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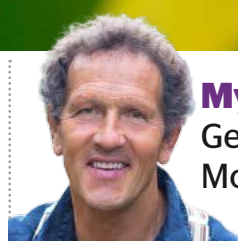
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● Sowing the seed

New to sowing or unsure why it doesn't always work? Join our masterclasses on 8 March in Hampshire and 29 March in Hereford. Go to gardenersworld.com/masterclass for details.

● Monty's spuds

It's not just time to sow seeds but also spuds. Watch how Monty does it in our two-part video at gardenersworld.com/monty-potato-trial



● Greener grass

Alan's guide to organic lawns should inspire you to tackle yours this month, and to watch Alan show how it's done, see his *No Fuss Guides* to lawncare at gardenersworld.com/alan-titchmarsh

● Plot to plate

Open up a new world of flavours with our 132-page special edition, *Grow Your Own*. Get 60 crop grow guides plus 6 free seed packs, at £7.99 in shops or at buysubscriptions.com/gyo17 for your copy by post.



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How to get in touch

For our contacts, turn to page 156

Welcome



The unfurling of new life from tiny, dried seeds is always a joy to see – whether it's the first time you've sown them or it's part of your well-honed routine. As we approach peak seed-sowing season, in March and April, we're sharing this everyday miracle with you through free packs of salad and flowers to sow now.

And what hot property your seeds are! As I'm writing this, the world appears to be in meltdown about a lack of those summer staples, courgettes and Iceberg lettuce, here in the depths of winter. It makes you realise how lucky we gardeners are to be so close to the seasons and able

to enjoy timely eating of the freshest food, picked just moments before you eat it. What do you relish: a fresh-picked Savoy, still dewy and crisp from the plot, or an air-freighted courgette fresh from the warehouse?

Self-sufficiency isn't what it's about, as most of us have neither the space nor time to make that a reality. But this year, why not aim to have at least one thing to harvest every month? It'll give you new flavours you often can't buy and is, in a very small way, a positive step towards helping the world regain its balance. Above all, it will bring you joy far beyond what's on your plate, and it starts here – with those seeds.

To fuel your gardening passions even more, whether you're a veg head or flower fancier, the programme is back! Mark the time: 8.30pm on 10 March – Monty, Nigel and the whole team will see you there!

Lucy

Lucy Hall,
Editor

@lucyhall_GW
@GWmag

MORE FREE SEED!

Don't miss your summer flower packs next month in the April issue – on sale 24 March



PS To mark the 50th anniversary of *Gardeners' World* programme, we've created three unique holidays for you to enjoy in the company of **Carol**, **Monty** and – launching on page 48 – **Adam Frost**. Find out more inside...

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Cover photo: *Narcissus 'Tête-à-tête'* by MMGI/Marianne Majerus



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your planner for March

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We love March

for its promising signs of spring

This is a tough month for gardeners: spring is so close we can almost taste it. Daffodils are poking through, and leaf buds on shrubs and trees are as plump and promising as a baby's fingers. But, and this is a large but, we are still beset by icy winds, drippy days and the ever present threat of a nasty frost.

Are we downhearted? We most certainly are not, for we are gardeners and are always full of positivity and bonhomie. Spring will soon arrive, amid sounding trumpets of sunshine and colour and, in the meantime, we'll savour what we have.

Words by **James Alexander-Sinclair**

STAR OF THE MONTH *Crocus tommasinianus* 'Barr's Purple'

Crocuses should always be planted en masse: they take up very little space, are relatively cheap to buy and delightfully simple to plant. They can be planted into grass or borders but there must be lots of them, as they're most effective when given the chance to become an azure sea. If you're pushed for space, they also look great in containers - especially when planted with tulips to extend the season. Crocuses look particularly wonderful when it snows - and, of course, it still might!

● **Care** Protect bulbs from mice: they seem to think that crocuses are planted especially for their gastronomic pleasure. Happy in a bit of shade ● **Height x Spread** 10cm x 5cm





Plant partners

Bursting with energy

Revitalise pots and borders this spring with these bright and breezy duos

1 *Erysimum* 'Rysi Copper' and *Narcissus* 'Tête-à-tête'

Here we go: a bit of zing, fizz and whoopie-do to shake off the last of those winter blues. This would make a very striking combination for containers, especially if you add a hellebore. Don't forget to stop and smell the wallflowers (*Erysimum*) - they have a gloriously seductive scent.

Erysimum 'Rysi Copper'

● **Care** Sow seeds in summer, or buy bare-root plants in autumn or plug plants in spring. Hardy and bee-friendly.

● **H x S** 40cm x 30cm

Narcissus 'Tête-à-tête'

● **Care** One of the best daffodils, perfect for containers and the front of borders. Bulbs will flower every spring for many years. Good in a vase.

● **H x S** 20cm x 10cm

2 *Skimmia japonica* 'Magic Marlot' and *Heuchera* 'Forever Purple'

Skimmias offer pink flowers as soft as a whispered kiss and glossy green (or in this case variegated) leaves. They're perfect for keeping pots and windowboxes warm until the bulbs come romping through. Good to see the sultry heuchera lurking below, adding a touch of exotic mystery.

Skimmia japonica 'Magic Marlot'

● **Care** Likes with slightly acid soil. Variegated skimmias are best in a cool shady position. Good for early bees.

● **H x S** 50cm x 60cm

Heuchera 'Forever Purple'

● **Care** An unfussy evergreen with pink flowers in early summer. Watch out for vine weevils if growing in pots.

● **H x S** 30cm x 40cm

3 *Muscari aucheri* 'Blue Magic' and *Stipa tenuissima*

Where would Martha have been without the Vandellas? Or Freddie if there were no Dreamers? They'd have been in trouble, because stars often needs strong background support. In this case, the startling blue of the grape hyacinth (*Muscari*) is so much better with the bleached and bouncy stipa.

Muscari aucheri 'Blue Magic'

● **Care** Plant bulbs in autumn. It will seed and spread quite happily in most soils. Beautifully scented.

● **H x S** 15cm x 5cm

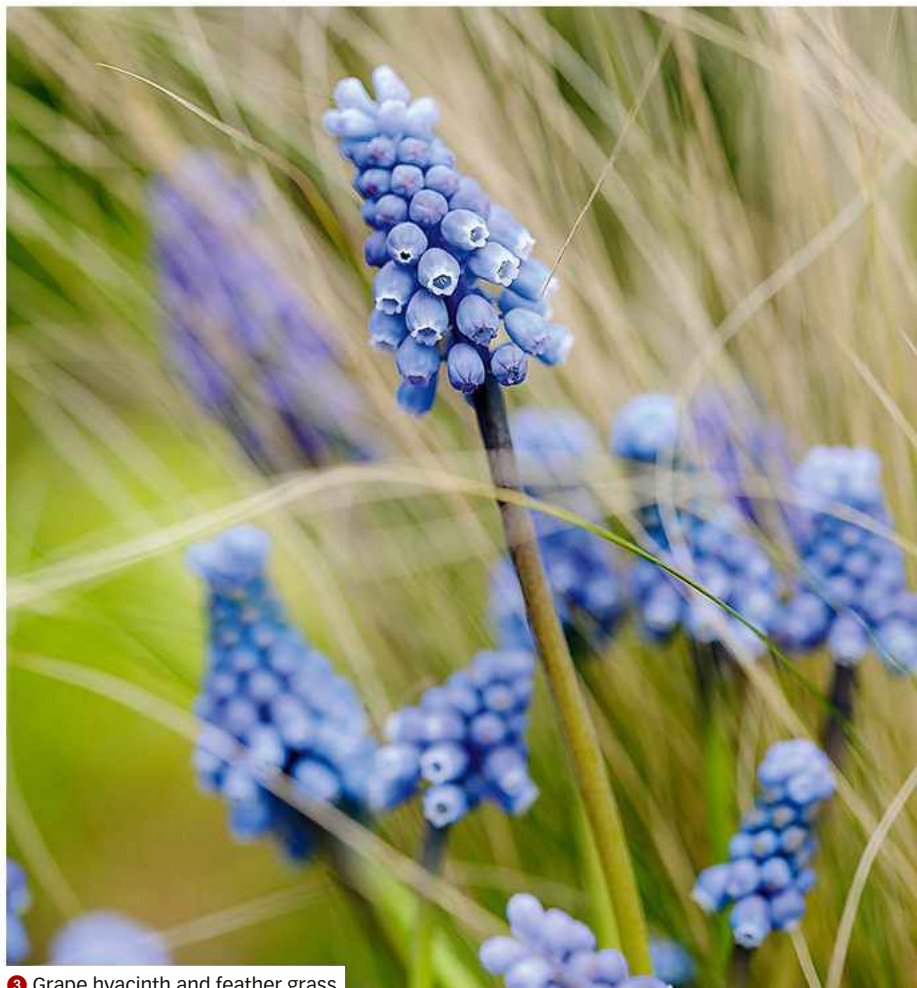
Stipa tenuissima

● **Care** Easy to look after, just comb it vigorously with a rake in spring to remove dead leaves and old flowers.

● **H x S** 60cm x 30cm



2 Skimmia and heuchera



3 Grape hyacinth and feather grass

Expert's choice

Pulmonaria

These tough little charmers have blooms and leaves that come in a variety of colours – and they love a shady border, says **Graham Rice**

Some perennials are essential. Every garden I've ever had has included pulmonarias – and yours should too. They're colourful, resilient and have attractive foliage, as well as flowers that come in many colours.

Related to forget-me-nots (but more permanent) and to comfrey (but less invasive), pulmonarias are low-growing, tough, mainly evergreen perennials that make slow-spreading clumps of usually silver-spotted foliage. These attractive summer leaves are preceded from late winter into early summer by clusters of flowers held in one-sided uncoiling heads.

The range of colours is impressive: from blues ('Blue Ensign') and reds ('Redstart') to white ('Sissinghurst White'), plus one with striped blooms ('Barfield Pink'). But following on from the flowers, the rough and raspy foliage varies from almost round ('Victorian Brooch') to long and slender ('Silver Bouquet'), sometimes entirely green (*P. angustifolia*), occasionally completely silver ('Cotton Cool'), rarely variegated ('David Ward') but usually dark green and spotted in silver ('Trevi Fountain').

The low mounds of overlapping foliage are ideal at the front of shady borders, in ground-covering groups around shrubs, and their early flowers weave happily into a spring tapestry. What's more, they're generally rabbit and deer resistant. Convinced? I thought so.

● **Position** Best in dappled or partial shade in fertile soil that's never waterlogged, some will take more sun if the soil doesn't dry out. Most are good on clay and they thrive where other plants often struggle.

● **Care** Deadhead regularly to encourage vigour. Cut back all the old foliage in autumn, then mulch. Leave to mature into substantial clumps. Warning: if you dig up a clump and move it, roots left behind will usually regrow. Prune to two buds after flowering.

● **Where to buy** Beth Chatto, bethchatto.co.uk, 01206 822007; Claire Austin Hardy Plants, claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk, 01686 670342; Macplants, macplants.co.uk, 01875 341179.

PLANT DIRECTORY Find lots of other beautiful plants that are at their best in March by using our plant finder at gardenersworld.com/plant-finder/mar

Pulmonarias

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	In flower										
				Foliage colour							
					Water in long, dry spells				Divide plants		
										Mulch	

Pulmonaria 'Lewis Palmer'

Large, dark-blue flowers with violet tinges are followed by long, narrow, dark-green leaves spotted in white. **Flowers Mar-Apr H x S 30-35cm**





***P. officinalis* 'Blue Mist'**
Unusually large, pale-blue flowers are followed by foliage spotted in greenish white. **Flowers** Mar-May
H x S 30-35cm.



P. rubra
Bold, fresh-green clumps of unspotted leaves follow coral-red flowers. 'Redstart' is substantial. **Flowers** Feb-Apr **H x S** 35-45cm.



***P. saccharata* 'Dora Bielefeld'**
Has lightly spotted foliage, and the large, clear-pink flowers opening from coral-pink buds are impressive. **Flowers** Mar-May **H x S** 25-30cm



P. angustifolia
Vivid-blue flowers are followed by elliptical, plain-green leaves that die away almost entirely for the winter. **Flowers** Mar-May **H x S** 25-30cm

MORE GREAT PERENNIAL BORDER STARS



Gaillardia 'Snappy'

The red and yellow blooms take on a purple sheen in the summer sunshine. Flowers June-Sept.

