

## Your garden in March – March tidy-up

You might be surprised to hear that I am a lazy gardener. Actually I'm a busy person with a business and a growing family, so my time is limited. I'd like to share with you my secret for maximum results with minimal effort. I call it the March tidy-up. If you can put aside just one weekend to prepare the garden for the coming season, your efforts will be richly rewarded and your work for the rest of the year greatly reduced.

### Pruning roses

If roses are not pruned, they become a tangled mass of diseased, weak and dead growth. Pruning encourages strong, healthy, growth. In frost-free weather, using sharp secateurs, first remove dead, diseased or crossing stems. Cut thin twiggy shoots back to the main stem. Then cut the main stems to half their length, making a sloping cut to an outward-facing bud.

### Cutting back perennials

Being lazy, I opt for the 'do nothing' approach to tidying my borders in autumn (I like to think of it as environmentally friendly – leaving shelter and seedheads over the winter for birds and insects). But now is the time to bite the bullet. Cut off last year's flower stems – the first glimpses of new growth should be visible at the base. Remove any dead-looking bits/leaves that may be harboring

disease (or slugs!). If clumps are looking congested, dig them up and divide them, replanting the outer, younger parts of the clump. Grasses that are not evergreen need cutting back to the base with shears.

### Feeding and mulching

Putting on lots of new spring growth requires energy, and plants need food as much as we do. Give them a kick-start to the season with a feed of blood, fish and bonemeal.

A longer term way of feeding the plants is to feed your soil. One of the most effective ways of doing this is to mulch your borders with a nice thick (2-3") layer of garden compost.

Worms will gradually incorporate the compost deeper into the soil and as it breaks down, nutrients are released for the plants to use.

Mulching has two other very important advantages for the lazy gardener. It suppresses weeds by covering any bare soil, and, increasingly important with our dry summers, it will help to hold all that winter moisture in your soil, cutting down the need for watering.

So invest a bit of time now, and you can spend the summer enjoying your garden rather than working in it.

