

Wally's Weekly News 21st November 2009

Written by Wally Richards.

CHRISTMAS IS COMING

With Xmas now only about 5 weeks away it is a good time reflect on our current season and start thinking about the festive season.

The season has been poorly, weather wise in most areas with a sprinkling of summer like days followed quickly by chills and rain. Growth has been good for all the hardy plants including weeds but not so favorable for the heat loving plants.

This is a shame as there are many new gardeners whom are either starting gardening this season or this is their second or so season. People that have gardened for many seasons know that some years it's great and some years poor, which they accept the good with the bad and battle on.

I know that my more tender plants such as tomatoes, capsicum, cucumbers and egg plants are still sitting in pots in my little glasshouse waiting for the signs of better weather before been moved outside.

They are doing well and being potted into larger containers as the need arises so time is not lost.

Every time I think of moving some outdoors the weather turns to custard and they would only sulk in the chills.

Often the weather does not really improve till after Xmas and then one hopes for a long season which we call an Indian Summer.

If you do not have a glasshouse or tunnel house then it is not too difficult to make one using horticulture plastic film. A tunnel house is the most simple, using lengths of plastic pipe about 25 to 30mm wide and placing larger gauge tube set deep into the soil about 2 metres apart and inserting the ends of the smaller tubing into these. A number of these hoops about 75cm to a metre apart in rows will form the basic structure to run your plastic film over. The film can be held down on the ground with a mound of soil or rocks on both sides and at one end. This leaves one end open and tied off (using say Velcro) as the entrance way and for ventilation. The structure should be placed where it's both sunny and sheltered.

When summer does comes the plastic film can be removed and stored then windbreak or shade cloth could be placed over making a neat shade house.

The alternative is to make an A-frame house using say 40 x 40mm wood framing and the film attached to this.

Where there is a will there is a way and a glasshouse like structure makes for easier gardening no matter the season.

You could also drop a few hints that you would love a plastic or glasshouse for Xmas and hope it does not fall on deaf ears.

Let's now look at a few ideas on what to give your gardening family or friends for Xmas. A living gift keeps on giving and plants are always appreciated.

There is ample time to pot up some containers with colour spots (flowering annuals from a garden centre) and grow them on for gifts just prior to Xmas.

Use purchased compost and add to this some blood & bone plus sheep manure pellets.

Select a range of colour spots and use your artistic flare.

If you wish to take this a step further then with a good size container, plant a rose or some other ornamental shrub into the same mix and around the edge of the container plant annual flowers such as Lobelia.

Another idea would be a fruit tree such as citrus or a Feijoa 'Unique' planted into a 45 litre container.

It could be finished off with a few salad lettuce plants around the rim.

Herbs are another good possibility and in a larger container a few different types could be used.

A pot of several strawberry plants makes a neat looking gift with their flowers and fruit. One in the centre and several around the rim.

A flowering climber in the centre of a container with a tepee of bamboo stakes to wind it around and give upward support.

There are endless ideas that one can find in your local garden centres and a gift of a few bags of compost never goes astray with a keen gardener.

If you are stuck then there are Gardening Gift Vouchers which can also be included into a Xmas Card as a small but appreciated gift to a gardener.

Garden Ornaments such as fountains, arches, sun dials, statues & plaques for those gardeners that like a bit more than plants growing.

A Worm Farm is a great investment, not only is it a good way of disposing of kitchen scraps plus you benefit from the worm pee, worm casts and worm populations for your gardens and containers.

Gardening books are useful tools for the novice to learn from and seasoned gardener to refer to.

There is a wide selection of books that can be found in bookshops, or by mail order from Touchwood Books and directly from some garden centres. Some books are on specialized subjects and others more general topics.

Here I must put a plug in for my own three books, **Wally's Down to Earth Gardening Guide**, all ready in its third print, **Wally's Green Tips for Gardeners** and the latest, **Wally's Gardening and Health**.

The later can be of value to anyone with health concerns.

Your options for gardening type gifts are many and as gardening has become very popular in recent times it is unlikely that any gardening gift would not be greatly appreciated.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)