H x S 30cm x 30cm

5 plugs £8.99

10 plugs £14.99 SAVE £2.99



Scabious 'Kudos Purple'

A cottage-garden favourite, these also work well in patio containers. Flowers July-Sept.

H x S 45cm x 30cm

5 plugs £9.99

10 plugs £14.99 SAVE £4.99



Peony 'Candy Stripe'

A modern twist with the unique flower marbling and a strong fruity fragrance. Flowers May-June.

H x S 90cm x 90cm

1 bare root £14.99

2 bare roots £19.99 SAVE £9.99



Anemone x hybrida 'Queen Charlotte'

Masses of large, pink blooms from Aug-Oct set on tall, wiry stems.

H x S 150cm x 60cm

1 jumbo plug £9.99

3 jumbo plugs £19.99 SAVE £9.98



Helianthemum 'Peachy Keen'

These tough little evergreen rock roses are hardy, drought tolerant and trouble free. Flowers May-July.

H x S 20cm x 30cm

5 plugs £14.99

10 plugs £19.99 SAVE £9.99



Gaura lindheimeri 'Sparkle White'

Free-flowering from June-Oct with a flurry of dazzling white blooms.

H x S 45cm x 45cm

24 plugs £9.99

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The Full Monty

Money can buy many things, but rarely a garden that is personal to you, says **Monty**



I can't imagine that I would ever design a show garden. Apart from not needing the grief (I've yet to meet a Chelsea garden designer who isn't completely exhausted by the experience), I've no desire to compete and don't want to advertise for work designing gardens for other people. Gardening for me is personal. I can only really engage by thinking about what I want to do in my space and how I might go about doing it with my own hands. The only gardens I've ever truly loved are my own.

The more personal a garden can be, the better it will become. When helping people on *Big Dreams Small Spaces*, the most important part I can play is to get them to abandon all the received ideas of what a garden should look like, and think as personally about themselves and what they want from their garden. It's surprising how often people don't really think that through, but instead have an image taken from the telly, a show garden or a magazine that they superimpose onto the space outside their back door. But beneath the brambles, building rubble and uncut grass is something much more interesting that is an extension of you and your family. Then the process of making that a reality is straightforward, give or take weeks of blood, tears, toil and sweat.

But there is a factor in gardens made for 'clients', let alone a Chelsea show garden, that most of us never have to worry about: money, in vast amounts that most of us can only dream about. I've had glimpses of the way the super-rich spend their money – on gardens and more – and it is fascinating, intoxicating and slightly repulsive.

Money does two things in a garden. The first is to buy you time. Money gets things done when you want, not when cash flow or nature permits. With enough money, you can treat making a garden in the same way as building a house: as a planned, highly disciplined operation that focuses on a delivery date. The more money you have, the closer to some kind of finished state you can buy. Money also buys you size. Fully grown trees can be craned into position, and huge rocks can be bought in by the lorry load and assembled like Lego. Avenues appear overnight. Topiary doesn't grow for the very rich but arrives fully formed.

Hedges can be bought and planted already clipped to their full height. And you can have as much of it as space permits, so you can fully indulge in the careless but devastatingly effective joys of repetition on a grand scale.

Not many of us get to walk round the private gardens of the very rich, but part of the fun of the large Chelsea show gardens is to guess at how much they cost and to marvel at the sheer size of the trees, topiary, water features and more. A few weeks ago, I visited a tree nursery in Greece with a friend who was looking for a couple of trees for her small garden on a Greek island and was staggered by the sheer quantity of giant trees for sale. Vast olives with rootballs so large you'd need a police escort for any lorry big enough to transport them, fully grown citrus and row upon row of 40ft-high cypresses. All you had to do was to point and say, "I want that one", and it could be delivered and planted in days.

How intoxicating it would be if your bank balance was fathoms deep. The temptation to go mad with cranes, excavators and

“Gardens need to evolve slowly to become themselves so that they are true to you”

teams of skilled workers happy to satisfy every horticultural whim would be great. But it would be like staying at a fancy hotel. Exhilarating for a few days, but you wouldn't want to live like that.

Trees are best planted when they are small enough to be picked up by hand. Gardens need to evolve slowly to become themselves so that they are true to you and their surroundings. Money only buys you so much: the biggest house in the land and a superb garden created by the best designers and assembled in an astonishingly short time. Put like that, it doesn't sound like such a bad deal. But it can't buy you a home and it can't make your own garden personal to you. Those are the only gardens that have true value.

Monty

Monty on TV

Gardeners' World

Monty returns with the *Gardeners' World* team on Friday, 10 March at 8.30pm.





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The bees' needs

Please be careful with your headings. In *Clippings* (February issue) you ran the article 'Brexit means bee-exit?' This could lead people to think that we should stay in the EU to protect our bees. I appreciate that the excessive use of pesticides can be harmful to pollinators, but I am concerned that your headline, together with some of the article's content and final remarks, add weight to some people's argument that we should remain in the EU. The article clearly casts doubt on our Government's ability to make decisions that are in the best interests of UK farmers, gardeners and bees.

Peter Spiers, Staffordshire

It is essential to keep the current ban on neonicotinoid pesticides, for the sake of future generations and crop fertilisation. Let's not dilute food standards any further, which would be detrimental to ecology.

Adrienne Sainsbury, by email

We say We contacted Defra for its comments on what leaving the EU would mean for pesticide use in the UK, but have not received a reply at the time of going to press.



Not a bad apple?

I was surprised to see the statement in *The Full Monty* (February issue): 'the single most important plant in the Garden of Eden: the apple.' If Eden was located around Mesopotamia, then an apple tree would be most unlikely. In all translations of the Bible I've read, it simply says fruit.

Vince Henderson (retired RE teacher), by email

Are we a nation divided over foxes?

Hedgehogs have been voted Britain's most popular UK mammal but it may surprise many to

martens and even bottlenose dolphins, so we must have more than a soft spot for the wily creatures. The shortage of



Foxes may be cute, but they can be destructive too

Out-foxing their critics

In the February issue you ask: 'Are we a nation divided over foxes?' Well, I certainly am – while I enjoy the occasional sight of foxes in my garden, I am not so happy when they howl in the early hours of the morning. However, my dogs love chasing them around the garden.

Christopher Coward, by email

Foxes have visited our garden for many years, but usually never more than one at a time, so we were excited to see two playing together. However, my attitude changed when I discovered overturned pots and broken ornaments – obviously a good night! I thought I would stop encouraging them with food, as they had definitely slipped down my 'favourite wild animal list'!

However, I really missed the simple pleasure of seeing these beautiful animals, so with the arrival of cold weather I began feeding them again. I secured my pots in readiness and hope the visitors don't disgrace themselves too much, so they can go back to the top of my wildlife popularity list.

Valerie Wallace, South Yorkshire

The fox is certainly not my favourite mammal, and I try to discourage them from our garden. But when a den was dug under our shed, the sight of the mummy fox with her six cubs feeding, while daddy fox stood guard, is a wonderful memory I shall never forget!

Pauline Prismall, Wallington

Help a hedgehog

We were sorry to see that fewer readers had reported hedgehog sightings this year (February issue), but sadly not surprised. Ensuring hedgehogs have easy access to gardens is really important, and gardeners can do a lot to help.

First, create a hedgehog highway by cutting a hole at the bottom of your fences to allow hedgehogs in and out. Always check for hedgehogs before lighting bonfires, forking into compost heaps or using strimmers and mowers. Also, try to avoid using pesticides and poisons to protect the food chain, which is



Leave out meat-based dog or cat food, or unsalted chopped peanuts

vital for their survival. Hedgehog Awareness Week takes place from 30 April to 6 May – find out more at britishhedgehogs.org.uk.

Fay Vass, British Hedgehog Preservation Society, Shropshire



Flying in the face of fashion

I'm glad Alan is sitting on the fence in *Tales from Titchmarsh* (February issue). I have never been one to follow trends, especially in the garden. It's my garden and if anyone told me to ditch my hanging baskets or send them to the local pub, I would turn the air as blue as my trailing lobelia, which I can never resist even though I'm sure they're not in fashion!

Sylvia Monk, Bishop's Stortford

I've been gardening on the east coast of Scotland for nearly 30 years, and I've learnt a lot from Alan. But I have to disagree with his disdain for lime-green heucheras (*Tales*, February issue). We have very long winters, so I am very grateful for the many beautiful evergreen heucheras. They're especially useful in shade, and the lime ones are not only the brightest, but also some of the hardiest varieties.

Karen Fraser, Dundee



Lime heucheras add valuable and vibrant year-round colour



Which crops can I grow in a mixed flower bed?

● Try to find a copy of Geoff Hamilton's *The Ornamental Kitchen Garden*. I've seen ruby chard, 'Cavolo Nero' and red onions grown with the 'Bishop of Llandaff' dahlia at Arboretum Kalmthout. Also, fennel, purple sprouting broccoli and cut-and-come-again salads.

Obelixx

● Blueberry bushes! Just dug a trench for mine in the middle of a border with ericaceous compost.

Mattwestyorks

● A couple I've grown as ornamentals are chard and kale.

punkdoc

● I used to grow mangetout in borders. They don't take up much room with a little tripod of canes to grow up and the flowers are similar to sweet peas.

Fairygirl

● I've grown broad beans among wallflowers in a cottage-style front garden. Passersby would stop and ask what the pretty black and white flowers were. And the bees that came to the wallflowers pollinated the beans.

Dovefromabove

● I've made a border of thyme plants, which are very easy to grow. They're very attractive in a border.

Pat E

GARDENERSWORLD.COM/FORUM features lots of lively debate, with readers asking questions and offering advice. To join this thread go to gardenersworld.com/edible-flower-bed

Over the fence



Ivy: is this garden regular a friend or foe?



Toby Beasley and Chris Baines debate if this robust plant is a damaging bully or a wildlife essential

Ivy might look attractive growing on the wall of your house, and a study of ivy growing on buildings conducted by English Heritage suggested it doesn't cause harm to sound masonry. And that's the point: masonry has to be sound or it can lead to problems. The vigorous roots that grow from ivy stems will exploit any weakness they find; once they start growing behind mortar it will soon be pushed out. It's a constant battle to keep ivy out of gutters, drainpipes and roof tiles and it must be kept from painted surfaces as it will pull off paint very easily.

“Once ivy has covered something it makes any work extra difficult”

Also, think twice before growing it up trees. After the next winter storm, check to see which trees get blown over. I'll bet the uprooted ones will have an ivy 'sail' where it has grown extensively in the crown. This bulk will catch the wind far more effectively than the tree's own branches, and can cause a tree to topple over. Ivy can disfigure plants if it's allowed to smother them, especially conifers, where the ivy leaves can shade out any new growth.

Ivy's dense foliage can also hide things – from attractive coloured bark to rotting fungi on an oak tree, or one of those 'snail cities' that always seem to lurk somewhere under ivy leaves. Once ivy has covered something, it makes any work extra difficult. My rotten, ivy-clad garden fence (no doubt rotten because the ivy held moisture for longer) was a nightmare to replace: the ivy had not only covered it but also rooted where it touched the ground.

Ivy has its uses, but it's also hard work to keep looking good and comes with a host of issues – do you really want it in your garden?

Toby Beasley is Head Gardener at Osborne, the former home of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert

A few years ago, in this magazine's review of leading gardeners' favourite plants, I chose English ivy.

Horticultural heresy? I don't think so!

On a sunny afternoon in late autumn you can *hear* the ivy in my garden. The glistening nectar on the jewel-like flower heads is a magnet to any bees, wasps, hoverflies and other pollinators in the area, and the plant comes alive with their busy buzzing. This late supply of sugary energy also helps to secure survival for overwintering butterflies, such as peacocks, red admirals and small tortoiseshells, and many of them will choose to hibernate in recesses of mature ivy. One of the great camouflage 'tricks' of British wildlife is the disappearing act that torpid brimstone butterflies perform when they hang in the ivy imitating its dead leaves. The holly blue butterfly depends on ivy even more directly, as alternate generations of females lay their eggs in its flowers.

The plant's very late flowering produces a fruit crop that ripens later than all our other native trees and shrubs. In a harsh winter, when the birds have stripped hawthorn, rowan and other fruits,

English ivy berries will be reaching perfection. They provide a valuable source of food for redwings, wood pigeons, fieldfares, blackbirds and song thrushes.

