

Portstone

GARDEN CENTRE

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A u g u s t

BIRDS

After a long mild start to winter, it hit cold and hard when it came. The biggest dump of snow in a long time was fun for the kids (and the big kids) and made the world look beautiful, but of course, it was most disruptive to our everyday life. Christchurch businesses certainly didn't need yet another days loss of trading! The cold should have killed many bugs and diseases that would have plagued us in the coming summer if we had continued to have the mild winter it had been.

My backyard got down to -7°C, the lowest I've ever known it to get, and that's near Hagley Park.

Anyway, what about the birds? They need feeding when it gets this cold, so buy some wild bird seed mix or a fat roll and hang it somewhere safe away from cats. On a metal pole is the best, or suspended from your eaves. Always remove old mouldy food before topping up with fresh. The same goes for bird baths, clean out every few days as the water can quickly become contaminated with droppings and dirt.

FRUIT TREES are in store now. The flavour of the month is apricot. An easy to grow blossom tree that rewards you with yummy fruit that you can make into jam and desserts, or put in the dehydrator and dry whole or make into fruit leathers, or eat them fresh from the tree.

Tomcot is a new one that has an intense apricot flavour and grows on a nice compact tree. **Sundrop** and **Trevatt** are good old favourites that are suitable for the more moderate climate of Christchurch compared to Central Otago where they grow **Moorpark**. **Katy Cot** and **Garden Annie** are semi-dwarf varieties for the smaller garden, or dwarf **Aprigold** for courtyards and containers.

Fitzroy is another sweet, tasty, medium size golden fruit that is suitable for a warm climate. It's a consistent and heavy cropper that matures in February. Most apricots are self pollinating; hence one tree will fruit well by itself. The best time to prune them is late summer. Treat pruning wounds with a pruning paint to prevent disease getting in.

ROSES

The new season roses are here now, and looking strong and healthy. August is the best time to get them planted in the garden. Prepare the soil well with good compost or well rotted manure. Once planted, water well most days whilst they are getting their new little roots established. Water them well in their first summer and spray the foliage regularly with **Oceans Organics** (a seaweed product). Here at Portstone, we spray once a week with Oceans Organics all the citrus, roses, rhodos, azaleas, daphnes, vegetables and more. It keeps them healthy!

DAPHNE odora leucanthe is the popular pink flowering daphne that most people know. But did you know there are other types of daphne?

The **Daphne odora** varieties are the very sweetly scented ones, very popular for picking. **Daphne odora alba** has a pure white flower and **Daphne odora rubra** has reddish buds opening to deep pink, and is a lower more spreading bush than leucanthe.

Daphne burkwoodii is a twiggy, densely foliated evergreen (or semi evergreen in cold areas) with matt mid-green foliage and masses of small starry shaped, fragrant, pink flowers in spring.

Then there is **Daphne bholua** (Himalayan Daphne) that can grow up to 3m tall, but narrow making it suitable where there is not much room but you want some height. They have an open habit and the same fragrant flowers but flower much earlier than odora.

While Daphnes can grow in the sun, they like a moist soil, so that's why they are often best where there is some shade. Mulch the soil well to retain the moisture, but a free draining soil is imperative as water logging will kill them. Feed well with an acid fertiliser particularly in autumn when they need it for flower production.

Time to plant strawberries, sprout potatoes and sow broad beans