



SEPTEMBER IN THE GARDEN

By **Russell Jordan**



Unless we've had a good amount of rain by now (still very much in drought conditions as I write) then this month's major task will be much more difficult than usual; bulb planting. In order to plant bulbs at the correct depth, the rule of thumb being to at least twice the height of the bulb, the soil needs to be relatively moist and not baked solid. Of course, this depends largely on the sort of soil you have; a light, sandy, soil will probably allow for decent planting, even when dry, but if, like me, you have soil containing a good proportion of clay then it bakes solid during a drought.

Apparently, 'Wessex Water' relies mostly on groundwater extraction to supply our water and this is less affected by low summer rainfall than water derived from reservoirs and above ground sources—hence we don't have a hosepipe ban at the time of writing. I have an ancient well on my property and, according to the website, this is not governed by a hosepipe ban, if one was imposed. I have invested in a deep well pump, this year, as it seems wrong to be watering anything with precious, treated, mains water even with no ban.

Having said that, the well has had the odd wall collapse, over the years, so it's not as deep as originally dug and the water table is now so low that it will only run for a short time before the pump cuts out. The level will rise again, as groundwater percolates back into it, but the water is over eight metres down which is, I think, the lowest it's ever been. This is the first year, in over two decades, that I have ever made serious use of well water. Turning on a tap is so much easier than lowering an expensive pump over eight metres down a hole in the ground, running an extension lead to it, with the necessary rope / hose attached, and then running the pump every time I want to fill an irrigation tank!

Having checked various websites, it's interesting to note that there are a lot of exemptions to a hosepipe ban, for many

horticultural uses that are water critical, and also for large sections of our community, such as those with any health issues, or vulnerabilities, which would make lugging watering cans around impossible. Newly purchased plants / trees are allowed to be irrigated and any plants which are grown as part of a business (this applies in relation to plants I raise to use in other people's gardens) and there are many other scenarios, in addition to these, so it's worth checking your own particular case before giving up on precious plants in your garden.

'Turning on a tap is so much easier than lowering an expensive pump over eight metres down a hole in the ground'

Curiously, ponds are allowed to be topped up, using a hosepipe, if any fish are in mortal danger. This is a relief as I totally chose the wrong year to install an entirely unnatural pond, recycling a second hand, fibreglass, pond liner. This was formerly my 'pot soaking' reservoir which, obviously, has no natural means of refilling so all the wildlife in it, it's already full of dragonfly larvae as well as ornamental fish, rely on me to replace water lost due to evaporation—which has been unusually high this summer. September is a good time to tackle

excessive weed and marginal pond plant growth while the water is still relatively warm, making the task more agreeable, so that it can recover before the onset of winter dormancy.

It's hard to think of anything else while the unusually hot and dry summer is still the major factor dictating what can be undertaken in the garden. In the hope that we have had some rain between August and September there are some tasks which would normally be necessary this month, in addition to the aforementioned bulb planting.

Lawncare should be done now, while the soil is still warm, and the brown turf will soon turn green again, starting back into growth, once there's been a decent amount of rain. It's

been a stressful summer for lawns so, once the soil is moist again, a timely resowing of bare patches and an autumn 'feed and weed' should help to improve the sward before colder nights halt growth. Similarly, hardy annual seeds, for flowering next year, should be sown now so that the seedlings can get established before winter. Beds and borders will require some intervention to remove collapsing foliage and to edit them sufficiently to make the most of the autumn flowering constituents which have survived the drought. Hedges, especially evergreen ones, should not be cut much later than September as they require a little time to recover before they are hit by the first frost.

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