As a tough evergreen, ivy offers very effective shelter all year round. Wrens, robins and blackbirds build their nests there. Bats roost there and all manner of helpful insects, spiders and other creatures hide there. A fence or wall clothed in English ivy is as comprehensive a wildlife resource as you can fit in a garden.

Chris Baines is an independent environmentalist and author of *RHS Companion to Wildlife Gardening*

“On a sunny afternoon you can *hear* the ivy in my garden”

HAVE YOUR SAY Do you think ivy should roam free in our gardens due to its benefits to wildlife or is it a bothersome, invasive thug? Write in and tell us at the address on p17

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Clippings

Our monthly pick of the latest gardening news and views



Bumblebees benefit from community grant

Funding winners

A shared allotment scheme in Essex, and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust's Pollinating The Peak project in Derbyshire, are two of nearly 400 projects nationwide to have won a grant from the Aviva Community Fund. Other winners included the Brogdale National Fruit Collection, along with Inch Park in Brechin where a wildlife trail will be created in one of Scotland's most deprived areas. Grants of between £1,000 and £25,000 were made by the insurance giant for the environmental projects. Could your local project benefit from a cash injection? For more information on how to apply for the 2017 awards go to community-fund.aviva.co.uk

Gardeners' World back on our screens

As **GW TV** returns to BBC2 on 10 March, Executive Producer, Paolo Proto, reveals what's in store for the year ahead: "2017 is going to be a really exciting year for the *Gardeners' World* and all of us in the production team are looking forward to sharing it with viewers. We'll be producing more than 20 hour-long shows,

plus we will celebrate our 50th year in production.

"All the usual faces will be returning to the series – Monty, Carol, Joe and Rachel – along with new presenters who joined last year, including Adam Frost, Frances Tophill, Flo Headlam, Nick Bailey and Mark Lane.

"There are some great events to look forward to

over the year, particularly BBC Gardener's World Live, which will be hosting our 50th anniversary celebrations, plus we'll be covering the new RHS Chatsworth Flower Show. We also have a whole host of new strands, which we're busily researching now, as well as some dramatic developments at Longmeadow!"



News in brief



● Posh plants

Victoria Beckham wooed David with an aloe vera, offering it as a salve for his sunburn on one of their first dates. David mentioned the moment as a special guest on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*.

● In Alan we Trust

Check out Alan Titchmarsh's new TV series *Secrets of the National Trust*, where he explores the stories behind the Trust's properties and gardens. Tuesdays, Channel 5 at 7pm – 1-hour episodes, until 14 March.

● On your bike

The National Cycle Network (NCN) is looking for volunteers to help manage its habitats and run wildlife events on its cycle paths. To find projects in your area visit sustrans.org.uk/volunteer

● Queen of herbs

Jekka McVicar will design the first ever permanent garden at RHS Malvern Spring Festival. The garden will focus on the importance gardening has on our health and wellbeing. Opens 11 May, Three Counties Showground.

● Marvelous magnolias

RHS expert, Jim Gardiner, will share his expertise on magnolias at a talk and tour at Borde Hill Garden, West Sussex on 5 April. Tickets from £25. See bordehill.co.uk



Sightings of bluetits tumbled last year – why?

Is rain to blame for blue tit scarcity?

Blue tit numbers are at a 13-year low, according to figures from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). In December, BTO Garden BirdWatchers reported the lowest numbers of blue tits spotted in gardens since 2003 – last year's damp spring and wet summer could be to blame.

Usually, during winter, the lack of food available in the wild, brings adult and juvenile blue tits into gardens to use bird feeders. But low sightings indicate that the wet weather during the breeding

season, particularly in June, could have made it difficult for adults to feed themselves and their chicks, thus fewer young birds survived than usual last year.

Claire Boothby, Garden BirdWatch Ambassador says, "We'll be waiting to see how blue tits fare this winter. We would welcome information from birdwatchers about what is happening in their gardens." To find out how to help the BTO monitor blue tits and other garden birds in 2017, visit www.bto.org/gbw

Clippings



Chickens to be prison regulars

Unlocking gardening's potential

Prisoners at HMP

Wandsworth will soon be involved in 'greening up' areas of the London jail in a Gardening Against the Odds project called Unlocking Nature. Run by The Conservation Foundation, activities such as growing vegetables and keeping chickens and bees will aid offenders' rehabilitation and help them gain useful gardening and farming qualifications. "Unlocking Nature shows how practical gardening activities really can make a difference to minds, spirits and life opportunities," said David Shreeve, director of the Foundation. "There is a huge amount of enthusiasm to make it happen and we believe it is a challenge well worth undertaking."

Visit Italy with Monty

Don't miss your chance to book a place on our exclusive tour to the gardens of the Italian Lakes. Monty Don and BBC *Gardeners' World* Magazine Editor, Lucy Hall, will join the tour as you enjoy fine Italian food and luxury accommodation. The trip runs 24-28 April, from £1,995 pp. See the full itinerary at gardenersworld.com/monty-italy or call 01334 657155.

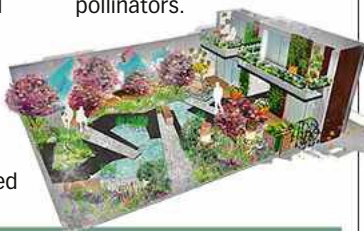


The stunning gardens of Villa Balbianello, on Lake Como

Crazy paving revival

Crazy paving will make a comeback at RHS Chelsea this year in Nigel Dunnett's Greening Grey Britain Garden. The creator of the wildflower meadows at London 2012's Olympic Park, says affordability is at the forefront of his design for the world's most elite horticultural event, and he aims to "provide ideas for people that they can try at home or in a community garden." Planning to use recycled

municipal slabs, with no concreting in between, he describes his exhibition garden as a "sponge garden" that will allow rain water to soak away, which is particularly relevant as flooding is on the increase in the UK. The planting is designed to support pollinators.



Our pick of garden kneelers at £20 or less



National Trust Berrington Floral Vine Kneeler

Stylish, yet practical and comfy to use. **£20, shop. nationaltrust.org.uk**



William Morris Honeysuckle Kneeler

This beautifully designed, extra-large cushion has thick foam padding. **£19.99, briersltd.co.uk**



Kneelo Kneeler, in Moss

A lightweight but generously sized kneeler with memory foam technology. **£14.99, burgonandball.com**

Pottery designer Emma Bridgewater talks sweetpeas



Garden talk

This year sees British pottery designer, and passionate gardener, Emma Bridgewater team up with Unwins to create a limited edition sweet pea vase. We discover why the fragrant blooms are her must-grow flowers.

What's your favourite sweet pea and why?

I would say 'Cupani' - it's related to the wild one that grows in Sicily in the spring and although its short stalks make picking quite a long job, it smells by far the most delicious.

What sweet pea would you suggest for people who want long stems?

'Castle of Mey', a creamy white variety, and 'Memories', which has deep purple/pink flowers, are both beautiful long-stemmed sweet peas and make a great contrast when paired together.

What's your secret to success when growing sweet peas?

Sow by November for the 'earlies' and as late as 1 May to keep the blooms coming until

September. And be brutal when pinching out the shoots.

What are your three golden rules for growing cut flowers?

First, grow zinnias. Secondly, thin your plants out properly, the more room they have got to breathe the better the flowers. And last, grow more than you think you need, no one ever said 'that's too many flowers'.

Do you have a garden shed - and what do you use it for?

Yes, I have one. It's stacked high with pots, canes and mouse traps (vital for keeping mice off sweet-pea seeds) and of course for hiding in.

From 1 March, Emma's vase (worth £14.99) is free to the first 1,000 gardeners who buy three packets of seed from the new Unwins Sensational Sweet Peas range. Claim online at unwins.co.uk/emma-bridgewater. You will need to pay £4.99 postage and provide proof of purchase to qualify.



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- A) Thermometer**
- B) Propagator**
- C) Rotovator**

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Terms & Conditions: Promoter Immediate Media Company London Ltd. † Value of total prize fund split as 1st Prize: Rhino Premium 8x12, including accessories & installation, worth £4,400; 2nd Prize: Rhino Premium 6x8, including accessories & installation, worth £3,100. *Winner is responsible for providing a suitably prepared area for installation. This can be a firm, level, compacted soil area or alternatively a prepared cement base. Both options are the winner's responsibility. Closing date for entry is midday, 23 April 2017. All correct entries shall be entered into a draw and the winner will be selected at random. Winners will be notified within 14 days of competition close. If the winner cannot be contacted or does not respond within 15 business days of receiving email notification, if the notification is returned or is undelivered, such potential winner forfeits all rights to any prize and an alternative winner will be selected. Your competition prize is subject to availability. No cash alternative, non-transferable and no alternate prize will be offered. Not for resale. Only one entry per person. Delivery to a UK address. This competition is open to all residents of the UK, 18 years or older. Employees of Immediate Media Co or Greenhouses Direct, their families or anyone else connected with this competition will not be eligible. Bulk entries, or entries sent through trade, consumer groups, agents or third parties will not be accepted. Promotion is subject to the laws of England. Full terms and conditions apply, see gardenersworld.com/rhino

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From small beginnings

A man with dark hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and dark blue trousers with suspenders, is standing in a garden. He is reaching up to harvest purple pea pods from a large, leafy bush. A wooden basket sits on the ground next to him. The garden is filled with various plants, including large green leaves and yellow flowers. A wicker fence is visible in the background.

*"Millions of seeds will soon
be growing to delight
gardeners across the land"*



Every seed holds the exciting promise of future abundance

Monty Don shares his tips for turning a few seeds into a garden bursting with life.

Photos by Marsha Arnold

Right across the country, envelopes crammed with seed packets are tumbling through letterboxes, while visitors to garden centres are riffling through racks of seeds. Some will no doubt buy packets that they'll never open and others will sow in expectation, then fail before germination. But millions of seeds will soon be growing to delight gardeners across the length and breadth of the land. This is seed sowing time.

On one level, it's the simplest horticultural recipe there is. Take a seed and place it in or on a growing medium of some kind, add water and heat, and a brand new plant magically appears. Simple.

In practice, there are many variations and refinements on this. I also know that for many people eager to grow as much as possible from seed, but not perhaps wholly confident with the whole business, there is a sense they could or should be doing it better or differently. Let's start with the first and most important rule of all horticulture: if it works, then you are doing it right. (The second being if you are not enjoying it, then you are doing it wrong.) Yet I have found from my own experience over the years that there are several factors that will improve the chances of success with all kinds of seeds – and understanding this ensures a better return on your investment in the seeds themselves. While it is certainly the cheapest way, by miles, of stocking your garden with the widest possible range of plants, a year's supply of seeds can still add up to a sizeable sum. So you want as many as possible to grow well from the very start.

Begin with the seeds as they arrive. Once you have been through them, laid them all out on a table, made a note of what you have, a spreadsheet or whatever it is that you do,

A good start in spring means Monty enjoys plentiful harvests all summer



Monty's potting bench keeps compost, seed trays, sieves and labels in easy reach

store them somewhere cool and dry. If in doubt, you cannot go wrong by keeping seeds in the fridge.

Then you need to decide which growing medium is best for you. This is as simple or complex as you want it to be. The easiest solution is soil, and when I was growing up everyone always made their own seed compost, usually from loam (ideally from turves left to rot down in a stack, or from molehills) mixed with leaf mould, garden compost and some sand or grit. I know one commercial biodynamic vegetable grower who still very successfully grows all his seeds in compost made from a 50:50 mix of molehill soil and well-rotted manure.

But most of you reading this will go and buy a bag of general-purpose compost from a garden centre – and, by and large, that will serve very well. The one caveat I would

urge is that you avoid peat. There is no good reason to ever use peat and plenty of reasons not to – the main one being that its harvesting involves the destruction and degradation of rare and effectively irreplaceable wildlife habitats, not to mention the amount of carbon released and therefore contribution to climate change. Just avoid it. I have used bark-based general-purpose composts for years and they are excellent.

Key ingredients

I always customise my composts a little. There is no magic formula. Nothing is weighed or accurately measured. Judging only by sight, for the seed mix I typically combine coir, vermiculite, sieved garden compost and garden loam. The latter two ingredients are as much to add bacterial and fungal life to the mix as anything else.

