



Garden Birds in February

Encouraging birds in your garden

Male birds are starting to mark out their territories ready for mating and the nesting season. Natural food supplies may be in short supply, especially when deep frosts persist.

Birds such as sparrows, blue tits, chaffinches and greenfinches will be happy to use hanging feeders. For ground feeders, such as blackbirds, thrushes and starlings, you could scatter food under the bird table (if cats are not regular visitors to your garden).

If the ground is covered in snow, clear a patch to allow them to hunt for insects in the lawn.

Gardening in February

Lengthening days tempt keen gardeners back out again. In all areas, there is still time to plant trees, hedges and shrubs before they resume growing in the spring. You can also plant bare rooted fruit trees and soft fruits. If it is too wet and cold for gardening, sit back and use the time to plan for the coming year. Why not look at other gardens in your area to see what grows well and looks good at this time of year?

If you have a well-established flower border and want to increase the amount of flowers at no cost, you can divide perennials such as hardy geraniums and asters. These will have formed new growth under last year's leaves. If you dig these up carefully and split them in two, you can then replant both. They'll do best if you add a little compost to the ground first.

Very early bulbs will now be through, including snowdrops, crocuses and, in the south, daffodils. If you want to plant some for next year, note in your diary now to buy and plant bulbs in the autumn.

If you grow winter jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*) for its bright yellow flowers through December and January, it's now the right time to cut back flowered shoots to strong buds after flowering. You can also buy them now to plant against a wall or fence to provide some winter colour for next year. Other

shrubs you might like to try for winter flowers include: witch hazel (best in acid soils), Viburnum bodnantense and Daphne mezereum.

If you like grasses, one that looks good in a winter border is Stipa calamagrostis. If you leave it after it's flowered, its tawny seed-heads look great in frosty weather. You can then cut it back in March or April when new leaves appear. Any seed-heads at this time of year will provide welcome food for birds.

Jobs for the month:

- Plant trees, shrubs and hedges in milder weather
- Prune winter dogwoods to just above ground level
- Spread compost or bark around shrubs and trees
- Prune apple and pear trees
- Make a pond or wetland
- Check bird baths and ponds and remove any ice
- Put up nestboxes
- Buy seed catalogues and plan what you will grow
- If hedges need trimming, do so after the birds have eaten the berries (but before the nesting season begins in March)

What you might find:

- Bumblebee
- Common frog
- Common toad
- Fox
- Rabbit

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