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# June Diary 2012



June is the first calendar month of winter in New Zealand. Winter officially arrives June 21st which is the shortest day of the year, the Winter Solstice. The next six weeks or more will most likely be the coldest, darkest and often dreariest time of the year. Cheer up, every day there after gets a little longer and brighter with the promise of spring to follow!

This is a time of rest and dormancy for much in the garden and for many gardeners. It's an excellent time to curl up in a warm cozy spot with your garden diary, reference books, nursery and seed catalogues and garden snapshots and enjoy a little dreaming. Reflect on your successes over the past growing season and research why something you planted failed, you'll learn so much from this exercise. Use this time to plan for the future.

## Stay Healthy through Gardening!

Fresh air and moderate exercise are very important factors contributing to our health so get outdoors whenever

the weather permits. There's still a lot to do out there in the garden! And not only will you accomplish much which will put you ahead of the rest, but the refreshing activity will lift your spirits and there is a lot to be said for a positive attitude contributing to a healthy, prosperous and successful life.

## Remedies for a Soggy Lawn:

Winter wet spells are the best times to discover the drainage flow of your property.

Make notes of any areas where water continually settles in real problem areas so that you can correct the problem in the spring once the soil can be easily worked. Even most swampy ground can be greatly improved by laying trenches with drainage tiles.

If your lawn often remains soggy for some time after rain or watering, this may be a simple compaction problem due to the natural settling, compaction, of the soil through (foot) traffic or heavy wind and rain. Or it may be due to a heavy loam or clay soil. To correct this

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problem first aerate the lawn. This is easiest when the soil has been thoroughly soaked then dried out for at least a day so that the soil is not sticky.

For large areas use a lawn aeration roller or for smaller lawns use a sharpened garden fork, loosening the soil to near a full fork-prong depth, if possible. Just a few centimetres deep will do for starters.

After forking, spread a thin layer of river sand or round river gravel over the aerated turf. Round gravel or sand will 'roll' or settle into the soil which will help with aeration, as opposed to sharp (angular) sand or gravel that will lock together with soil particles effectively creating wet cement that will ultimately harden into concrete.

Then add the secret ingredient which will deeply open heavy soils for better drainage and root penetration: a generous dusting of Gypsum. Whiten over the sand or gravel with the Gypsum dust. Then lightly water it down to the consistency of milk and let this settle and sink into the soil right into the aeration holes.

The colloidal properties of liquid Gypsum will slowly collect the individual particles of clay and transform them into small pea-like colloidal beads. As these colloidal beads form the soil separates, the spaces created between them will 'open' the soil to deeper root penetration which can draw nutrients from the colloidal beads and thus ultimately render the soil much more

workable, deeply productive and freer draining. Building raised beds over soggy ground can produce outstanding results because the plants can then keep their crowns and heads dry with their feet (roots) raised above the ground water line and dangling down into the damp only enough to let them drink all they need without drowning. The advantages of this become most apparent with the approach of warmer, drier weather.

#### **\*Improve Soil Now for Planting:**

If we are blessed with a dry spell, unused land can be improved or prepared for later planting. The wise and well-organized gardeners probably started turning the soil last month as they removed the last warm weather crops and flowers. But there is still plenty of time to complete this very healthy exercise.

Dig deeply and leave rough to allow the ground to weather and break down over the winter. Add at least 2-3 buckets of compost per square metre and a generous dusting of lime or dolomite.

The exceptions for adding lime are where one is intent on growing acid-loving plants or shrubs like potatoes, blueberries, raspberries, lilies, azalea, daphne, gardenia, rhododendron, etc.

Where an acid soil is wanted, add dolomite which is slower to decompose but longer-acting and neutral pH. Depleted soils that have been over-worked will also benefit from a generous dusting of a commercial well-balanced

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general plant food. This is also necessary for most vegetable plots which take a lot of nutrients from the soil to produce the crops.

Dig soils only when they turn and break up easily. Winter wet weather can lock a lot of water into the soil that can make digging not only difficult but also damaging possibly to your back and the land. It's important not to pack down wet, heavy soils (especially clays) when digging or they will turn as hard as rock once they dry out.

But if a wet garden plot has dried out enough to work the soil, add drainage material (sand, gravel, compost, bark, clay breaker/gypsum, etc) to lighten the soil. And if this is not possible or seems an impossible task, consider raising problem beds and eliminate the problem once and for all.

### **Planting Time Already:**

Prepare planting holes for new bare-root trees, shrubs and hedges, especially roses, deciduous ornamentals and fruit trees plus most conifers and broad-leafed evergreens that will be appearing in the garden centres this month. It's a good time to move and transplant all deciduous varieties now.

They are so hardy during this resting or dormant period that they are often sold bare root (without soil). This is also an excellent time to transplant container grown specimens. Their strong and well established root system makes them easy to transplant now.

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### **Heeling In:**

Whenever it is not possible to plant a bare root shrub, hedge, conifer or tree immediately, simply stand it up in a dampish, sheltered site, preferably out of scalding winter sunshine, then pile damp soil up the trunk and covering around all the exposed roots that are then kept moist until it can be planted. This is called 'heeling in' and can successfully maintain the life and quality of dormant deciduous trees and shrubs throughout the winter months until they can be planted in their permanent positions.

### **Pruning:**

This is a big pruning month. Roses, Cassia, Abutilon, Buddleia, Abelia, and Hydrangea, late flowering perennials, fruit trees, hedges and many ornamental trees and shrubs can be cut back and/or shaped now. Remove all dead wood, thin weak branches and cut back hard (wherever appropriate) to strong buds.

The big exception here is to be sure not to prune back winter/ spring flowering trees and shrubs in the extreme. If you do you'll cut off their buds and have no spring flowers. Included here are: Azalea, Daphne, Deutzia, Forsythia, Lilac, Magnolias, Pieris, Philadelphus, Rhododendron, Viburnums, Weigela, and ornamental fruit trees like Almond, Apricot, Cherry, Peach, Plum, etc.

### **Pruning Tip:**

Remember that new growth will not start again until spring so take care to shape rather than butcher hedges and conifers