



## IN THE PINK

Family-run Chiltern Seeds, based near Wallingford, Oxfordshire, has come up with a pretty-pretty collection of sweet peas in their 'Pink Champagne Mix', with three varieties that will make excellent bedfellows. First up is 'Juliet', which has a powerful scent with citrus overtones and cream flowers with a pinky-apricot blush. Frilly 'Heaven Scent' is a light apricot pink with a creamy background and finally, large-flowered 'Valerie Harrod' is a warm coral pink, flushed with white at the base. Price £2.75 per packet (01491 824675; chilternseeds.co.uk).



## A GOOD READ

It is no surprise that the rose is the world's favourite flower and in her new book, simply called *Rose* (Reaktion Books, £16), social historian Catherine Horwood dances us through every aspect of its history, botanical, cultural and literary significance, royal connections and horticultural development. It offers many interesting nuggets – not least that we should all add the European Rose Garden in Sangerhausen, Germany, to our bucket list, as it has 8,600 varieties. There's an enticing recipe for rose vodka, too.

# garden notes



## Everything you need to know to get the most from your plot in February

WORDS BY PAULA McWATERS

bide their time beneath undergrowth in mature gardens and then magically reappear, even after decades, when the brambles have been cleared. True harbingers of hope after a long winter.

Their favoured position is in humus-rich soil akin to woodland conditions – they like to be dry in summer and moist in winter. Growing them under spring- and summer-flowering shrubs will provide the dappled shade they prefer and allows you to 'mark' any special cultivars, so you know where they will come up. To learn more about them, head for one of the hundreds of snowdrop sales, talks and walks. The Cottage Garden Society ([thecottagegarden.society.org.uk](http://thecottagegarden.society.org.uk)), Alpine Garden Society ([alpinegardensociety.net](http://alpinegardensociety.net)) and the Scottish Rock Garden Club forum ([srgc.net](http://srgc.net)) are all good for information.



I'VE NEVER BEEN TEMPTED TO SPEND SILLY MONEY on a rare snowdrop and I wouldn't describe myself as an incurable galanthophile (yet!) but like most gardeners, I am bewitched by this precious little flower and usually add at least one or two new ones to my collection each year. 'Magnet' is rather special as it stands taller than the others, and I also favour reliable, honey-scented 'Brenda Troyle' (above). A delicate appearance belies the resilience of snowdrops as they can push their noses up even through rock-hard ground. They also have the ability to

## WHAT TO DO

- Wash** seedtrays and pots thoroughly, ready for re-use
- Set** potato tubers to chit (sprout) in eggboxes in a light, frost-free position (shown)
- Plant** lily bulbs in dry weather in well-drained soil enriched with organic material
- Cut** back ivy on walls before birds start nesting
- Repair** and repaint any fences that need overhauling
- Put** cloches or fleece in position for early outdoor sowings or transplants
- Weed** and mulch round the base of any fruit trees
- Clear** dead leaves away from hellebores and other bulbs
- Prune** weak growth from early summer-flowering clematis
- Cut** late-flowering clematis back to 15cm-30cm from the ground



## Clear winner

I like this Victoria Tall Wall greenhouse by Forest Garden – it could be just the job if you yearn for such a structure but lack space and/or funds for a full-size one. Having a back panel means it can be stood anywhere (not just by a wall) and its fold-down centre shelves make the inside space flexible. It is made of pressure-treated timber with a 15-year anti-rot guarantee and has acrylic windows. Measuring 196cm high x 147cm wide x 74cm deep, it costs £389.99 (flat-pack, unpainted) including delivery from Forest (0333 003 0026; forestgarden.co.uk).



## Making the cut

If, like me, you are forever trying to bite off more than you can chew with your secateurs, you will welcome a really tough pair that can stand up to a certain amount of abuse. I have been putting Darlac's Rhino secateurs through their paces and have found them to be as robust as the name suggests – they fit comfortably in the hand, too. The blades are carbon steel and the handles are drop-forged to make them more durable. With a lifetime guarantee against material defect, they cost £29.99 from Darlac stockists (darlac.com).



## BOUNDARY LINES

This is a great time to put in a traditional hedge – the plants go in as bare-roots, are inexpensive to buy at this size and grow away readily. All you need to do is dig over the soil, remove any large stones, make a slit with your spade, and then drop and firm them in. Make it wildlife-friendly by including a mixture of edibles such as blackthorn, crab apple, hawthorn, wild cherry and dogrose, as well as hazelnuts. Prices from 69p to £1.49 from Hedges Direct (01257 263873; hedgesdirect.co.uk).

*Tip* Mulch hellebores with spent mushroom compost (avoiding the crowns) and nip off spent flower heads to encourage next year's growth

## 1 HOUR to make a difference

*If time is short, focus on one satisfying task – and the rest of the garden can wait*



When it's chilly outside, it is rewarding to set up your own miniature veg patch indoors by raising some micro leaves on your windowsill. Collect some plastic vegetable punnets with drainage holes and fill them with seed compost, then sow a selection of micro greens. These are simply vegetable and herb seedlings, such as chard, beetroot, rocket, basil and coriander (try johnsons-seeds.com), that are harvested very young – within 16-21 days. Although they can be a bit slower to get going in winter, they should soon furnish you with a tasty and nutritious crop.

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