This means that the emerging seedlings start to build a symbiotic relationship with the particular micro-organisms of Longmeadow soil from the very beginning. This seems to dramatically improve their growth and health when they are eventually planted out into the garden. The one thing I am not trying to do is provide much nutrition. I want the seedlings to grow steadily but not too fast, especially at this time of year when the light levels are still low.

From the moment of germination, strong and steady growth is what I am looking for to establish robust mature plants. I also plan to prick out seedlings well before they have exhausted the available nutrients in their seed compost.

Of course, seeds sown direct into the garden need none of this tarraffiddle. You just

Vermiculite lets in light and air, making it ideal for seeds that need daylight to germinate



Broad beans and peas need the long root run of tall modules or pots



Monty's basic sowing method



1 Fill the seed tray with your compost mix, and firm down gently. Then scatter seeds thinly and evenly across the surface.



2 Cover with a thin layer of sieved compost, unless the seeds need full light to germinate. This also helps to hold them in place.



3 Sit the seed tray in water for half an hour. This ensures the compost is soaked thoroughly without dislodging the seeds.

sow and they just grow. But very few seeds, other than perhaps broad beans, are worth sowing direct until the soil warms up – and that can mean waiting until late April or even May on cold, heavy soils.

Having mixed up my seed compost, I sieve it to remove any especially large bits of bark or fibre (these sievings get added to my potting mix, which is similar but uses grit instead of vermiculite, while the coir is replaced by garden compost – see p32).

Sowing tips

I tend to sow into seed trays rather than modular trays. I very rarely sow directly into pots unless the seeds are especially robust or large, such as sweet peas and climbing beans. Seed trays are easy to handle and sowing into them is very quick. However, success does depend on

My aim is to produce strong seedlings able to withstand all the affronts that the garden will accost them with

pricking out the seedlings as soon as they are large enough to handle.

Larger, heavier seeds such as beetroot or French beans are best sown into modules or small pots, as these will then be transplanted directly into the garden. Occasionally I sow in clusters in modules – this works well for beetroot, rocket or other leafy greens – and only thin each cluster lightly, transplanting them outside in small clumps rather than as individual plants. But on the whole my aim from the outset is to produce strong individual seedlings that are

able to withstand all the affronts that life in the garden will accost them with.

I always sow thinly, with as even a spread as possible, trying to resist the temptation to scatter the last few pinches of seed just because they are there. I then cover most seeds with a finely sieved layer of compost or a sprinkling of vermiculite. This protects them from being moved by watering, and the compost provides the dark that many seeds need for germination. Some seeds, including celery, achilleas, petunias and tobacco plants, need light for germination so should be left uncovered (although often enough light will penetrate a fine layer of vermiculite). Others, such as phlox, veronica and calendula, need darkness.

If the compost mix is at all dry (compost used straight from a sack is often very damp, but it dries out fast on the potting shed

bench) I stand the seed tray in shallow water for about 10 minutes to dampen the compost. It will then not need watering from above for a few days. This is especially useful for those seeds placed on the surface, so they are not all pushed to the edge of the seed tray by the spray from the watering can. Otherwise I place them on a heated bench, water them and leave them to germinate.

Watering is something you have to judge on a daily basis. I inspect all seed trays at least twice a day. As spring progresses, the greenhouse can become much warmer than the outside air and they may well need watering twice a day. But too much wet can rot seeds before they germinate or lead to fungal problems, such as damping off. If in doubt, more harm is usually done by overwatering than holding back for 12 hours.

I strongly recommend using a heat mat, as these greatly increase the speed and rate at which most seeds germinate at this time of year. They provide gentle heat at the roots and although they need a power supply, they are not expensive and last for years. They work best in a greenhouse or conservatory, but a well-lit porch or wide windowsill is viable too. If you do not have any of these, then consider making or buying a cold frame. These are old fashioned but brilliant, both for germinating seeds and raising seedlings, as well as for storing plants over winter. I cannot imagine gardening without them.

I like to take seed trays off the heated mat as soon as the majority of seeds have germinated. This creates space for a fresh batch of seeds, while the emerging seedlings go on to another area within the greenhouse where they are slightly less mollycoddled. If I have sown too thickly – and, even now, I still do – I thin cheap and cheerful plants like lettuces, nicotiana or celery simply by plucking clumps of tiny seedlings to stop overcrowding. It also improves ventilation.

As soon as the seedlings have a true leaf and are large enough to handle, I prick them out, either into plugs or more widely spaced in another seed tray. They are then placed in a cold frame as part of their progress to the harsh world outside. But that is another part of the story. □

Monty on screen

The new series begins...

Catch up with Monty in his garden at Longmeadow in the first *Gardeners' World* programme of the year, at 8.30pm on Friday 10 March, on BBC2.

You can watch more of Monty at a time that suits you at gardenersworld.com/monty-don where you'll find lots of practical video clips from the programme.



Monty's compost mixes help to produce robust young plants that are raring to go

Monty's compost mix recipes

Gardeners spend a lot of money buying multi-purpose compost, but it's not the best option for sowing. Seeds need little nutrition but must have good drainage and aeration. Loam is a great compost ingredient. It's a type of soil that combines sand, silt and clay in even ratios, making it a useful

medium for plant growing, with good water- and nutrient-holding capacity. You may be lucky enough to have loamy soil in your garden. Otherwise, buy topsoil in bags. In your potting mix, adjust the grit according to the water and nutrient needs of the plants being potted on.

Seed mix

1 part
coir or leaf mould

1 part
bark-based compost

1 part
vermiculite or grit

1 part
loam and sieved
homemade compost

Potting-on mix

1 part
garden compost

1 part
leaf mould

1 part
bark-based compost

1 part
grit

½ part loam

NEXT MONTH Monty shares his complete growing guide to the best tomatoes

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Shortlisted

Your insider guide to Longmeadow

Get a sneak preview of the new TV series as Monty reveals plans for the year ahead

Change in any garden is inevitable, even if at times it is accidental. But in 2016 we made some deliberate additions to Longmeadow – a garden now 25 years old – as part of its accumulating story. More are to come, and while some changes are forced upon us, I welcome them.



NEW FRUIT GARDEN

I am planning to create a brand new soft fruit garden within the apple orchard, to be planted this spring. The soft fruit is scattered round the garden so our aim is to make the orchard an even more fruity place. I also intend to add topiary and more roses under the apples.



TALL GREENHOUSE

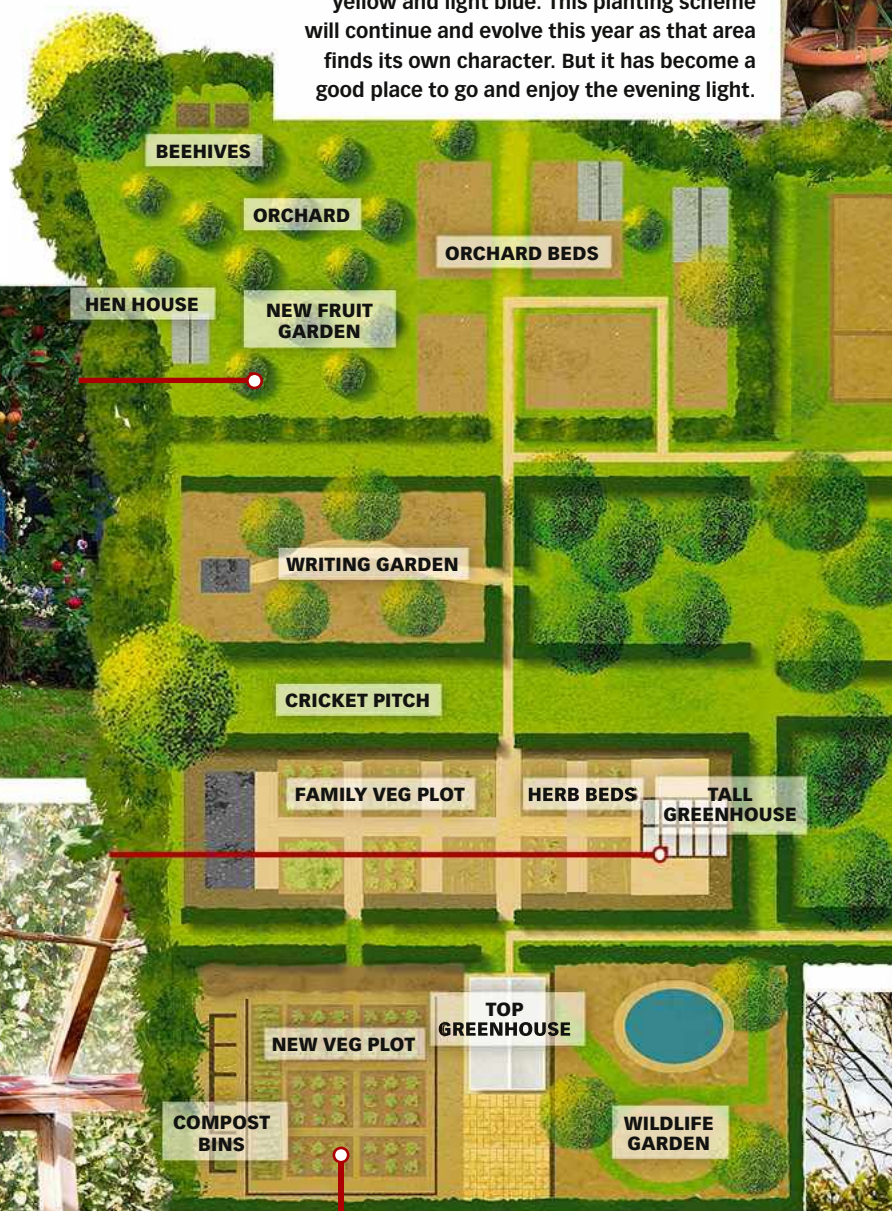
The 'Black Hamburg' grapevine, planted in 2014, is taking real shape, after two winters of careful pruning. After losing our grapes to wasp and bird attack in 2015, the Waspinator deterrent (right) kept most at bay – so this year's crop should be even better!



NEW VEG PLOT

The biggest addition in 2016 was a completely new veg garden where we used to have nursery beds and soft fruit. It meant creating six new beds, edged with low fences of woven hazel. This has expanded the range of veg we can grow and the quantity of favourite crops.

MOUND
The mound was transformed by the erection of a simple 8ft wooden cube on its summit, enclosing a paved seating area. We planted it up last year with a theme of fragrant flowers and a restricted colour palette of white, pale yellow and light blue. This planting scheme will continue and evolve this year as that area finds its own character. But it has become a good place to go and enjoy the evening light.

