

GARDENING

DURING THE MONTHS of October and November we get into the early winter routine. A time for clearing up and the removal of rubbish, remembering that much of it can be composted.

As ground becomes vacant it should be rough dug so that the winter frosts can break it down and make it friable. It will then be ready for early spring sowing.

If you have fruit trees, especially apples and pears, prune the new growth back to three buds and as far as possible remove old fruiting wood and any weak growth. A tar oil wash is recommended as this kills canker, especially in apples, and prevents a recurrence. It clears the tree of moss and lichen growth and renders the buds unpalatable to birds. Good too for gooseberries to deter attacks on new buds.

Any member of the vine family needs cutting back to two buds. Wisteria, a favourite of mine, should have the current season's growth pruned to eight buds and next spring, when the danger of late frost has passed – we are talking of late May, so don't be in a hurry, a further cutting back to four buds.

Many of the perennials in the border may be divided now – there are many, but particularly helenium, michaelmas daisies, phlox and the many I call "the white daisy tribe".

Remember that the young outside growths on the root are what you

want, and not that hard chunk in the middle which has already done its job. Penstemons require cutting off now and if possible they should be kept in a cold greenhouse.

In late October and early November you will have cleared the annuals and now is the time to plant biennials such as wallflowers, sweet williams and forget-me-nots. Time too to set out primroses and polyanthus.

Don't forget the bulbs and especially the hyacinth. It makes a lovely show and has a heavenly scent. Any good garden soil is suitable provided it is not too damp in winter.

Plant in clumps or beds or alongside a path in any design or arrangement of colour that you desire. At six inches apart or further, there will be a brilliant display. The crowns of the bulbs should not be less than four inches or more than six inches below the surface. A greater depth will slightly retard the flowering. No more trouble until the time comes for their lifting to make room for other flowers.

Good gardening,

A.V. Mitchell.

