



# A fresh start

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One of the most frequently-asked questions I have had this winter from friends and clients has been: 'How will this rain affect my garden and the plants in it?'

The truth is that most garden plants will survive this recent prolonged spate of wet weather if the soil is in good heart.

As the weather improves and the days start to warm up, much of the surface water will finally drain away. Areas which still remain water-logged will become problematic and the soil may need to be improved by adding a combination of grit and organic mulch. Waterlogging prevents oxygen getting to the root system and this leads to the plants suffocating. It is really very simple: plant roots need oxygen to grow.

Signs of waterlogging damage to garden plants include yellowing leaves which wither and drop off, general 'wilt' of a plant, or the young shoots dying back. If the plant is lifted out of the soil, the roots may be black, soft and soggy and the soil will smell like rotten eggs.

Much of the land around Haslemere, such as Marley Common, is free-draining

While the wettest winter on record in the south may have left gardeners' water butts overflowing, it has claimed its share of casualties. Waterlogged plants, nutrients leached from the soil and pest and disease problems can all result from consistently wet conditions, and those gardeners with poor drainage systems are likely to be the hardest hit

sand-based soil and the biggest problem in gardens with this type of soil will be replacing the nutrients which will have been washed away with the heavy rain.

To do this in beds and borders, dig over the top layer of the soil and then mulch with a thick layer of compost or heat-sterilised manure.

When planting in sandy soils, add a good amount of compost and a handful of a general fertiliser to the soil removed from the hole before backfilling around the plant. On lawns, a general lawn feed twice a year, in spring and autumn,

will perk up tired grass.

For heavier clay soils, such as that found along Bell Vale Lane and around Fernhurst, the soil will take much longer to drain. In addition, heavy clay soils tend to remain colder for longer into the spring than more freely-draining soils.

The easiest and most effective remedy is to simply stay off waterlogged soil. Repeatedly walking across wet 'squelchy' lawns compacts the surface and delays absorption.

Do not push wheelbarrows over squelchy waterlogged lawns, as this can create ruts which set solid later - this will make mowing difficult.

In established beds and borders, fork over the soil to break up the 'crust' which may have formed on the top, this will allow water to move through more quickly. Then, add a mixture of grit and compost to improve the texture of the soil.

When creating new beds, dig down deeper than the depth of the rootball of the largest plant and add in lots of horticultural grit and builders' sand to the soil at the bottom of the trench. This will improve drainage in

the future.

Problems of waterlogging on areas of lawn include moss build-up. To tackle moss build up on lawns requires a two-stage attack when it is dry: firstly, the lawn will need to be scarified (raked) to remove the build-up of moss and thatch. After this, apply a combined moss killer/lawn seed/fertiliser in April, if it is not too wet.

This process removes a core of soil from the ground which is then swept up and removed. Then, a mixture of sharp sand and sieved compost can be swept into the lawn.

Plants in pots can also become waterlogged. Check to make sure pots are not stagnating in trays of water and use pot feet to raise pots off the ground. If plants are waterlogged, replant after some TLC: simply lay the pot on its side and gently slide the whole plant out. Check for and remove damaged roots. Before replanting, clear the drainage holes at the bottom of the pot and add a layer of crocks (pieces of broken pots) or similar to allow the water to pass through easily. Add a layer of fresh compost on top of the drainage layer, then replant. Remove the top inch or two of the surface compost and replace with fresh compost.

If worse comes to worse, consider making changes to the garden! Perhaps a bog garden or pond may be the best solution for a persistent wet area of the garden.

If the idea of creating a bog garden does not appeal and the problems with waterlogging persist, there are many drainage solutions which can be installed.

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