

## Where there's a willow...

The months from December until March are ideal times for cutting and replanting willow whips, or using them for weaving. You can use willow to make all sorts of structures either living (they will grow and the new branches are then woven in to strengthen what is already there) or dead (for example sweet pea or runner bean supports).

There are around 18 species of willow native to the UK. You will need to source the right kind if you want to try some weaving. Try ***Salix alba***, ***Salix viminalis*** or ***Salix triandra***. You will find lots of sites on line offering help – or speak to gardening colleagues, not least Nikki Cole of the Walled Garden in Perth (01738 631777).



### Some activities for outdoors...

- It will soon be time to start gathering the foliage, seedheads, teasels, cones, etc you need for **Christmas wreaths and decorations**. A good excuse for a walk. The base of the wreaths could be made using willow whips you have gathered.
- Have a **snowman** competition when the inevitable happens – or create a community snowman with everyone working together. Path clearing will get the blood coursing too!
- Speak to your local **Countryside Ranger**. They may have winter activities that you could join in with

Have you thought about:

Running a Winter Warmer open day for your surrounding community. Raise both funds and your profile and make new friends.

### And for indoors:

- Plant prepared **bulbs** in containers as a winter fundraiser for your project
- Gather all the **photographs** of the garden you have taken throughout the year. Use them as a wonderful reminiscence session and as the basis of a fund-raising calendar which can be created cheaply through a number of websites or as a planning tool for next year
- Invite someone who knows about birds. Talk about what to look out for in winter, identify tracks in the snow, make **bird feeders** and bird food and ensure there is always water available for them
- Pour over **seed catalogues** and plan what is to be grown next year
- Share some **poetry** about gardening, wildlife, winter. Discuss how you felt as they were being read. Discuss memories they brought back. Vote to find out the favourite
- It is time to take **hardwood cuttings** – simple to do and a good idea for some potting shed work, once you have cut them of course
- Make **salt dough** and use to create decorations, beads or presents. Or press leaves, etc into the dough to create patterns. (Dissolve 300g table salt in 200ml warm water. Add 300g plain flour and 1 tbsp vegetable oil and stir until it thickens then knead it into a smooth ball. Flour a surface and then roll the dough to a thickness of around 1cm. Make the shapes you want using cutters or a knife. Or roll into beads and make holes with a cocktail stick so that you can thread them together once they are dried. Bake flat shapes in the lowest possible oven heat for around one hour and beads for around one and a half hours. Turn the oven off after this time but leave them in until they are cool as this helps prevent the dough from cracking. Decorate with water-based paints.



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