

What to do THIS WEEK

In the flower garden



What to CHOP!

Prune acers

Acers are slow growing and naturally form a graceful and spreading shape, so pruning should be kept to a minimum. But if you simply have to chop them, they should be pruned while they are fully dormant between November and early February, otherwise the wound will bleed sap, which will weaken the plant. Remove crossing or badly placed shoots to create an evenly spaced framework of stems. If you want to reduce the height or spread, follow long branches back to a side branch and prune them out at this point.

A plant to PROPAGATE



DAYLILIES

Propagate daylilies now through simple division. Use a garden fork to dig around and under a clump of daylilies, leaving a gap of a few inches to avoid damaging the roots. Remove the clump from the ground and chop through the clump with a spade or old bread knife to split it into smaller chunks.

These can be divided even further by gently splitting into sections a few centimetres across, but make sure each section has both roots and upper shoots or 'eyes'. Pot up each division into small pots with the shoots at the surface, water well and keep in a cold greenhouse or cold frame until spring. Larger clumps can be replanted straight into the ground.



Hoe out weeds

In mild winters, weeds such as creeping buttercup and bittercress can grow almost year-round, so it's a good idea to keep on top of them even in the depths of winter. The reduced groundcover in winter also reveals perennial weeds hiding at the base of shrubs, hedges or among perennials. Remove the deep taproots with a slender knife or weeding trowel to reduce damage to neighbouring plants.

GN product tester **Geoff Hodge** tests hand-held weeding hoes

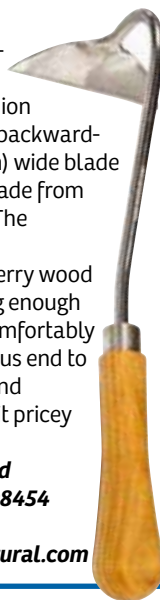
BEST HAND HOE Darlac Onion Hoe DP546 £6.90

Like all the best hand hoes tested, this has a sharp, backward-facing blade. It is made from stainless steel, 12cm (4¾in) wide and cuts through weeds and soil with ease. It is incredibly comfortable thanks to its contoured soft plastic handle, which features finger grips, thumb stop and hand stop. These make it easy to use even when wet and slippery.
Supplier: 01753 547790, www.darlac.com



BEST ONION HOE Sneeboer Hand Hoe £30.95

This has a swan-necked shaft of a 'traditional' onion hoe. The sharp, backward-facing 10cm (4in) wide blade and shaft are made from stainless steel. The relatively short (12.5cm/5in) cherry wood handle was long enough for me to use comfortably and has a bulbous end to prevent your hand slipping. It is a bit pricey though!
Supplier: Harrod Horticultural, 08454 025300; www.harrodhorticultural.com



BEST CUTTING HOE Burgon & Ball Razor Hoe £12.95

Although this looks more like a mini scythe, it performs in the same way as the others. It has a very sharp blade, which is 10cm (4in) wide, angled backwards and made from high-carbon, laminated steel. The handle is 12cm (4¾in) long, just big enough for me, and made from rubberwood. Left- and right-handed versions are available.
Supplier: 0114 2338262; www.burgonandball.com

