

Cleaning out the GARDEN CUPBOARD



From the GARDEN

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The sunshine in February is brilliant. Not just brilliant like 'Wow man, cool' but brilliant like 'soul-warming'.

Finally, there seems to be a glimmer of hope that winter will pass and we can get back into our gardens. Now, I know that you are laughing, having just survived one of the mildest and snow-less winters in recent history, but I am certain you haven't spent those mild December and January days doing spring chores. Admit it! You have the very same jumble of projects hidden in your garden cupboard as I do.

Hidden behind the doors of a garden shed, tucked into the corner of a full-to-the-ceiling garage or lurking in the corner of your basement are dozens of little jobs that absolutely need doing before the first daffodil shows its pretty yellow face.

I should interject right now that I am a self-confessed procrastinator. As a matter of fact, I could be the poster child for putting things off to the very last minute. My excuse has always been that 'I work better under pressure'. But putting off garden chores causes more pressure than one needs in the season of way too many things to do- spring.

In an effort to contribute to the health and well being of my gardening readers, I thought I would give you some guidance and encouragement in the organiz-

ing of your garden cupboard. I won't be able to assist with all of your chores as the editor told me I only have 1,000 words, but here are a few things to get you going.

TACKLE THE SPACE

The first chore is to sort out the space, right down to the floor and out to the walls. I admit that it is much easier to open the door, look around, close the door and go read a gardening magazine. What I saw when I opened the door was a pile of dirty pots, tools that were put away covered in mud, ornamental troughs of rocky plants that were tucked inside- away from the damage from freezing rain- and an assortment of non-gardening items blocking the doorway.

My immediate task was to put a little snow on the troughs. We normally get a thaw mid-winter so I use that opportunity to place snow on any containers that I have protected for the winter. It is like mimicking nature, the snow will melt when temperature rises and the plants will get just enough water to get them through to the spring when they once again go outside.

SORT THE POTS AND STUFF

(Note: stuff is a technical term used by hoarders)

If you have gardened for more than 10 minutes, you have a pile of pots. In the last two or three years the bulk of retailers have started accepting the return of plant pots so you now have no excuse for stock-piling. For those of you who have always recycled to the local nurseries or garden clubs for their sales, good on you, you were way ahead of your time. Now spend a few minutes sorting the rest of the stuff stacked in the space. Toss out the two-foot long bits of twine that are so knotted as to be unusable, donate the extra pink flamingos to the thrift store and roll up the garden hose properly.

CLEAN AND SHARPEN TOOLS

This is the task that never gets to the top of my list, but can truly make most jobs easier in the spring. Pick a miserable rainy, sleety or snowy day and get out the gear. I use an old, yet clean, cat litter tray to keep the mess confined. First, wash, scrap or brush off any caked-on dirt. If you like the traditional method, use a file to sharpen your spades, shovels, hoes, pruners, etc. For those of you more mechanically inclined use a Dremel or similar tool with a grinding stone. Just remember to be careful; all of the grinding and filing makes very sharp tools. Before hanging up the tools, take a moment to sand the handles with medium-fine grade paper. This will get rid of any potential splinters that have appeared from leaving your tools out in the rain! A drop of oil rubbed into the handles will protect them for the season.

SORT AND START SEEDS

Gardeners, novice and experienced alike, have tried to grow things from seed. Whether or not you continued to indulge in the process, you will likely have a stack or three of seed packets somewhere in your gardening cupboard. For some, it is a coffee can in the garage; others carefully store the 'dormant promise of green' in the refrigerator crisper. Wherever you keep the seeds, it is time right now to sort them. The difficult thing is how to know which seeds are still viable and which are past their due date.

Most annual flowers and vegetables can be tested quite easily. Wrap 10 or 20 seeds in a damp paper towel, seal in a plastic bag and place on top of your fridge for a week. Check the bags every couple of days and count how many seeds sprout. If you get more than half sprouting in a week or so, keep the package. Perennial seeds usually have more complicated germination cycles so I just go ahead and plant them. It is a cosmic truth that if the seeds remain in the package, you

the space



pots



tools



seeds



bulbs



ho



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