

ONCE upon a time, January gave us a moment for reflection in the garden.

Not so this year. A mild winter has brought everything forward so instead of spending time planning for the months ahead we've been cracking on with jobs normally in the calendar for February and March.

At the time of writing this, the first rose buds have just broken through. So the roses have needed pruning and it is proving difficult because these delicate buds break off very easily.

Jobs like putting the mulch on your borders normally happen in March, but the shoots are already coming through so it might be that you have to leave it this year.

Wisteria and fruit trees are also ready for the chop thanks to the warm weather and what seems like an increasingly short winter.

We haven't had enough frosts and the ones we have experienced have barely penetrated the ground by half an inch.

The snowdrops started to flower ahead of time and the crocuses are marching on faster than usual after what has been one of the warmest winters I can remember.

It's been a gradual thing, but we've gone from thinking maybe we could be tackling these jobs earlier than normal to actually having to do it.

The only worry is that if we get hit by a 'Beast from the East' it could cause a lot of problems, but you just have to work with the hand you are dealt.

For now though the end result could simply be that when you sit in your garden for a morning coffee this February there might be a little more to see than usual.

Think about the wildlife

This changing of the seasons might also have consequences for wildlife and, in particular, the birds. Milder weather might encourage them to nest earlier so jobs like cutting down an overgrown leylandii should be done sooner rather than later to avoid disturbing our feathered garden visitors.

Plant of the month

Another 5,000 snowdrops have been planted in the Woodland Walk so this month's display should be the best yet.

Everyone loves their arrival because they bring with them a promise of Spring.

On an estate like Arley, where we have thousands of visitors each year, we like to create interest in different areas of the garden across the year.

In February and March the most interesting parts of the gardens are The Grove and The Woodland Walk.

They are wild and wonderful and, let's face it, it is just good to get out and about when the weather allows it.