

GARDENING

ONLY 50 DAYS to go before Christmas. Only seven pay days so time to plan as cheaply as possible the decorations, food and of course the drink, to keep up the festive spirit. Where to save and where to spend?

The necessities of life, namely food and drink, having little to do with the gardening fraternity can be left to the side of the household used to balancing the weekly budget. However we can help to keep the cost down with the decorations. Berried holly is going to be scarce this year so obviously costly. However green holly and ivy can be very attractive if dusted with glitter.

A table decoration can be simply made by taking a clay filled saucer and pushing sprigs of holly into it. This can be made more interesting by adding a few dried flowers and mixed foliage, keeping to an overall diameter of about one foot. Also a bowl of polished apples looks very attractive. One or two plants throw a few flowers at Christmas such as *prunus subhirtella* (cherry) and *helleborous niger* (Christmas rose), it's worth a search around.

Pot plants are expensive so if you have a plant such as cyclamen or hyacinth its life may be prolonged by popping it into the cool, even outside as long as there is no chance of frost. They appreciate the respite.

Christmas is the usual starting date for gardening. Sowing onions (to get large ones) is the first job, followed by sweet peas. It can be risky but well worth the effort.

Just at present we are enjoying a mild spell of weather which may continue through the month. However if it does the plants will suffer when the cold does come, especially if there is no snow to protect them. Don't rush to sweep up those leaves it may be prudent to leave them. Remember the last really cold snap in 1981? It proved really painful and this followed a mild autumn.!

It is now time to prune apples, pears and climbing roses and get that rough digging done.

So here is wishing you strength to your arm and the courage for the winter to come.

A.V. Mitchell.

MELPLASH TURKEY FARM

(Proprietor: Joanna Cook)



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