

# AUTUMN

Natures time for planting

It is strange how people's view of the world has changed over time. These changes appear to gradually infiltrate every aspect of life.

Take for instance horticulture, when I was setting out in this trade some 40+ years ago we were always advised that Autumn was the best time of year to carry out planting works, unless the items to be planted were tender tropical types. The reason for this was that we were taught that once plants went into the ground they start to produce new roots and develop a new root system.

Root growth will continue until the soil temperature consistently falls below 5°C, which in most years, in the south of the country, happens for only a very short period, if at all. Many people will be surprised to learn that last year, during December, when we were suffering snow and air temperatures of -10°C, a lot of soils would have barely dipped below 5°C in the root zone, which for large shrubs

is generally 40cm+ below the surface. This means that the roots would have carried on growing whilst the rest of the plant is in dormancy, ensuring a better established plant by the spring. This would definitely have paid rewards this year as the temperatures were above average in February, resulting in an early spring. It is this same phenomenon that heating engineers use for ground source heat pumps, although this is at even lower depths for higher temperatures. The reason why the soil remains significantly warmer in winter than the air temperature is due to its insulation properties.

With the growth in garden centres and container production of plants, in the 1980's, the emphasis on planting changed to the spring. The reason this occurred was not for the benefit of plants, but as often the case a marketing ploy, garden centres promoting planting at a time when customers showed the greatest

interest in their gardens. Views have changed so much in recent times that we are now asked on a regular basis whether it is alright to plant in the autumn, or we are even told that customers will leave it until the spring to plant as it is better for the plants. Unfortunately this is a common misperception.

Container production has made it possible for plants to be sold and planted successfully throughout the year. However for most plants I would continue to strongly recommend planting in the autumn, particularly for larger plants, if you have the option, as they still benefit from that winter root growth and establishment. Spring and summer planting is fine if you miss the opportunity to plant in the autumn, but you will need to keep a closer eye on watering in particular, as the root system will not be as established in the garden! With summer planting you are more likely to come across leaf scorch when the weather warms

up very quickly, not necessarily due to not watering the plant but merely that the small root system is unable to take up the water supplied quickly enough. This type of leaf scorch rarely causes long term harm but can detract from the plant's interest until new growth is put on.

Dealing with plants is similar to many aspects of life, preparation is the key. If at all possible if planting can be carried out in the autumn it is recommended, however if circumstances mean this isn't possible planting later can be highly successful it just requires more careful preparation and execution.

*Wrap up warm and plant now could give you more time to enjoy your garden in the spring!*

*For more information or help with your planting contact The Big Plant Centre at Pantiles, Alnners Road, Lyne, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 0BJ or call 01932 872195 or visit the website at [www.bigplantcentre.co.uk](http://www.bigplantcentre.co.uk)*