

GARDENING

A NEW YEAR, a new spring, and with it loads of resolutions and hopes. Hopes of no long droughts and excessive heat waves, a hope for no late frosts – all is hope. So let us hope the Almighty is kind to us all, just a little bit of heaven is a lot to ask, but let us hope!

So far I do not think any shrub or rose has suffered from the very cold weather during the last two weeks of last year, even though the thermometer on one chilly morning registered minus twelve Celsius – around twenty-two degrees of frost Fahrenheit, but so far, no visible casualties. So get the digging and pruning done at every workable opportunity – another hope!

I was listening to the Gardening Today programme and to my surprise they suggested sowing early cabbages. Far too early around here for they take so long to get over their “blues” that plants sown at the end of February will usually overtake the earlier sowings.

Soon it will be rose pruning time; please prune properly. Don't snip your H.T.s half way down last year's growth, but cut back to three buds from the ground. Prune the early flowering shrubs as soon as flowering has finished, and prune them hard.

Winter greens will be very scarce, so if you have some old cabbage or kale seed, sow some in the warmest corner of your garden and use them to eat as soon as they are big enough. A sacrifice, really, but we shall be hungry for greens in March as sprouts

and kale suffered so much in the summer, and we shall miss our usual excess in March.

Our feathered friends will need some help too, I see that they are already grazing the pinks and carnations. Pheasants and doves love sweet william and wallflowers, to say nothing of your early lettuce and brassicas. They do love green growing plants, so keep them busy on peanuts.

I find that penstemons have suffered, so grab a few cuttings before they all die off and the same applies to most of the grey foliage plants. Lavender, cotton lavender, curry plants and rosemary never seem to suffer from the cold weather, so happy the garden that does rely on them. All of the real herbaceous plants are unaffected, but such things as osteospermums only escape in the mildest of winters, so don't expect them to survive. Dry summers cause poor shows of spring flowers so don't expect too much for Easter!

Brussels sprouts and cabbage seeds are a penny each. Now a penny is a hundred for a pound – can you remember when there were 240 pence to a pound, that makes these seeds 2.4 pence each, old money; now they want us to have European currency, does that mean another double-up of the price of sprouts seeds? Or do we eat pasta and German sausage washed down with French wine? To quote Robby Burns “Forward though I canna see, I guess and fear”. Goodnight – I have one more hope “that it never happens”.

A.V. Mitchell.