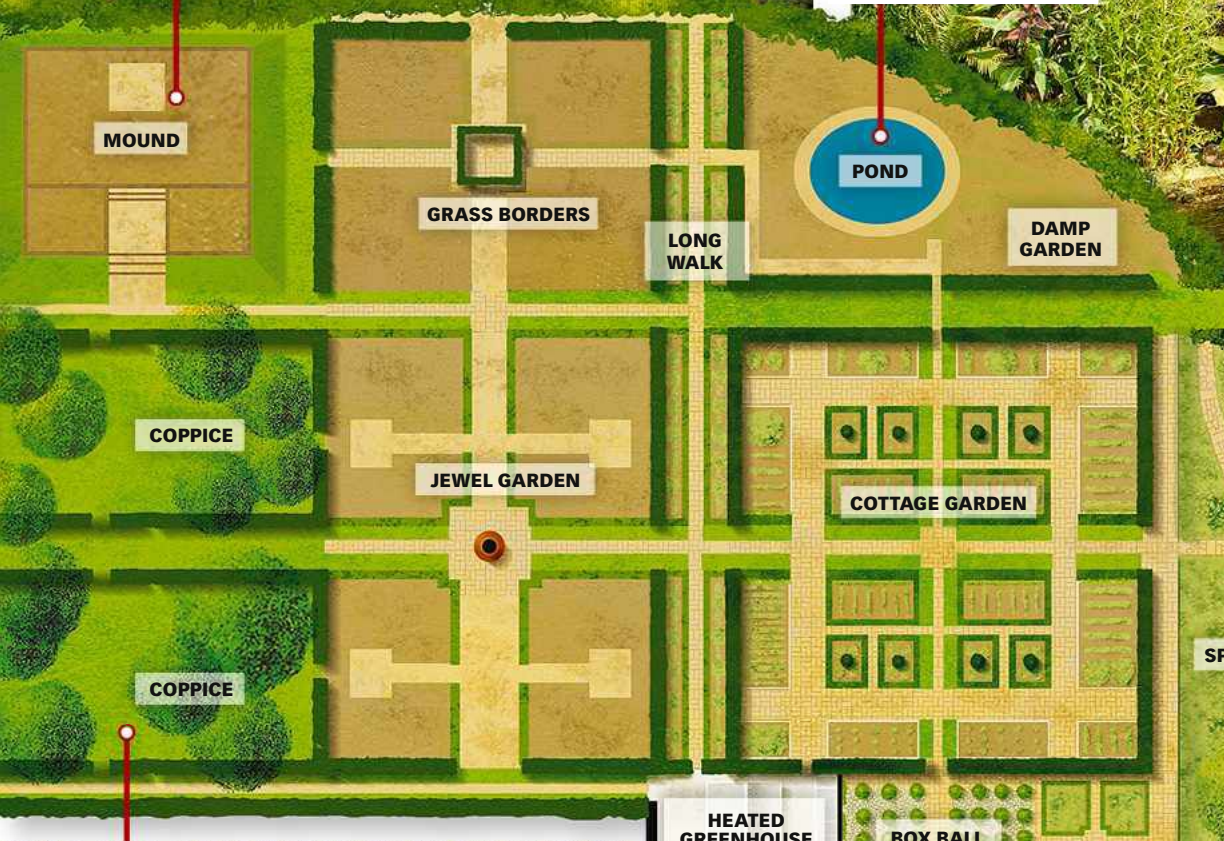


COPPICE
By the time you read this, I hope we will have done some major tree surgery and complete tree removal in the coppice. This will let more light into the Jewel Garden and improve the airflow to counter the growing fungal problems seen in the garden, not only in our box plants. Losing any tree is always sad but change is essential – and it will give us lots of logs for next winter.



POND

In its fifth year, the pond is in vibrant health, with marginals bursting their pots and clear water disappearing under spreading leaves. Cutting back from around the rim will reveal the water again.



BOX BALL YARD

The biggest project for 2017 is the removal of the blighted box balls and herb beds to make a brand new herb garden in that space. There will also be a new sitting, cooking and eating area bounded by pleached limes. Watch this space!



HEATED GREENHOUSE

POTTING SHED

POTTING UP AREA

This space, between the pottling shed and heated greenhouse, has become a display area as much as a working place. A large table is the centrepiece, hosting an ever-changing medley of jewel-like colours in a mix of small terracotta pots.





JEWEL GARDEN

2017 will see quite a lot of drastic pruning in the Jewel Garden, including coppicing the purple hazels in the four main beds. We'll also be dividing plants, removing any old, tired ones and adding others. All this is in order to maintain the true spirit and energy of this key part of the garden.



COTTAGE GARDEN

The Cottage Garden has been planted with three or four times the usual number of tulips for 2017 and we have many more tulips in pots. So look out for a really spectacular spring display around the garden.



MONTY'S CO-PRESENTERS

Nellie, a golden retriever, came bounding in front of the cameras in spring 2016. To Nigel's hero, she is the naughty one and has taken to life on camera like an old pro.



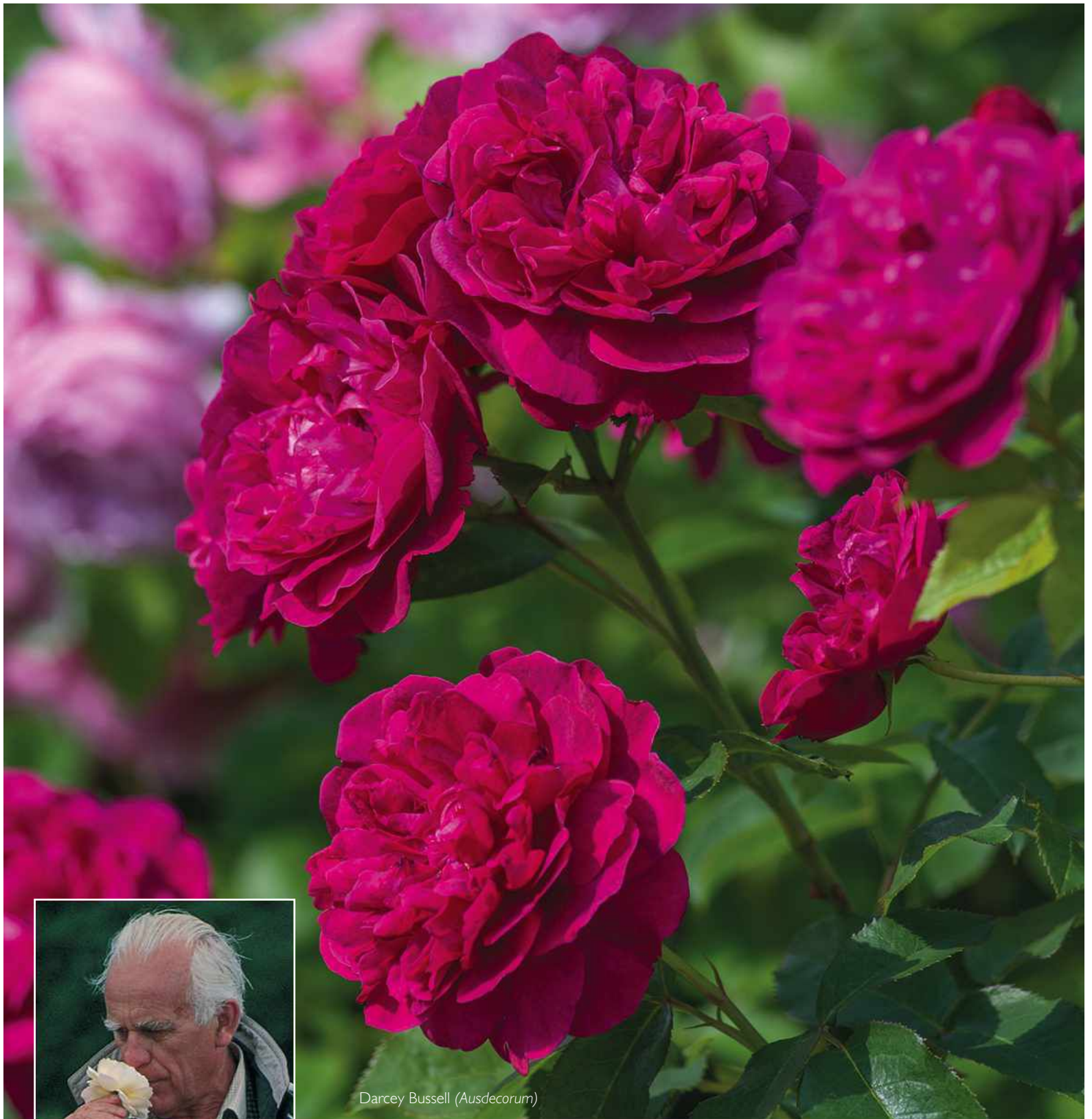
ORCHARD BEDS

The 30 or so species roses planted into these relatively new beds remained modest through the year but should really take off in 2017. The display of foxgloves in these beds was one of the best things in the garden all year.

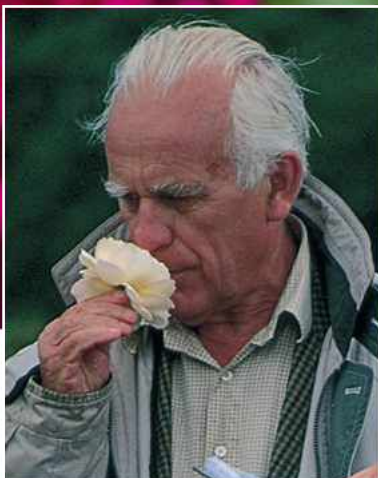
Monty on TV

Gardeners' World returns to the small screen on Friday 10 March, at 8.30pm. Catch up on clips from last year's series at bit.ly/GW-clips





Darcey Bussell (*Ausdecorum*)



David C.H. Austin



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YOUR container YEAR STARTS HERE...

Beautiful pots transform a garden, injecting instant colour and structure to patios, doorsteps and pathways. Now is the perfect time to create yours from scratch, or revive any that aren't looking their best after winter - there's no end of colourful bedding plants, spring bulbs and evergreens on offer to make a winning combination.

There's something for every taste and budget, which means there's nothing to stand in your way as you kickstart your container year. We've suggested four styles of pots to get your creative juices flowing - some are quick fixes while others include elements that will last all year - so use these for inspiration when you venture out to the garden centre.

Boost with bulbs

This container heralds the arrival of spring, with potted bulbs stealing the show. The miniature daffs and grape hyacinths make the perfect colour combo, while the primula adds a bit of height to the back of the display and boosts the yellow. A central evergreen grass softens the whole look, with a layer of moss disguising any compost that's on show.

Other bulb and bedding combos

- Pink miniature tulips with silver senecio
- Deep-purple *Iris reticulata*, ferns and trailing ivy
- Yellow daffs with colour-contrast violas
- White/pale daffs and black ophiopogon



COWSLIP

Native *Primula veris* puts on a hearty show. Keep it in top shape by watering regularly and deadheading blooms as they fade. Move to the garden when over.

MINIATURE DAFFS

A stalwart 'Tête-à-tête' produces several blooms per bulb. Buy bulbs just coming into flower and plant with their necks slightly proud of the compost surface.

WEATHERED TERRACOTTA POT

This 25cm pot has become lighter with age and after being exposed to the elements – it creates a fresh, Mediterranean look.

STURDY GRASS

A robust evergreen, *Festuca glauca* looks good all year and enjoys a sunny spot. Pull out dead foliage annually and repot into new displays as the year progresses.

GRAPE HYACINTH

Break up clumps of muscari bulbs as you plant them, taking care not to disturb the roots too much. The flowerheads will soon straighten as they settle in.

Start with the best



From seedling to flower, our Which? Best Buy Multipurpose Composts offer the perfect conditions for seeds to germinate and grow quickly. Their rich, yet fine blend of grit, sand, green compost and coir means you can be sure you're choosing the best for your garden.

Check out full details of our best on test Wyevale Garden Centres Multipurpose Compost and Multipurpose Compost with John Innes at which.co.uk



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wyevalegardencentres.co.uk

 Wyevale garden centres

VIOLAS

These pretty flowers are also edible, so use them as a surprise addition to salads and puddings. Water and deadhead regularly for the best display.

GARDEN PINKS

Cottage-garden favourites that will brighten any container. Deadhead to encourage more blooms and move to the garden when they finish flowering.

ROSEMARY

A woody herb that does best in a sunny spot. Pick regularly to encourage fresh new growth and to keep the plant compact – delicious with roast lamb.

THYME

Perfect for filling gaps and tumbling over the edge of a pot. It enjoys the sunshine and responds well to picking. Use it to perk up chicken dishes.

STANDARD POT

You can't beat plain terracotta for good value and a classic look. This 25cm pot will weather after a few seasons outside.

Pretty and edible

A pretty combination that mixes culinary herbs with beautiful flowers, some edible – perfect for kitchen pickings and brightening up the back doorstep. The rosemary gives height to the centre of the display, while the thyme and flowers soften the edges of the pot. The blooms are in complementary shades for a coordinated feel that still has cottage-garden appeal.

Other flower and edible combos

- Lollipop bay tree with seasonal bedding
- Purple sage and violas
- Salad leaves and marigolds (after frost)
- Tomatoes and nasturtiums (after frost)



GROUPING

An informal collection in the centre of a table creates instant impact in an understated way. Best in a sheltered spot so pots aren't toppled by winds.

SMALL POTS

At less than £1 a go, 10cm terracotta pots are great value. The compost will dry out quickly in these containers, so water daily.

PRIMULAS

Cheery blooms that always raise a smile. Use identical shades for an expensive look on a budget, and remove faded flowers and leaves regularly.

Keep it simple

This display proves that you don't need a lot of time, space or money to make a difference. Three potted primulas make a stylish focal point when grouped on a table, or why not try them lined up on a windowsill? Make sure the blooms are exactly the same shade and select identical pots for a simple look with designer style. Your pots should be just slightly larger than the ones you buy the primulas in.

