

WHAT TO DO FOR *Spring*

BY TRACEY COLE



Spring is in the air so it's time to get busy in the garden, the temperature is rising and gardens will soon be bursting into life!

By taking stock of what needs to be done now, whether it's a complete revamp, a chic patio, cottage garden packed with flowers or a bountiful vegetable patch, the options are endless, so here are a few tasks to kickstart your action plan toward achieving a garden that will lift your spirits and bring hours of pleasure and enjoyment.

1. Decide if there are any changes you could make to improve the general layout of your plot. New paths, seating areas, new flower borders, shrubs or trees that need moving, or a new area to grow delicious edibles.
2. Clear any algae and weeds from existing paths.
3. Water is precious, so fit as many rain barrels as you can around the house and any garden buildings that have gutters, or consider installing an irrigation system that uses recycled rain-water.
4. Tackle all those pesky weeds in borders with a hoe, then add a thick layer of mulch.
5. Start a compost heap, if you don't already have one. This is the best, cheapest form of organic fertiliser for your soil. Compost bins are available to buy, or you can easily make your own.
6. Move any perennial plants that are in the wrong position to a more suitable spot. Replant and add compost. Water well until established. When watering any garden plants aim for the roots, not the leaves. Mulch after watering to retain moisture.
7. Try to grow plants that suit your soil type. Sandy soil is ideal for hardy, drought-tolerant plants like lavender and rosemary. Thick, poor-draining clay soil is fine for eucalyptus, geraniums and hydrangeas.
8. Prune back Winter flowering shrubs as soon as they have finished flowering, also deadhead and cut back dead and weak stems from roses.
9. Check out any container grown plants. Are they healthy?, do they need a top up of fresh compost? If the roots are growing out of the drainage holes then the plant is 'root bound' and will need repotting in a larger container. When replanted, water sparingly to avoid the repotted plant from rotting before it has had a chance to root properly in its new home.
10. September is the ideal time to plant trees and shrubs, preferably varieties that will attract wildlife and birds to the garden. Shrubs like Deutzia, with its pretty off-white flowers, gorgeous Philadelphus coronatus for evening fragrance, Wild Pomegranate with bright orange flowers, much loved by sunbirds, Choisya with scented white flowers in Spring and glossy green evergreen leaves, Weigela, covered in pink and red blooms.
11. The Abelia Grandiflora, with its graceful arching stems of pink/white flowers will look stunning grown against a sunny bare wall or trellis. For trees try the paperbark Acacia, the fabulous Pom-Pom tree, the Fever tree or the Cape Chestnut. These are all ideal garden varieties that will attract wildlife.
12. It's time to choose and plant your Summer bulbs for a fabulous display during Summer. Popular varieties are Liatra, Watsonia, Flame Lilies, Tiger Lilies, Dierama and Alliums.
13. Start sowing seeds in seed trays to fill your flower borders with colour. Cosmos, Marigolds, Salvias, Zinnias, Celosias, Nasturtiums and Sunflowers. So much choice and packets of seed to choose from! Plant out Delphiniums, Aquilegia, Scabiosa, Gerbena, Clivia and Penstemon.
14. In the vegetable plot sow or plant in prepared soil bush beans, climbing beans, Swiss chard, sweet corn, carrots, beetroot, summer cabbage, egg plant, peas and squash, plus salad veggies of cucumber, radish, tomatoes, lettuce and sweet peppers. Don't forget some 'companion' planting to help ward off pests. Plant Nasturtiums and Marigolds around the veggies. Seed potatoes and sweet potatoes can also be planted now.
15. Start planting some herbs in a sunny spot, preferably near the kitchen, such as oregano, thyme, parsley, basil, chives, coriander, borage and mint.
16. Cut back old canes of loganberries and boysenberries. Plant out new raspberry and gooseberry canes in beds previously prepared by forking the soil over and adding compost. Blueberries need to be planted in containers with ericaceous soil. Treat yourself to some strawberry plants so you can enjoy the luscious juicy fruit in Summer!
17. Feed any fruit trees with a balanced fertiliser.
18. Don't forget to start to increase watering your houseplants and feeding once a week. Mist the leaves using a spray bottle once a week.

By tackling a few of these tasks now you can look forward to enjoying a beautiful, and relaxing garden throughout the warmer months.

Tracey Cole
Cell 071 686 0472
www.villagegardens.co.za