

DAVID STEPHEN'S

with monthly guide by
PETER CUNDALL

ORGANIC GROWING CALENDAR

M A R C H

DAANGEROUS ORGANIC MATTERS

We've all heard of the dangers in contracting tetanus from handling some of the raw animal manures or raw earth while carrying an injury where bacteria can enter. Similarly, for handling dry poultry manures, it's advisable to wear a dust mask to filter out airborne particles which are as potentially dangerous as the fungal spores found within old dry bales of hay, straw of dry grass clippings. The spores are the result of interrupted decay; of water soakage being allowed to slowly dry and kill all fungal activity.

Medical records do exist of lung complaints resulting from breathing in too many spores. At this first sign of this white fungal dust, settle it down with a light spray of water.

PETER CUNDALL'S GUIDE

Evergreen trees and shrubs can be transplanted successfully at this time of the year if the summer heat has passed its peak. The still-warm soil allows for that little extra root growth before winter brings it to an end. Citrus trees, azaleas, rhododendrons, camelias, and a whole range of similar plants can be moved now to a new position, but don't forget to keep the rootballs intact. Scale of citrus fruit can be a serious problem right now and is easily identified by the conspicuous, black sooty mould which always comes with the scale insect. White oil emulsion sprayed below the leaves will effectively control it.

HOW TO MAKE A LONG LASTING COMPOST/SOIL CONDITIONER

It is possible, with the aid of mechanical shredders, to make mature garden compost in as little as three weeks. To make a product which has a long lasting soil improving effect, you must include a high proportion of plant stems in your ingredients. These contain cells rich in cellulose and lignin. Hence the prunings from shrubbery, trees, herbs, perennial weeds, straw grass and sawdust become more important than annual weeds, mowings, soft autumn leaves and household peelings.

It is imperative to chop or shred all tough stems before they dry out because the sap feeds the decomposition. Other activators in a compost pile are the fresh greens mentioned above. Alternating layers of animal or poultry manure are traditional activators and can be included too but are not necessary. A depth of 40-60cm for shredded materials is optimal for composting. Spread this over as large an area as you like. I have sectioned off an area 3m x 1m in my fowl run for this purpose. Smaller quantities can be left to rot in woven plastic or jute bags. Check after three weeks to see if the moisture level is being maintained. If not, spread it out on your driveway and lightly hose it down. Then re-bag it. Compost is ready to use before it turns to soil - even when some of the toughest ingredients are still recognizable. Fork it into the soil. Then give it as many weeks as your patience will allow to settle, merge, and form that highly desirable crumb structure for the perfect seed bed.



A U T U M N AUSTRALIAN HERB ALCALENDAR

DIVIDE ROOTS OF THE FOLLOWING:

AGRIMONY
ALPINE STRAWBERRY
ALOE VERA
BERGAMOT
BUGLE
CAMOMILE
COLTSFOOT
CURRY PLANT
CHIVES
GARLIC - CHIVES
HORSETAIL
HYSSOP
LEMON VERBENA
LOVAGE
LILY OF THE VALLEY (CONVALLARIA)
MARJORAM
PENNYROYAL

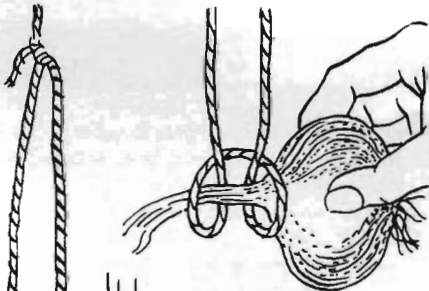
SHALLOTS
SWEET FENNEL
TREE ONION
VIOLET
YARROW

ANGELICA SEEDS

These should be planted as soon as harvested due to poor longevity.

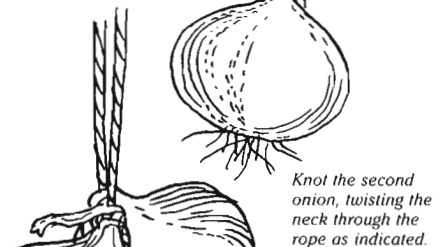
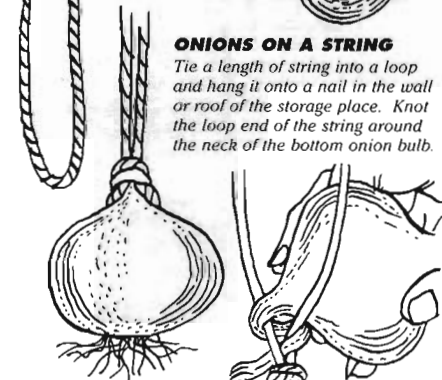
LAYERING STEMS

Thyme, rosemary, southernwood, sage etc. will grow new roots if a branch can be lowered to the damp soil. To encourage this, the branch can be pegged into position with a hill of soil. If a branch needs to be partly broken from where it is attached to the main stem it will be okay, so long as some of the cambium layer remains.



ONIONS ON A STRING

Tie a length of string into a loop and hang it onto a nail in the wall or roof of the storage place. Knot the loop end of the string around the neck of the bottom onion bulb.



Knot the second onion, twisting the neck through the rope as indicated.



Add the rest of the bulbs one by one, to form a spiral 'rope' of onions.