

DAVID STEPHEN'S

with monthly guide by
PETER CUNDALL

ORGANIC GROWING CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

THIS MONTHS HINTS

For the garden

- It is important to stop any new leaf growth on pumpkin vines now, so as to channel the plants energy into fruit production.
- Tag any healthy, non-hybrid crops for seed taking. If you have enjoyed the flavour or other qualities of a crop but cannot remember the variety name, then collect the seed because that variety may, in the future, go off the market and sadly be lost for all time. Particularly important in this respect are the annuals: tomato, lettuce, beans, and corn.
- Fungus-free **celery leaves** can be dried in a cool oven, crumbled, and kept in airtight jars to add flavour for soups and stir-fried cooking.
- Continue to pick **zucchinis, beans, cucumbers, capsicum, kohlrabi, beets, lettuce and eggplant**, even if you cannot use them. Do this to maintain productive plants.
- Sow **turnips** now to enjoy turnip greens through the winter. Force plenty of leaf growth with a high nitrogen fertiliser and eat them raw, or cooked like spinach.
- Mignonette (mini) **lettuce** matures in 10 frost-free weeks. It will grow through the extremes of weather.
- For the control of **brassica grubs**, a contact poison for this green leaf-eating pest is derris dust; effective only in the small (from 1-6mm

long) immature stage. Larger caterpillars can be either picked off by hand; or sprayed with 'DIPEL'; or dusted with a mixture of flour and salt. Peter Cundall recommends a pyrethrum mixture, (see January Guide)

- Vitamin rich **curly kale** planted now will provide greens for winter. The dark green colour of its deeply curled foliage makes it an attractive addition to the ornamental garden, too. The dwarf variety matures in three months.
- Any **potato** seed (tubers) showing signs of bud growth may be planted out in frost-free areas. Don't expect the yield to be as good as the main crop planting of October.
- Pods of **runner beans** left to dry off on the vine can be used both for future seed, or in cooking for stews etc like other dried beans. Mature beans are 20% protein. They are six times richer than immature beans.
- Have you a **zucchini** glut on hand? Cut them raw into cubes and blend in a little water. The resulting thick milky concoction can be used to replace milk or water in baked recipes: bread, cakes, pie fillings....The foods stay moist and keep well.

Pruning

- If a fruit tree is getting too big for the space allotted to it, *summer pruning instead of winter pruning may be the answer. This tends to stunt the tree for a few years. Root pruning is another option. Be guided by a good text book.
- If a **citrus tree** is showing signs of aphids, scale, ants and pale leaves it is under stress. Is it hungry, thirsty, wind damaged or suffering from root competition with other plants or trees?
- *Footnote: The same week that the last fruit is harvested is the time to prune.

For daily living

- To make **leather boots** waterproof for wet weather gardening, saturate them in castor oil.
- Rub **warts** daily with the furry inside of broad bean pods, try castor oil regularly, or try the milk of thistles.
- Combine vinegar with washing soda to clean off soap scum in the **shower recess**.
- Collect all the tea leaves for a week, then pour over five caps of boiling water. Leave for an hour. Strain and bottle the liquid. Use it on **mirrors or windows** - it makes them shine like crystal.
- The spikes of **stinging nettles** inject formic acid into the skin. The traditional gardening remedy is to rub with an alkaline dock leaf, but diluted bicarbonate of soda may be easier to find.
- For **grass stains**, dampen stain lightly, then rub with methylated spirit or cream of tartar.

A USEFUL KITCHEN BY-PRODUCT

Pureed garbage (blended food scraps) make a most remarkable liquid fertiliser that stimulates food-bearing plants (such as vegie crops and fruit trees in tubs) into healthy and rapid growth.

A broad range of residues makes the best brew: e.g. fruit and vegie peelings, fish bones, seafood waste, pumpkin seeds, eggs and walnut shells, coffee grounds and spoilt or left-over meals. The vitamin/mineral content of these residues is almost always higher than the parts we eat. So it's little wonder that this cocktail is effective as plant food!

To make a puree, organic residue must be put into some water for blending. The resulting 'soup' can be taken outside and hidden beneath a grass mulch on the garden for further decay; or diluted again for use as liquid fertiliser. I can't help thinking 'wouldn't it be better to drink it?'

PETER CUNDALL'S GUIDE

There is plenty to do now preparing for winter and spring. Daffodils and jonquils can go in now, in sun or light shade. Deep shade means flowers in the first spring season but never again. Lawns can be well watered, fed with a good tight handfull of blood and bone for each square metre, then watered again. Stonefruit trees can be pruned as fruit is harvested, especially apricots. Large, vigorous trees which are becoming too dominant are best heavily lopped at this time, rather than waiting until winter. This will effectively control their excess vigour for at least two seasons.

MINIATURE SHADE HOUSE

I use a banana crate as a propagating shade for growing new plants from cuttings (shrubs, herbs etc.) and last summer I removed six lateral shoots from one staked tomato bush, placed them all in a 15cm plastic pot of moist coarse sand, then put them under the shaded protection of a banana crate placed on the floor of my solar greenhouse. Within two weeks, I had six rooted seedlings ready for transplanting into my tomato bed. The box is also used to shade bare-rooted herbs from wilting in the warm sun when they are first settling in.

