

Evergreen hedges Newly planted evergreens such as yew lose leaves rapidly in exposed positions. A windbreak will protect young plants. Provided the ground is not frozen, fork into the soil a slow release fertilizer such as Fish, Blood and Bone. None should be pruned.

Frost and wind protection The weather is likely to get colder, so continue and increase protection from wind and deep frost around newly planted trees and shrubs. Wrap outside taps and bring all hosepipes under cover.

Fruit bushes Bullfinches will have a happy time if fruit bushes are not covered with netting.

Fruit trees

- Espaliered and cordon: rejuvenate overgrown espaliered and cordon fruit trees now, removing overlong growth. Stagger this over two years if necessary. Refer to a good book on pruning.
- Free standing with and without stones: complete pruning of apples and pears this month (see December). Check stake ties are firm but not too tight. Feed pruned trees with sulphate of potash, covering all the root area, which should be cleared of competing grass and weeds. Such competition is particularly bad for young trees. Mulch up to the drip line of the tree, leaving space between the mulch and trunk.

Greenhouse and indoor plants

Opening the greenhouse or porch door on warm days improves air circulation, but if housing tender plants the temperature should not drop below 4°C. If it does, keep air circulating with a fan - not to create heat but to keep it just above freezing. Air movement also helps keep botrytis at bay. To avoid waterlogging and root rot, do not water plants more than absolutely necessary,

allowing plants to dry out between waterings. To maintain low humidity and reduce opportunities for pests and disease avoid splashing water around.

Hedges Mid-winter is a good time to cut, renovate and plant bare-root hedges like hawthorn, hornbeam, beech, hazel and yew. Leylandii need to be planted later, as they are always sold as containerized plants. If hedges are getting too big they can be root pruned to slow their growth - use a spade to cut their roots back. Do any major surgery like cutting an arch or gap now.

Lawns If possible, avoid walking on the lawn when frosty or covered in snow, though it would spoil so much fun for children to stop them; snowmen do not seem to do any long-lasting damage. On a dry day brush over worm casts, which provide a useful topdressing. Remove molehills (they may be 'fortress building' or nesting) and refirm. Keep the topsoil the moles earthed up as it makes a fabulous soil-based potting compost.

Leaves Collect leaves from areas where the first bulbs appear, attending to places where there are aconites, alpinas, cyclamen, hellebores, snowdrops and winter irises. Rake leaves off grass as they do it no good. Remove leaves from the crowns of herbaceous perennials, from under box and around lavender where they shelter slugs and snails and encourage rot. Leaves piled between wire meshing, or held in sacks with drainage holes, eventually produce precious leafmould. Beware of spiking with a fork piles of leaves under shrubs as they may harbour hibernating hedgehogs.

Perennials Ensure the roots of slightly tender perennials (and shrubs) are protected with dry mulches such as bracken, straw or Strulch and wrap those you fear for in horticultural fleece. Do not