

# Portstone

## GARDEN CENTRE

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# D e c e m b e r

**DECEMBER** heralds the beginning of summer. Have you noticed the cabbage trees flowering profusely? According to Maori myth, when the cabbage trees flower well, it means we're in for a long, hot summer. So here's hoping.

There are so many **cabbage trees** (*Cordyline australis*) to choose from, ranging from the usual tall trees that can reach up to 5 or 6 metres, down to short ones that develop virtually no trunk at all, like Renegade or Red Fountains. They still have the rosette pattern of leaves which differentiate them from the flat fan formation of flaxes. The colours range from almost black, to rich burgundies & caramels, reds & purples, through to green with red ribs or brown ribs, then to variegated yellows. Varying leaf widths add to the mix, but what really tops them off is the wonderful big flower plumes which are sensuously fragrant and fill the air around them.

**ROSES** are still very popular and now is a good time to choose the ones you want because so many of them are in flower now. While bush roses are still the most popular, standards add formality and height to your garden and also allow room for underplanting. Patios and miniatures are great for smaller spaces and for growing in pots. Give your rose some fertilizer at the time of planting, a slow release is easiest, then keep well watered over summer. Put a thick layer of 'Mulch n Feed' round the roots to conserve moisture. It also has in it, peastraw, blood & bone and powered sheep manure.

**ROBINIA MOP TOPS** have put on all their spring growth and are showing big heads of lush green foliage atop their sturdy lollipop stems. They are the bees knees for creating formal layouts giving controlled height and size. Also very useful where you want a tree but one that never gets too big. Unlike other Robinias, Mop Tops are thornless and virtually flowerless. They are adaptable to just about any position but happiest with some sun, tolerant of all soil conditions except wet poorly drained soil. and are tolerant of either extreme heat or cold.

**A FISH POND** is a delight to have in the garden at this time of year as the water has a cooling effect on us. Remove any dead foliage from the pond plants as these make the water dirty. Plant submergible or oxygenating plants to help keep the water clean, then plant marginals to decorate the pond and to provide food, shelter and spawning for your fish. Tall plants such as reeds, offer protection from sun and wind. Feed your plants with Aquatic Plant Food 'Plus' from Aqua Hydrotech. This product encourages strong, healthy growth in lilies and marginal plants, whilst also discouraging algae with the addition of extract of barley straw. It contains no synthetic or toxic chemicals and is totally harmless to fish, pets, wildlife, plants and children.

**LAVENDERS** are a versatile plant. They don't require much water over the dry summer, are wonderfully fragrant, are edible & medicinal, make a stunning display when mass planted, and can be used as a hedge ranging in height from .3m to 1.2m depending on the variety that you choose. They are not susceptible to pests or disease making them easy care plants. They just need a cut back after flowering.

The **VEGETABLE GARDEN** should be well planted by now but it isn't too late if you still have some gaps to fill. If any plants, particularly tomatoes, pumpkins, courgettes and cucumbers, have succumbed to any pests or diseases and are looking decidedly dodgy, then it is better to discard the plant and start with a new one, something that can't be done later in the season. Liquid feeding regularly will improve the quality and flavour of your crops. Tomato food can be used for most of the vegetable garden and is fine for the flower garden too. Leeks in bundles can be purchased now, so time to get them in for winter harvest. The same for brussel sprouts.

Decorate indoors with a Christmas red Poinsettia, only available at this time of year. Put a wreath round the bottom of it and make it into a table centre piece. Buy a living Christmas tree and save the hassle of buying a cut tree each year. Plus as the tree gets older so it gets bigger and better each year. It can be placed in a festive pot and decorated with baubles from our gift range.

### SEASONS GREETINGS

Chris and the team at Portstone wish you all an enjoyable and safe Christmas.