Other solo plant winners

- Miniature potted bulbs
- Pansies and violas
- Young lavenders



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 **Wyevale** garden centres

All-year performer

A piece of evergreen topiary makes a great centrepiece in a container, with the bonus of looking good throughout the year – ideal if you're looking for a hassle-free display with longevity. Combine with trailing ivy, small perennials and colourful bedding plants. Replace the bedding as it fades to keep the display fresh.

Other centrepiece evergreens

- Cone- or lollipop-shaped bay tree
- Lollipop olive tree – great in a sunny, sheltered spot
- Lollipop or pyramid holly
- *Ilex crenata*, a good alternative to box



Step by step

The perfect conditions for potted topiary



1 Half fill your pot with soil-based compost – John Innes No.3 is ideal. The soil retains the nutrients that permanently potted plants need.



2 Add a measure of slow-release fertiliser. This will gradually release nutrients through the year to keep your plants fed and healthy.



3 Plant the topiary in the centre of the pot after carefully removing it from its container, gently teasing out the roots as you go.



4 Fill around the topiary with more compost and add the other plants one at a time. Add more compost to plug any gaps and water well.



30CM BOX SPHERE

Does well in most locations. Feed weekly with a liquid seaweed during the growing season and clip at the end of May to keep it in shape.

HEUCHERA

Grow for vibrant foliage that enjoys a semi-shaded spot. Will last in a pot all year, although it can eventually be transplanted to the garden.

BELLIS

Available in shades of red, pink and white, these pretty daisies are great value for money. Keep well watered and remove faded blooms to encourage more.

IVY

Just the plant for softening the edges of a container. One pot often includes several small plants, so split these to make your money go further.

RIBBED POT

This chunky 45cm-diameter terracotta pot creates the perfect permanent home for topiary. Choose frost-proof pots for all-year displays outside.

Container buyer's guide

Make sure your container displays look great this year with some smart new pots for your doorstep and patio. Here are some of our favourites, along with a selection of fertilisers and container composts that will keep your potted plants in great shape.

FIND MORE IDEAS for pot displays and other projects at gardenersworld.com/how-to

Container feeds



WILKO ADVANCED TOMATO FEED

This liquid feed is rich in potassium and phosphorus for plentiful flowers and fruits.

● £1.50, 08000 329329, wilko.com

Resin & plastic pots



RIBBED SQUARE PLANTER

This lightweight resin pot has the look and feel of authentic stone. Available in various sizes.

● From £29.99, 0344 272 3000, wyevalegardencentres.co.uk

Wooden planters



HARDWOOD SQUARE PLANTER

A classic grey planter made from treated acacia hardwood (H49cm x W44cm).

Also available in dark green.

● £65, 0345 605 2505, worm.co.uk



PHOSTROGEN ALL PURPOSE

Use in spring and summer for abundant flowers and fruit, and healthy green foliage.

● £4.99, 01953 714091, millracegardencentre.co.uk



ARTSTONE ELLA PLANTER

This stone powder and resin composite pot is lightweight and frost proof (H40cm x W40cm).

● £55, 03456 049049, johnlewis.com



KINGHAM PLANTER

This square planter is handcrafted from slatted panels of spruce wood (H50cm x W50cm).

● £95, 03456 049049, johnlewis.com



GRO-SURE 6 MONTH FEED

Simply add the nutrient tablets to pots for season-long flowering and healthy fruits.

● £3.99, 0844 573 8400, unwins.co.uk



TUTCH ROUND PLANTER

Stylish, durable and robust, this pot is resistant to impact, frost and UV light (H34cm x W35cm).

● £44.99, 0118 903 5210, primrose.co.uk

Terracotta pots



GOLD LEAF PLANT POTS

Bling up your potted plants with these gilt-edged pots. Small sizes, with no drainage hole.

- From £11.95, 0116 298 6393, miafleur.com

Metal pots



SQUARE GALVANISED PLANTER

Crafted from durable zinc-plated steel, this ribbed, tapered planter is both stylish and hard wearing (H26cm x W30cm).

- £25, 0844 567 2400, thefarthing.co.uk

Container compost



NEW HORIZON PEAT FREE

An organic, peat-free compost formulated for use in containers and hanging baskets.

- £3.50 for 20L, 08000 329329, wilko.com



CONTEMPORARY TERRACOTTA POT

Guaranteed frost proof, this pot is made from robust Yorkshire red clay (H28cm x W37cm).

- £29.95, 0333 4001500, harrodhorticultural.com



GALVANISED WASH TUB PLANTER

Create a rustic cottage-garden feel with this vintage-style, zinc-finished tub (H28.5cm x W39.5cm).

- £42, 0345 605 2505, worm.co.uk



INCREDICOMPOST

A reduced-peat compost for pots, with separate feed to boost plant growth for a whole season.

- £9.99 for 25L, 0844 573 1818, thompson-morgan.com



BELL TERRACOTTA LAVENDER POT

Perfect for Mediterranean herbs, this pot is hand-thrown, so each one has its own unique shape and character (H44cm x W47cm).

- £49.99, 01344 578000, crocus.co.uk



CHARTWELL SQUARE PLANTER

This iron and zinc fluted planter has an attractive weathered finish (H16.5cm x W16.5cm).

- £9.71, 0800 169 0423, wayfair.co.uk



GRO-SURE ERICACEOUS COMPOST

Perfect for acid-loving plants in pots, such as azaleas, camellias and blueberries.

- £3.75 for 25L, 08000 329329, wilko.com

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CRUISE HIGHLIGHTS

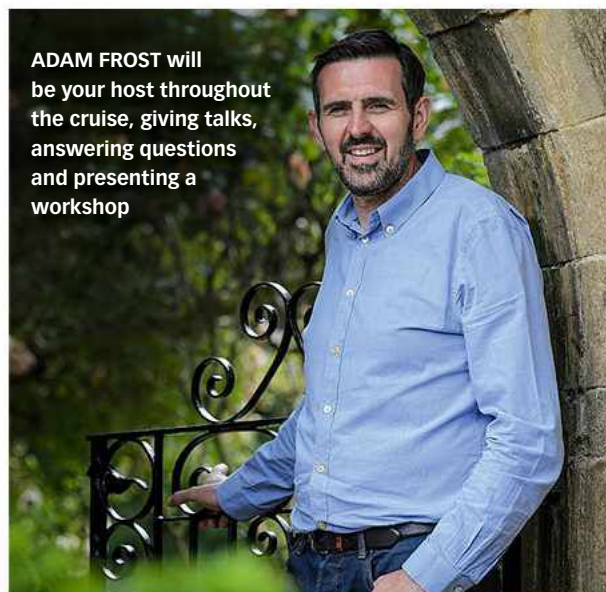
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Botanical Garden, Funchal

Your itinerary

✧ 15 October

Sail from Southampton.

✧ 16-18 October

Cruising days Meet your hosts throughout your cruise, whether informally or at one of the scheduled get-togethers.

✧ **19 October Funchal, Madeira** A benign climate ensures this 'floating garden' is filled with the year-round colours and perfumes of subtropical flowers and fruit. Explore on your own, or book an optional tour to the Botanical Garden.

✧ **20 October Santa Cruz de La Palma** La Palma's capital boasts lush greenery, and to the south, discover rich flora and scenery of the San Antonio Volcano.



Jardin de Cactus, Lanzarote

✧ Saturday 21 October

Santa Cruz, Tenerife

FREE GARDENERS' TOUR

Join your hosts for an extensive walk through the Palmetum gardens with the official botanist of the park.

✧ 22 October Las Palmas, Gran Canaria

FREE GARDENERS' TOUR

Join your hosts today as you visit Jardín Botánico Viera y Clavijo, the largest botanical garden in Spain.

✧ 23 October

Arrecife, Lanzarote

FREE GARDENERS' TOUR

Enjoy lush vegetation and rich fruit plantations, and join your hosts on a visit to Cesar Manrique's Cactus Garden.

✧ 24 October

Agadir, Morocco

Agadir's wide, modern boulevards host plenty of cafés and restaurants.

✧ Wednesday 25 October

Cruising There will be a gardeners' talk today.

✧ 26 October

Lisbon, Portugal

The old district of Alfama mixes medieval and Moorish architecture. Take a relaxing city tour of Lisbon or book a ship's tour to Sintra.

✧ 27-28 October Cruising

days at sea Relax on board and enjoy all the facilities *Balmoral* has to offer. Plus, meet your hosts for two last talks and a gardeners' question time.

✧ **29 October Balmoral** arrives in Southampton.



Palmetum, Tenerife

EXCLUSIVE

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- Workshop with Adam Frost
- Gardeners' Question & Answer Sessions
- Photo opportunity
- Book signing
- and more ...

YOUR HOSTS



ADAM FROST

Gardeners' World presenter and seven-times Chelsea Gold Medallist, Adam Frost will be talking about working with the late Geoff Hamilton, 'His journey so far' and

'My Gold Medal Chelsea Gardens' **'I love everything about gardens, whatever type of design or style. They connect people, space and plants – all of which I am passionate about.'** Adam Frost



DAVID HURRION

Join BBC *Gardeners' World Magazine*'s Associate Editor, David Hurron as he talks 'Gardening Gold' – how to discover the secret to your best garden ever!

'Although I've visited these islands many times, there are always new plants and landscapes to discover.' David Hurron



MATTHEW BIGGS

Gardener, writer and *Gardeners' Question Time* presenter, Matt Biggs will give an insight into the 'Unique Plants and Flowers of the Canaries'.

'There are so many exciting plants in the gardens and wild places we visit on this cruise.' Matt Biggs

Terms & Conditions: **All-Inclusive Drinks Package is subject to terms and conditions, and available on selected drinks. This Cruise is organised by cruise.co.uk Ltd (ABTA 78024) for BBC *Gardeners' World Magazine*, acting as agents on behalf of Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, and are subject to the individual cruise line's terms and conditions. cruise.co.uk, Grosvenor House, Prospect Hill, Redditch, Worcestershire B97 4DL. Bookings have to be made through cruise.co.uk. Prices shown are per person, based on the lead-in cabin fare and in twin occupancy. Single prices available on request. Please note all tours and places of interest mentioned, with the exception of the FREE tours mentioned, are not included in the cruise fare and may be visited on optional tours. Full details of the shore tours available for you to book will be sent to you prior to the cruise. The experts hosting any of our cruises are subject to personal circumstances permitting. Hosts are subject to a minimum number of people travelling in the group and we will keep you informed if there needs to be a change to the number of hosts travelling on the cruise. We plan to visit the gardens mentioned in the itinerary, however we reserve the right to change a visit should circumstances become necessary. E&OE.



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Joe's designer know-how

Patios

From smart dining areas to laid-back sun-traps, patios take many forms. **Joe Swift** explores a range of different surfaces for this key garden area

I view a patio or terrace as the single most important hard landscaping element in a garden. It can dictate how a garden will be used and from where it will be viewed. The choice of materials, adjoining plants and furniture or ornaments placed on it have a huge bearing on the overall style of a space. Patios can be incredibly simple – just some gravel on the ground with a carefully placed chair or two – but with a little planning and thought they can become the main focus, the very heart of your space.

While patios are often added onto the back of the house for easy access, this isn't always the best approach. Don't feel constrained by convention – consider all your options and you may find it will lead you to a more dynamic and flowing garden design in the end. Budget is, of course, a big consideration. I always determine the approximate size and shape of a patio first, to make sure it is practical and versatile. Only then do I explore possible materials to give me a look that works well with the house and overall style of the garden, but are also affordable and achievable within the budget.

DECK IT OUT

Decking is a quiet, warm surface that is relatively quick and easy to install. It is ideal for 'floating' over sloping or uneven ground and hiding ugly surfaces too costly to remove. Often viewed as a contemporary surface, I see it more as a colonial classic with many uses.

COST Softwood decking kits are good value at about £45 per sq metre – stockists include savoytimber.com.

JOE'S TIP Pressure-wash decking to stop it getting slippery.



TURN TO STONE

This sawn sandstone patio sets a sharply contemporary tone. For success with this look, you need precisely laid slabs with tight pointing gaps. The large pebble sculptures add contrasting curves, but need plenty of space.

COST Sandstone slabs from about £55 per sq metre – suppliers include londonstone.co.uk.

JOE'S TIP Avoid any fussy cutting, so measure out full slabs before you start laying them.



SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Small-sized paving, such as setts, paviors and bricks, work particularly well in small spaces. However, they can look a little municipal when scaled up to cover larger areas.

