

McRAE'S MAIL



OUR NEWS

This month we welcome Matt Playdon to the team. Matt comes to us with a wealth of horticultural knowledge and experience including time as the Leading Hand at Taronga Zoo. Matt will be a team leader in our Newcastle division.

FEATURE PLANT

Chrysanthemum



Always associated with Mother's Day, chrysanthemums are most commonly seen as indoor pot plants. After it begins to fade, take your tired chrysanthemum out of the pot and find a spot for it in a sunny garden bed. It will last for years.

The sheer beauty of the Chrysanthemum as a flowering plant makes it understandable why the Chinese have been growing them for 2,500 years. Of course, the Japanese also became addicted - it's been their national flower for 1,000 years.

A good tip when buying a Chrysanthemum is to try and find one that has its own roots, because once the flowers have withered and faded you can plant them into the garden

MAY IS THE MONTH FOR COMPOST

Although International Composting Awareness Week was first celebrated in Canada in 1995, May's surely a much more seasonally appropriate month here in the Southern Hemisphere where we're in the depths of autumn. This is the season when the leaves that fall from deciduous trees and the luxuriant garden growth provide an abundance of material for composting.

What to compost

The sweetest smelling compost is made of a good mixture of different types of components. The first group – called 'greens' or 'wets' - is high in nitrogen and includes green grass clippings, weeds (remove seed heads), manure and vegetable scraps.

The other group – the 'browns' or 'dries' – is high in carbon. Included in this group are sawdust, shredded newspaper, fallen leaves (especially leaves from deciduous trees), dried grass and straw.

As well as the ingredients mentioned you can add such things as wood ash, chopped-up prunings, vacuum cleaner waste, coffee grounds, tea leaves, eggshells and cooking oil. Just remember the golden rule: never

too much of any one thing.

What not to compost

Avoid using meat (because of the vermin it will attract), plastic (watch out for Lego blocks in the vacuum cleaner waste!), weeds with seedheads or pieces that may survive composting, diseased plants, and plants that have been treated with herbicide or a pesticide.

Other composting tips

- Oxygen, while it's not strictly necessary, does make the whole composting process a lot pleasanter. Regular forking, stirring, turning or tumbling will usually add sufficient oxygen.
- A small amount of moisture aids the breakdown process. Even leftover drinks can be poured into the heap. The idea is to have enough moisture to encourage the breakdown microbes, but not so much that oxygen is excluded.
- Large pieces of material take a very long time to break down. If you need to get rid of a lot of garden prunings, consider buying (or hiring) a mechanical or

electric garden mulcher to reduce the pieces to a compostable size. Large, tough leaves can be run over with the mower and collected in the grasscatcher.

- The composting process works best if it's not too hot and not too cold. This may mean building a compost heap in a sunny spot during winter, and moving to a shadier position for summer.



THE YARD— MAY GARDENING

Even though the weather is getting colder—don't forget about your garden!

- Vegetables to sow— Onions
- Flowers to sow— Linaria "Fairy Bouquet"
- Prune now— in warmer areas its time to prune tibouchinas and oleanders
- Feed now— bulb leaves are starting to emerge and would appreciate some liquid fertiliser
- Pest Watch— watch out for wasps this month especially the evil European wasp that builds its nest in inconvenient places in the garden.