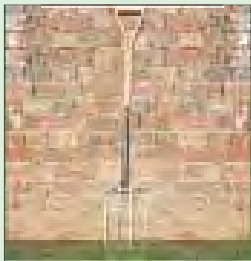


## Guide to useful kit



### Digging forks

Digging forks are useful for cultivating heavy soil. The head and neck should be forged from a single piece for strength. Stainless steel is easy to clean and will not rust. Look for strengthened tines. If you are tall, seek out the longer-handled versions, which will help reduce back strain. Shafts may be made of wood, metal or fibreglass, but the main point of weakness is where it attaches to the business end. Quality products will have several rivets at this point. The RHS endorses Burgon & Ball products ([burgonandball.com](http://burgonandball.com)).

## Top of the list this month

January is the last chance to prune walnuts (pictured) and other trees prone to bleeding from pruning cuts. Do a test cut on a small branch to check the trees are still dormant.

Exhibition-standard sweet peas are sown in October, but for garden display, sowing in late January is fine. Place pots in a cold frame in good light. Planting out in March produces strong flowering plants in summer.

When the weather permits, do a quick tidy around the garden, cutting back any foliage that may block early tulbs such as snowdrops and *reticulata* iris. Cut away old leaves of *Helleborus orientalis* hybrids to show off the flowers and reduce the carry over of fungal leaf spot onto the new foliage.

Now is a good time to check through garden chemicals and prepare a shopping list for the spring. Never pour surplus chemicals down drains. If disposal is unavoidable, small quantities should be diluted and sprayed according to the label instructions. For larger quantities contact your local authority's waste disposal section.

Well-intentioned Christmas presents of houseplants may come with unwelcome guests, who will relish the benign conditions of a centrally heated home. Check for pests and treat accordingly.

Peach leaf curl is best controlled by taking action in November, but it is still a worthwhile remedial task to undertake now. Bring potted plants under overhead cover or rig up a polythene-covered timber

framework for fan-trained trees outdoors. Also spray with copper-based fungicide (Vitax Bordeaux Mixture or Bayer Fruit and Vegetable Disease Control).

Forcing rhubarb results in earlier stems which are more tender and pinker. Place straw around the crowns and cover with an upturned bucket or a traditional clay rhubarb pot to exclude light. Stems will be ready to pull two to three weeks later.

Inspect stored bulbs, corms and tubers, including dahlias and cannas, for signs of rot. Do the same with any stored fruit and vegetables.

For more information, visit [rhs.org.uk/advice/search](http://rhs.org.uk/advice/search).