COST Setts from about £45 per sq metre, from stockists such as simplypaving.com.

JOE'S TIP If you spend plenty of time levelling and consolidating the sand base, then the paving should go down quickly and easily.



ENJOY A CLEANSlate

Slate is extremely durable and has a classic quality. Random-sized slabs add movement, avoiding one clear directional line, which suits more rural or traditional-style gardens. Consider leaving out a small slab or two near the edge for planting pockets that will soften the look.

COST Slate paving from about £60 per sq metre – suppliers include homebase.co.uk.

JOE'S TIP When laying random sizes, take care to avoid too much alignment.

LAY IT ON THICK

The easiest and cheapest option is gravel – simply spread a thick layer on top of landscape fabric. Colour and size are the key considerations, and if cats are a problem choose a gravel size of at least 20mm.

COST Gravel from about £4 per sq metre – suppliers include wickes.co.uk.

JOE'S TIP Think about containing the edges, and always lay landscape fabric underneath to stop weeds coming through.

GIVE IT THE EDGE

This circular patio uses broken pieces of stone laid on their edge, creating a striking textural feature. It's a labour of love to make, using off-cuts from other paving or larger pieces of stone broken with a hammer and bolster.

COST Rockery stone from about £150 per tonne (approx 70 pieces) from stonewarehouse.co.uk, or try large garden centres.

JOE'S TIP Think about how you're going to finish the detail in the middle.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTLER/PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM/GETTY IMAGES



MIND THE GAPS

You can make a striking but low-budget patio from concrete paving. The wide, gravel-filled gaps between the slabs break up the expanse of grey, making an eye-catching feature. The gaps also allow water to drain through easily, which is handy in rainy regions.

COST Concrete paving slabs from £20 per sq metre – suppliers include wickes.co.uk.

JOE'S TIP Haunch each slab with mortar on all sides to stop it flipping up.



EVERY DAY'S A HOLIDAY

Bring a Mediterranean feel to your garden with terracotta tiles, white walls and tropical plants in pots. You must site this style of patio in a sunny spot to get the full-on holiday effect. Carefully measure out the tiles before laying.

COST Terracotta tiles from about £50 per sq metre – suppliers include simplypaving.com.

JOE'S TIP Make sure the tiles are frost proof, as not all terracotta is suitable for outdoor use.



RAISE THE STAKES

A raised patio not only creates a level change, which can add interest to a flat garden, but it also avoids having to dig out and remove spoil. Here the same tile is used to face the risers, bringing continuity to the design.

COST Tiles from about £60 per sq metre – suppliers include toppstiles.co.uk.

JOE'S TIP A small overhang of the paving over the riser creates both a shadow line and a drip line for water.

Patios - the dos and don'ts

- ✓ **Do keep** the shape simple and practical, so it's quick and straightforward to build.
- ✓ **Do look to soften** the edges with plants. It'll not only nestle the patio into the garden, but also create a cosy sense of enclosure.
- ✓ **Do make seating areas** as large as possible. Once you place some furniture and a few pots on a patio, the area will feel a lot smaller, and you need to allow space to manoeuvre the chairs.
- ✓ **Do take care** to accurately measure out the area when calculating how much paving you'll need, including any pointing gaps. Use whole pieces wherever possible, as cutting slabs and tiles is not only tricky, time consuming and expensive, but often looks unplanned or messy.
- ✓ **Do consider** where rainwater will run off. With a non-porous surface, you'll need to incorporate drainage or direct rainwater to a large planting area that can soak it up.
- ✗ **Don't mix up** too many different surface materials, as that can end up looking fussy. I use a maximum of two complementary materials close to each other.
- ✗ **Don't create** a level change in a small patio, as it will greatly reduce its versatility.
- ✗ **Don't build up** against the house's damp-proof course or have paths and other paving sloping towards the patio, as it'll end up as one big puddle. If in any doubt, ask a professional for help.
- ✗ **Don't include** little trip steps. Either keep it all on one level or have a full-sized step.

DISCOVER JOE'S three rules of garden design in our *No Fuss* video guide at gardenersworld.com/no-fuss-guides



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VITABIOTICS
SCIENCE OF HEALTHY LIVING

Carol's favourite lilies are the oriental hybrids, as their large, elegant flowers are the most highly scented



"These easy-to-grow plants wake up the summer scene, bringing colour and pizzazz"

Glamour guaranteed

From elegant lilies to graceful gladioli, summer-flowering bulbs add flair and drama to containers and borders.

Carol Klein explains how to grow these vivacious stars

How lucky we gardeners are to have the floral world at our fingertips. We have access to plants from every continent to bring colour and beauty to our gardens. But there's one group of plants in particular that stands out for their sheer panache – summer-flowering bulbs.

These easy-to-grow plants wake up the summer scene, bringing dramatic colour and a touch of pizzazz. Although a few do offer more subtle hues, most summer bulbs (and I'm including here tubers, rhizomes and corms, too) positively scintillate. These are not plants that you use instead of other perennials – they're an added extra that lifts a garden to new heights.

Even though they bring so much, they take little effort to plant or care for, and are surely among the most rewarding plants we can grow. Despite their dramatic looks, with artfulness and imagination summer bulbs can be woven into the fabric of beds and borders. Far from blinding the onlooker to everything else, they can be subtly blended

with existing ingredients or repeated through a border in waves, so they integrate, introducing pleasing rhythms rather than fragmenting its contents.

But what are bulbs, tubers, rhizomes and corms? Botanically they're all a bit different, however they do a similar job, storing food and providing a plant with everything it needs to produce a beautiful display.

Good mixers

At Glebe Cottage, we usually try to use bulbs so they fit into the overall 'natural' aesthetic. Most of the gladioli we grow are small and dainty (related to *G. x colvillii* and the Nanus group). We start them off in pots of loamy compost and plant them out later when the flower buds are beginning to show. This means they can be given a degree of protection – they only need to be frost free – until it's safe to put them outside. We also vary the number of bulbs we plant in each pot, from one to four, so that when they're planted out the effect is more random than if there's always three per pot.

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM



Carol's top bulbs to plant now

Galtonias

Tall gracious stems hung with green-tinged bells give *Galtonia viridiflora* a crisp, fresh look. This South African bulb is easy to grow in reasonably well-drained, fertile soil in a sunny position. Plant it deeply and it will go on for years. It's also a good mixer.

Flowers Aug-Oct
Height 75cm



Crocosmias

With the introduction of new varieties and the rediscovery of old ones, crocosmias are more popular than ever. 'Star of the East' has been around for more than a century and no wonder – its starry flowers are a rich, clear orange. Plant in a sunny spot with good soil.

Flowers Jul-Aug
Height 60-100cm



Ixias

Small corms but a big effect, adding flashes of zingy colour. Like so many of our summer-flowering bulbs, ixias hail from South Africa. Although they may survive in light soil in a sun-baked spot, they're not reliably hardy so are best planted afresh each spring.

Flowers May-Jul
Height 35-50cm



Pineapple lilies

With its characteristic tuft of leaves at the top of its flower spike, *Eucomis* certainly lives up to its common name. Plant bulbs deeply so they survive the winter. Great in pots or borders. 'Sparkling Burgundy' is a particularly striking variety with ruby stems and leaves.

Flowers Jul-Sep
Height 60-75cm

☞ Pots full of lilies are a tremendous stand-by to add a splash of fresh colour to flagging borders ☞

By contrast, we sometimes want 'stop-you-in-your-tracks' colour, and use some of the taller Dame Edna Everage-style gladioli, but we always grow them separately in containers. They're more a conversation piece than an integral part of the garden. Some of the more extrovert types, like these gladioli, the striking eucomis and more flamboyant dahlias, work best as showstoppers rather than blending in with the crowd.

If you want to create an exotic corner in part of your garden, there are plenty of bulbs that will help you achieve this effect without breaking the bank. Although buying cannas or ginger lilies (*Hedychium*) as mature plants provides instant gratification, it's much cheaper and more rewarding to start them off from rhizomes, which are available from garden centres or by post. Many ginger lilies have the added attraction of evening scent.

Style and grace

Lilies are a more traditional option, with literally hundreds of gorgeous varieties to choose from. If you plant a selection at this time of year, you can have flowers from June right through to September and even October. My favourites are the oriental hybrids, which share the grace of their antecedents – elegant species from Japan and China. Most have a heady perfume and long graceful trumpet flowers. The regal lily (*Lilium regale*) is perhaps the best all-rounder, with tall strong stems that carry large white trumpets with a heavenly scent, especially in the evening.

Lilies are very accommodating plants. They put on a good performance even in my heavy clay, although I love to grow them in large terracotta pots too. These are half-filled with loam-based compost and as the bulbs put down roots and begin to shoot, more compost is added. Oriental lilies make roots on their stems so they can absorb more nutrients as they grow, resulting in a fine show of flowers. They can be started off under glass this way and will flower a little earlier than lilies that are planted outdoors without protection.

Pots full of lilies are a tremendous stand-by to add a splash of fresh colour to flagging borders during July and August. If you plant them in attractive pots they can stand directly in the border, where early performers such as oriental poppies or aquilegias are looking a little the worse for wear. Another option is to grow the lilies in large plastic pots, then drop these into a more decorative outer pot when the plants



Abyssinian gladioli

Gladiolus murielae is one of the most graceful gladioli, with wide white flowers that seem to float above the vertical, ridged leaves thanks to their long corolla tubes. In their native Ethiopia they are pollinated by moths, attracted by their evening perfume.

Flowers Aug-Oct
Height 90cm



Martagon lilies

Exotic and unexpected, *Lilium martagon* thrives in dappled shade and does well in pots. 'Claude Shride' is an eye-catching variety – its unusually dark red petals, speckled with orange, are reflexed upwards, balanced by the pollen-laden anthers hanging below.

Flowers June-July
Height 120-180cm

PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; JASON INGRAM; GETTY/MATT ANKER; DIANNE CHRISTIE; MARK TURNER



Lilies grow well in large pots filled with free-draining, loam-based compost

How to grow summer bulbs

Now's the time to plant them, so follow Carol's key tips

- **Choose a hot, sunny spot.** The majority of summer-flowering bulbs need sun and warmth – after all, most are from sub-tropical climes where they can sunbathe without restraint. Few will thrive in shade, with the exception of woodland species such as the martagon lilies.
- **Grow in free-draining soil,** as bulbs can easily rot in damp conditions. Most should not be grown in nitrogen-rich soil, as this will lead to leaf development rather than flower formation. Only a select few do well in rich soil, including dahlias and some of the lilies. Several of the South African bulbs, such as ixias, prefer poor, thin soil.
- **Use a loam-based compost** when planting bulbs in containers, and add extra grit to improve the drainage. Loamy compost will sustain growth for longer than a multi-purpose compost.
- **Apply a high-potash feed** when the flower buds are beginning to form.
- **Deadhead after flowering,** removing the whole spent flower stem, unless you want them to set seed.
- **Divide and replant** clumps of bulbs every few years, to maintain vigour and stop them becoming overcrowded. This is best done in the spring, when the soil is beginning to warm up. With crocosmias, whose corms form long bead-like chains, simply dig up in the spring and detach the top corm, which is the biggest and most productive. Then replant it in a fresh location with extra compost added to the soil.
- **Lift dahlia tubers** in late autumn, dry them off and store them in a frost-free place over winter. Replant them in late spring, after the last frost – but more on that next month...

are coming into flower and are ready to take up their final positions.

Try this too with autumn-flowering lilies such as *Lilium speciosum*, whose fragrant and sumptuous pink-spotted flowers with their reflexed petals come into their own in September. I have a special fondness for this lily, as I was given a few stems to form my wedding bouquet!

Red devils

Unfortunately, certain types of lilies, including the Asiatics and the regal hybrids, are particularly vulnerable to lily beetles. These bright red pests can strip a lily plant of its foliage with alarming speed, so you need to stay vigilant. Still, new lily varieties are now being bred that are less attractive to this voracious pest (such as 'Defender Pink' and 'Defender Yellow'), while tiger lilies and late-flowering *Lilium speciosum* often escape their attentions altogether.

Lily beetles can be controlled to some extent by collecting the adults. It's a good idea to lay sheets of newspaper under the plants before you start, as the beetles tend to throw themselves to the ground when they realise they're under attack. The larvae won't try to get away – they stay put, having camouflaged themselves to look like bird poo. It's not a pleasant task to remove and squish the adults and larvae, but it must be done, ideally on a daily basis, if your lilies are to look their best.



