

GARDENING.

I KNOW THAT I AM always complaining but this year I have very good reasons. Due to late frosts and then the long hot dry spell garden crops have been poor. And then living, as I do, next to open countryside my neighbour is wildlife which finds that the things that I grow in my garden are far more palatable than those available in the fields and woods. To cap it all, squirrels have taken a liking to green strawberries.

The late frosts I mentioned were particularly hard on soft fruits so not much for the jam makers and generally apples and pears are short.

I have always been proud of my runner beans but this year they have failed me. The first sowing was most disappointing probably due to hot weather and lack of water but there is some solace in the bloom on the late sowing and maybe there will be beans later if the frosts stay away. Face saving I hope. Few beans for the freezer but fortunately the sprouts and brassicas are doing well.

Shrubs have made wonderful growth this summer and some need cutting back now. Wisteria has produced long shoots which should be taken back to four buds. Forsythias have been rampant but leave the cutting of these until January when some of the excessive growth can be brought into the house to bloom and brighten up the winter murk.

There is much to do in the next two months. Carry on with the bulb planting leaving tulips until the end of November or even early December.

For pots and bowls that are to bloom indoors be sure that the containers have drainage holes. Use the special bulb fibre or something similar, well watered, and keep the tips of the bulbs just above the surface. I plunge the pots about a spade depth into the garden and put the soil back over them but some people simply cover them with bark or compost. After eight weeks bring them into the house and away they go. My favourites for this treatment are hyacinths.

There is much planting of biennials to be done - pansies, wallflowers, polyanthus, primroses, bellis and so on. Time now before the ground gets too cold and soggy to thin out perennials remembering that the best growth for the future is that on the outside of the clump.

Have you tried collecting your own seed? Such plants as lunaria (honesty), lavatera and impatiens (busy lizzie) give plentiful supplies and unless they are F1 hybrids come true. Honesty and lavatera seeds can be sown in their flowering position now but most of the others must wait to the spring.

With a suitable fertiliser you can get some late growth into the lawn, which, if you have the energy should be spiked and scarified.

And, of course, everything needs tidying up.

So until the Christmas issue I wish you good gardening and a better prospect for next year and less complaints from me.

V. Mitchell