You What? Words that the Gardening Gang use.

Perennial

Dies back in winter but comes back every year from the roots. Some plants are only perennial in this climate because of the cold.

Annual

Grows every year from seed. The seed germinates, the plant grows, the flowers bloom, are fertilised, turns to a seed-head, the seeds are scattered and the plant dies.

Shrub vs tree

When is a multi-stemmed tree a shrub? I have large shrubs and small trees. In truth, it doesn’t really matter; it’s important to know how big the thing gets and how fast it grows.

Potting on

The act of taking seeds germinated together, for example all together in a seed tray, and put it into a pot, or a plug of its own.

Repotting

Taking a plant and putting it into a larger pot with more compost

Fertiliser

Chemicals that make plants grown better. Can be man-made or natural, such as a comfrey liquid or chicken poo pellets. Different plants doing different things need a different type of fertiliser.

Pruning

The act of reducing a perennial, shrub or tree in size by removing branches. Not to be confused with dead-heading, although you can do both at the same time, for instance with roses. See also Chelsea Chop

Planting out

The act of taking a plant, usually an annual, and putting it in the ground where it is to grow. For tender plants, this is done ‘when the risk of frost has passed’.

Dead-heading

For plants that continue to flower through the season, like roses or dahlias, or for annuals that are trying to make seeds, taking off the dead flowers can encourage new flowers to emerge. Also useful to do to bulbs, to encourage the bulb to fatten up and prevent the energy from going into making seeds instead. But some plants have nice seed heads that the birds love so we leave them on. How do we choose what to dead head? We watch Gardener’s World and do what they tell us.

Chelsea Chop

The act of cutting back a perennial plant, usually by a third, to encourage later flowering. In some cases the plant is reduced by a third, in other cases a third of all the plants are cut right back almost to the ground to make the chosen plants flower later. Always done in the week of the Chelsea flower show, or the Bank Holiday Monday after if you spend all week watching the show on the TV.

Evergreen

A plant that keeps its foliage all year round, even in snow and ice. Conifers, heathers and some grasses are evergreen.

Deciduous

A plant that loses its foliage during the winter.

Pinching out

The act of taking off the main growing stem of a seedling, like a cosmos or a marigold, to encourage more side stems and therefore more flowers.

Germinate

What a seed does when it starts to grow.

Graft

Some plants have one type of plant material joined to another plant. Rose varieties are usually grated to another type of ‘root stock’, as are fruit trees. Sometimes grafting is done to make and interesting plant with lots of different types of fruit or flower, for example, apple varieties or buddleia flower colours. It’s used by commercial growers to make mass propagation more reliable and cost effective.

Watering-can rose

The bit on the end that make the water come out as a shower, rather than a single stream like a tap. Roses has different size holes, which control how much water comes out.

Mulch

A layer, or top dressing, of material that is intended to suppress weeds. Mulching with inorganic material, like gravel or slate, looks pretty and prevents the moisture from evaporating from the soil at the top. Mulching with an organic material like compost or well-rotted manure allows the soil organisms to incorporate the goodness into the soil. Charles Dowding (Mr No-Dig Gardening) considers mulching far preferable to digging and weeding.

Propagating

The task of growing new plants from existing plant material. In essence, cloning the exact variety of the plant, which is particularly useful if a plant ‘does not come true from seed’. Some plants will easily grow roots from stems that are in contact with the soil or water and this feature can be exploited to make new plants. Stick a stalk of watercress from your salad bag in a milk bottle of water and watch the roots grow.

Dividing

If a plant does not root from the stalk, then maybe it can be made into two plants by dividing the root ball. Grasses, hardy geraniums, sedum ‘autumn joy’ are a few examples.