

# Facing the chop



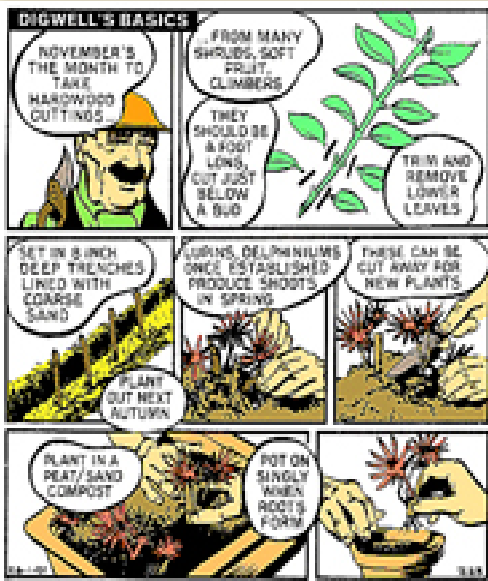
Hardwood cuttings can be taken from November into the New Year. Essentially, these are twigs cut off a plant and plonked in the ground. Between 40% and 80% survive. The parent plants need cutting back anyway, so these are essentially new plants for free.

A few things to remember. These plants don't have roots so if you put them in the ground with a lot of leaves on them, the leaf area will take away all the water and it will dry out and die.

The second basic principle is almost the opposite. If the soil is too wet, they are likely to get a fungal infection and die, or become unusable. Use well-drained soil or compost.

Finally, cold winds make it harder for the plant to develop, especially the all-important first root, so put your cutting in a moderately protected position, giving it half a chance of success.

Don't forget! Visit [mrdigwell.com](http://mrdigwell.com) for my fantastic Christmas stocking special offer.



Holly



Agapanthus



Dogwood

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# WINTER'S

It's not just holly and mistletoe that provide magic at this time of year - there are flowers, leaves and berries galore

Wandering through a magnificent garden centre this week, I marvelled at the twinkling Christmas lights, the forest of Christmas trees, the queues at Santa's grotto and the shelves teeming with scented candles and gift-wrapped chocolates.

The place was heaving, the car park full on a cold early December afternoon. The cafe was packed... and the outdoor plant section - well, it was empty! Not a single soul appreciating the true joys of a garden centre.

Benches were laden with winter delights, the cold air holding crisp, floral scent. There seemed to be a total ignorance of the joys that winter gardens can bring, which is a great shame.

So, in this season of manic madness, let's take a moment to pause and examine our green spaces

during this unusually dry spell. If you leave it until spring to chop back perennials, you will find all sorts of interest.

By the front door I have some agapanthus in pots, which gave a beautiful display in the summer and their spent flower heads of spiky green globes still look interesting.

The Chinese lantern plant, Physalis alkekengi, produces the most amazingly bright orange papery packaging to cover the orange fruit within. As winter progresses, the lantern becomes a skeleton. This unusual perennial is quite vigorous so unless you want to cover a large area, keep it in check.

Ornamental grasses can look wonderful in winter. The Hakonechloa grass I planted last spring has turned completely golden, so that it looks like a different plant altogether.

Bark is not the primary consideration for most

## YOU ASK...

Dear Diarmuid  
Can you tell me where I can get CastClear from as I have tried numerous garden centres to no avail?  
H Race, Rotherham

It's a good time of year to apply this to prevent worm casts making lawns muddy and, as it works without killing them, you don't harm the environment.  
You can find local stockists by going to the storefinder on the



CastClear website at [castclear.co.uk](http://castclear.co.uk)  
Your nearest is Wentworth Garden Centre near Rotherham (01226 744842).  
Best wishes, Diarmuid