

GARDENING

SO TO THE two real gardening months of the year, April and May, and the old saw says, "so many fogs in March, so many frosts in May", oh dear!

Most of the soft fruits suffered in May last year. Currants and strawberries were the chief sufferers. I had neither, so I was a sufferer. Being of an optimistic nature! I always prepare for the worst, it usually happens.

For example, I have spent much of my time in the winter preparing for the losses of hardy border plants – what the winter has not destroyed the pheasants, rabbits and hares are doing their level best to finish off. What's the use, they will just wait for my replacements to put in an appearance, and they will be in clover again. That's the way with today's pests – and people say be kind!

Don't be in a hurry to plant out anything. April was ever a wayward month, so say "mid May" for planting at the earliest. Six weeks from sowing to planting out, and you won't get frosted plants, and yet I suppose it is only one of the hazards we face.

A few packets of seeds such as annual poppies or lavatera, eschscholzia, cosmea or any other fast growing annual will fill up any gap in your border cheaply.

Vegetables to sow up to July 14th – that is the last date for sowing dwarf beans, peas, carrots, turnips, onions, spinach and early peas.

The late sowing of runner beans is the longest day, June 21st.

Swedes can be sown in early June as the latest date, potatoes can be planted up to July to prolong the season for nice young potatoes – and broad beans as well for small beans.

Lift polyanthus in June, divide them into single crowns and plant them in a damp, cool shady place for the summer, for autumn planting.

Sow cucumbers and melons in a cold frame in mid-May.

Wishing you a good season, and plenty of rain.

A.V. Mitchell.

