

Your Fruit garden at the turn of the year



Pruning a redcurrant



Sucker removal from the whitecurrant variety 'White Versailles'

Things to do at the turn of the year



- Remove all 'mummified' fruits left hanging on the trees. These shrivelled fruits will be the main source of brown rot infection in the coming season.
- Thoroughly clean, sharpen and oil secateurs, loppers, and other hard worked tools so they're fit for another years toil in the fruit garden. Give them a good scrub with some hot soapy water and leave them to dry thoroughly before wiping over with an oily rag to stop them going rusty.
- If your secateurs are beyond redemption, why not treat yourself to a new pair. And why not buy a [sharpening stone](#) at the same time. Sharpen secateurs regularly for best results.
- Complete picking of very late-maturing apples, before the hard frosts come.
- Insulate pots of container-grown fruit to protect roots from the worst of the winter weather. Pile straw, wood chips, leaves, or sawdust around the pots and hold in place using horticultural fleece or landscaping fabric.
- Plant new fruit bushes, trees and canes when the soil conditions are suitable. If the soil is too wet and you have bare-rooted plants bundled together, then loosen

the bundles and remove the packing material. Next heel (temporarily plant) the plants in a shallow trench at a 45-degree angle. If the soil is frozen, keep the plants in a frost-free shed or garage, in the loosened packing material, till the ground defrosts.

- Never plant a fruit tree or bush where another of the same type has been taken out. It may fail to grow well, due to a condition known as 'specific replant disease'. Soft fruit can also suffer from various pests and diseases that persist in the soil - so always choose a new site for replanting.

If you really have no option of planting on a new site, the effects of replant disease can be lessened by backfilling the hole with fresh soil.

Further protection is offered by mycorrhizal fungi, sold as 'RootGrow'. This product can increase plants' resistance to soil-borne disease and promote root growth, water retention and beneficial organisms.

- Prune bush and standard apples and pears to encourage new fruiting wood and to shape the tree. Continue pruning except in hard freezing conditions. Deal with the young trees first, and then the older ones. Collect up healthy prunings and shred them before composting. Alternatively, pile them up in an out-of-the-way corner of the garden and leave the pile to rot for a few years, where it will make a great habitat for all sorts of creatures..
- Inspect apples and pears for canker and prune or pare out lesions on larger branches and trunks.
- If your fruit trees/bushes didn't produce much fruit last year, the weather may have had something to do with this, but it's worth checking other factors:
 1. If they are early flowering varieties, do they need protection from the frost? Some early varieties of cherry as well as peaches and apricots may need a covering of fleece for protection.
 2. Do they need a pollination partner? Even self-fertile varieties will fruit better if they are cross-pollinated. Are there enough beneficial insects for pollination?
 3. Consider planting insect attracting plants to encourage bees, wasps, flies, moths and butterflies. Also consider shelterbelts if your site is particularly windy. .
- Finish pruning blackberries, summer raspberries and other cane fruit if you haven't already done so. Don't cut down autumn raspberries until late winter.
- Prune currants and gooseberries. Don't prune blueberries until late winter.

- **Have a go at growing blueberries**

- Blueberries are a popular and easy to grow fruit these days – so why not try growing some at home. The vital factor in growing blueberries is that they need a very acid soil (pH 4.5-5.5). Unless your garden soil is naturally acidic, they are best grown in pots, using an ericaceous compost. Although blueberries are self fertile, they will produce a better crop if you have at least two plants. Blueberries are generally pest and disease free.
- Untie laterals on spindle bush apple trees, which have 'set' at the required angle. These lower, longer branches set at nearly horizontal angles receive more sunlight and are more fruitful and less vigorous.

- Check the condition of all stakes, supports, ties and rabbit guards for trees. Look for wind rocking or constriction. If this has happened, replace stakes and renew ties.
- Propagate whitecurrants, redcurrants, blackcurrants and gooseberries by taking hardwood cuttings in December.
Choose a suitable shoot about 30cm long of this year's wood and cut just above a bud on the parent plants. Trim the base and remove top soft growth. Take your spade and cut a slit trench into available ground. Place the cuttings in a line about 20cm down (two-thirds their length) and firm in. They can be transplanted into their permanent positions next autumn or leave for an additional year for further root development. Make sure all plants used for propagation are pest and disease free.

Things to do in January



- Sow alpine strawberry seeds
- Sow alpine strawberry seeds at 20C (68F). Germination may take a few weeks; keep the compost moist at all times. Transplant the seedlings when large enough to handle. Finally, plant the young strawberry plants in their permanent position in April. The variety called 'Golden Alexandra' is best grown from seed. It provides excellent ground cover and fruits over a long period.
- Enjoy an early crop of strawberries by placing cloches over strawberry plants now. Remember to take the covers off on warmer days in spring to allow insects in to pollinate the flowers.
- Do not be tempted to prune the stone fruits (apricots, cherries, damsons greengages, nectarines, peaches and plums) until May when risk of silver leaf infection is past.

Pest and disease watch



- [\(click to enlarge\)](#)

Look out for signs of canker and prune out all dead, diseased or dying branches from apple and pear trees. Leave plum and cherry until next summer to reduce the likelihood of contamination by silver leaf disease. Clean and disinfect all pruning tools between trees.

- Check all stored fruit and remove any that are affected by pest and disease problems. If left to fester these will affect the rest of the store. Place mousetraps if you find nibbled fruits. Any unwanted fruits can be left out for the birds.
- Remove all 'mummified' fruits left hanging on the trees. These shrivelled fruits will be the main source of brown rot infection in the coming season



- Apple tree bark gnawed by rabbits
- Check grease bands are still sticky and in place around fruit trees and stakes. If not replace them to give control against winter moth, plum fruit moth and March moth. Also check rabbit guards as rabbits may gnaw at bark when other food sources are scarce.



- Encourage birds by providing winter food
- Protect fruit bushes and canes with fleece or netting if birds are damaging the developing buds.
- Entice birds to feed on aphids and other pests by hanging fat balls in trees or suspend from bamboo canes set among fruit bushes and canes. Fat balls and seeds high in protein are the best winter warmers for our native winter birds. Remember to keep bird feeders topped up and provide a source of unfrozen water for the birds to drink.