Also bear in mind that lily beetles feed on spring-flowering fritillaries too, which can support early-season generations. So if you grow fritillaries, check them for adult beetles and larvae in late spring to prevent this pest moving on to your lilies just when they're looking their best.

Whether it's starry-flowered crocosmia, the zingy coloured ixias or exotic show-stopping dahlias, riches abound among summer-flowering bulbs. For the price of a shrub or a few perennials, you can fill your borders and containers with colour year after year, making a major contribution to the summer show. □

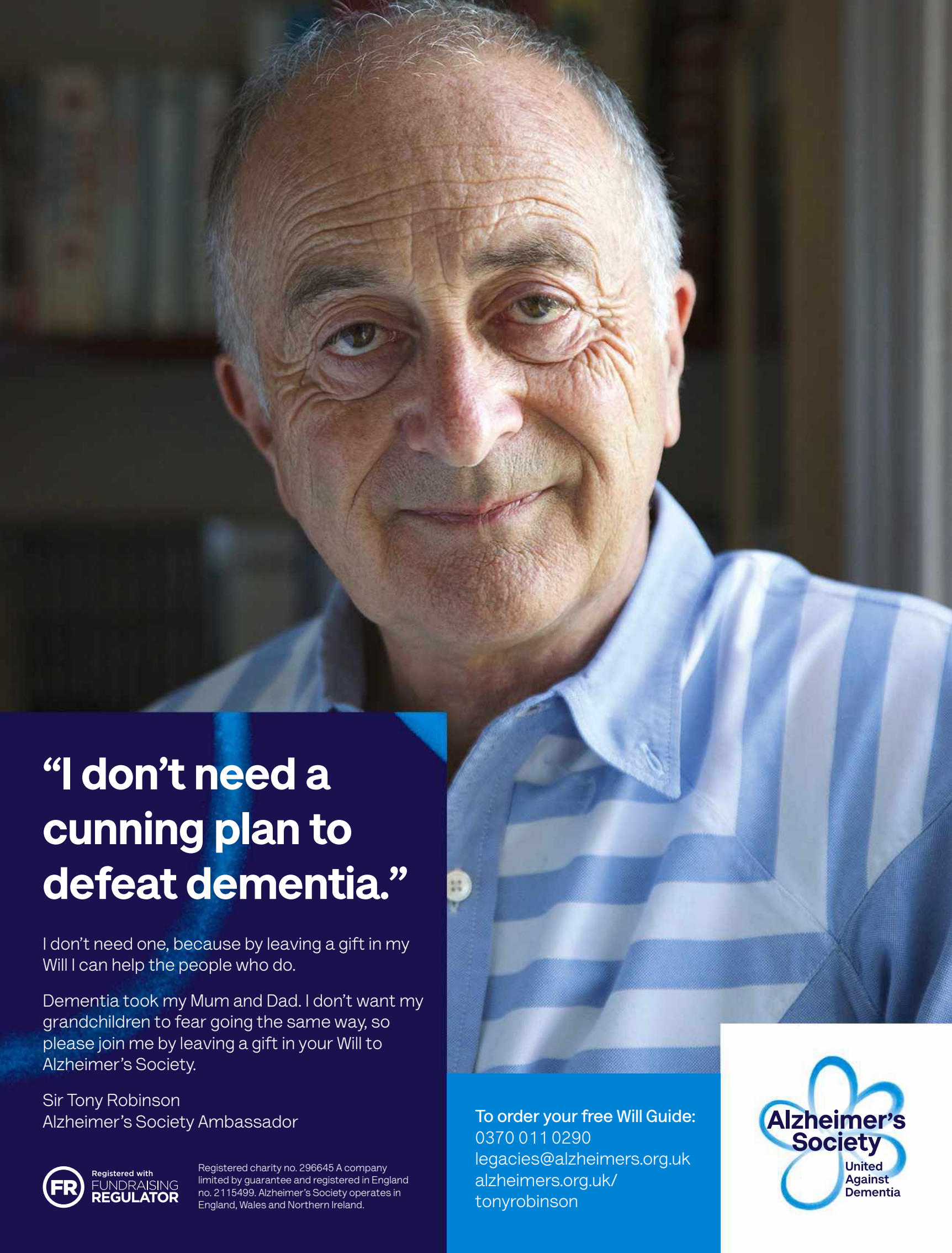
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Success with... organic lawns

Alan Titchmarsh shows how to get a lush, green lawn without resorting to chemicals. *Photos by Sarah Cuttle*

There is no doubt about it; cultivating an organic lawn is one of the greatest challenges faced by any gardener. After all, lawns entirely devoted to grass simply do not exist in nature – they are man-made features, the product of not just mechanical cultivation, but also chemical intervention. We can all see the perfect greensward in our mind's eye – smooth and level as a billiard table, probably with parallel stripes. It is weed and moss free, and its surface is as crisp and even as a new fall of snow. To achieve this effect is nigh on impossible for the organic gardener who has no recourse to lawn herbicides, moss killers and the like. So, is a good-looking lawn out of the question for those of an organic persuasion? Not a bit of it. You might just have to compromise a little, that's all.

During my youth, a patch of lawn was *de rigueur* at the centre of any domestic front or back garden. It could be a square

or a rectangle – in the pocket-handkerchief gardens fore and aft of terraced houses there was no room for the sweeping curves of more generously proportioned country estates. Then, as apprentice in the local parks department, I found myself mowing bowling greens and recreation areas and the creation of stripes became ingrained. To this day I love that sort of neatness and symmetry, unfashionable though it may be now, with the current

☞ Lawns entirely devoted to grass simply do not exist in nature – they are man-made features ☞

preference for prairie planting. (That said, landscape designer Kim Wilkie has done wonders at Boughton Park with a verdant landscape of towering and inverted grass pyramids.)

I still get a kick out of mowing – it allows my mind to wander – and I enjoy the contrast between the neat lawn and the billowing chaos of my beds and borders.

I have been an organic gardener for over 30 years now. Though I always allowed myself one indulgence – a spring application of 'weed and feed' to the lawn.



Alan uses a spring-tined rake to scarify his lawn, removing moss the organic way

That is, until about five years ago when, a day or two after applying the mixture – which killed moss as well as weeds – I saw a mother blackbird heaving a worm from the blackened surface to take back to her young. It was an epiphany. It occurred to me that I wouldn't let my own children walk on the lawn for a week or two after the weed and feed was applied, let alone eat anything that had come into contact with it. Surely my love of nature – of the birds and beasts and insects that populated my garden – was stronger than my love of a fine lawn?

There and then I vowed not to use the stuff again. From that moment on I gave myself the challenge of cultivating a good-looking lawn without the use of chemicals. It has not been nearly so disastrous as I thought it would. My lawn is still even and green, it still has stripes in summer and it still shows off the beds and borders that lie around it. That it is not composed entirely of grass is something I have learned to live with; and that is the key.

Starting out

If you are planning on going 'lawn organic' now is a good time to begin. And to spur you on your way, it is worth remembering that chemical solutions are not quite the one-stop solution they at first may seem. You can apply a preparation that will kill moss. It will turn it black. But you still have to rake out the dead stuff, and next year you will have to go through the process all over again, because the chemical treatment is not long lasting. If you have to rake out the moss anyway, why bother to kill it first?

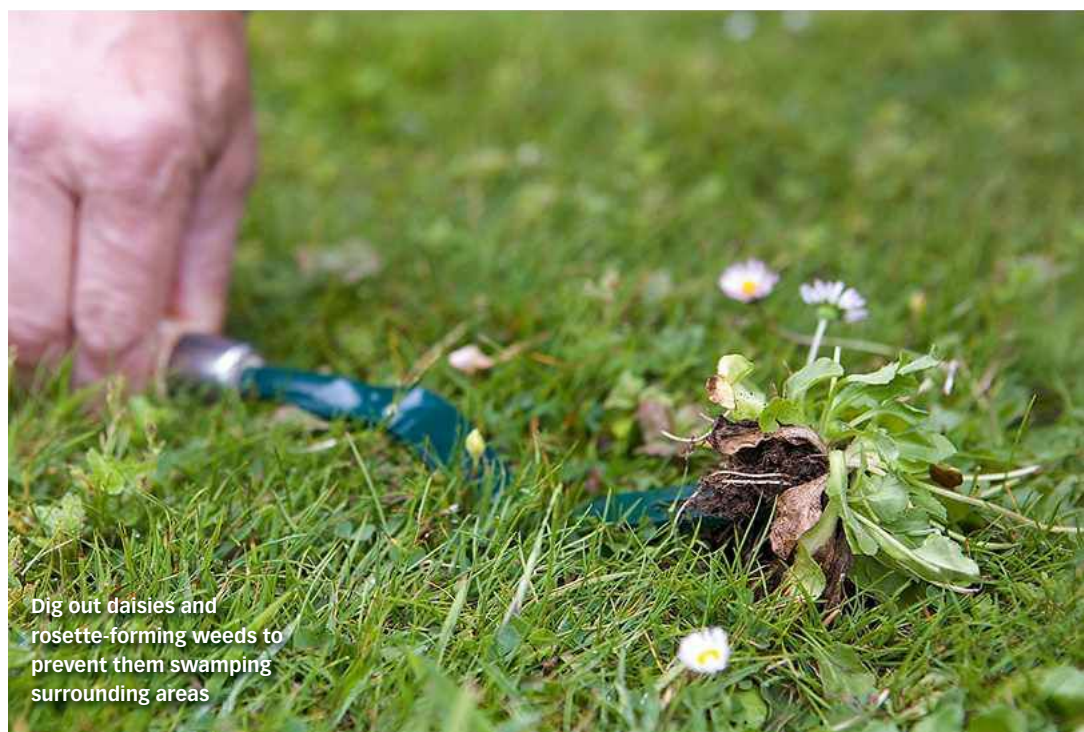
Rake out the moss now and, if the surface of your lawn is badly drained, go over it with a lawn aerator or a fork, perforating the surface to a depth of 8 to 10cm. A hollow-tine aerator can be used on heavy soils, the cores removed from the surface and sharp sand swept into the vertical drainage channels. This process alone will help reduce the incidence of moss, which likes damp conditions. (Moss also loves shady spots, so pruning nearby trees will help to let in more light and encourage grass growth.)

That said, moss grows well in almost any lawn through the autumn and winter, regardless of the cultivation regime employed. Resign yourself to this annual raking as part of your fitness routine, and if you don't have the strength, then a powered lawn raker will make life much easier. You'll be astonished at the amount of moss and dead grass that it removes – enough to stuff a large mattress. Dump it on the compost heap, mixing it in with other material.

Your lawn will look pretty threadbare once the moss has been removed (especially if you've used a powered raker). Don't worry. You've created more space for the grass to occupy and, come the warmer weather of April and May, you can feed your lawn to encourage that to happen. I use a wheeled



Mow at least once a week in spring and summer



Dig out daisies and rosette-forming weeds to prevent them swamping surrounding areas

Steps to success with organic lawns

- ✓ **Remove large-leaved weeds**, such as dandelions, plantains and daisies so they don't get out of hand. Use an old-fashioned daisy grubber (and a padded kneeling mat!). It's actually a satisfying job on a warm spring or summer's day.
- ✓ **If you want stripes**, use a rotary mower with a large rear roller. Cylinder mowers don't much like cutting plants other than grass, and the effect they produce on organic lawns is not as good as their rotary counterparts.
- ✓ **Rake out moss annually** without using chemicals.
- ✓ **Improve surface drainage** by spiking with a fork or using a hollow tine aerator, and reduce shade to help cut down moss.
- ✓ **Sweep off worm casts** on a dry day with a birch besom so that their fine soil acts, in some small way, as a top-dressing.
- ✓ **Always remove lawn clippings** – leaving them on in great clods will do nothing to improve matters and will kill off grass rather than encouraging it to grow.
- ✓ **Mow at least once a week** in spring and summer when the grass is growing rapidly. Regular mowing produces a finer sward, even on organic lawns, and helps to eliminate many weeds.
- ✓ **Sweep off fungi, fairy rings** and other toadstools with a birch besom or stiff-bristled broom and then suck up with the mower. Few chemical treatments are available to the amateur anyway.
- ✓ **Don't bother to water your lawn**, even in dry spells. It'll soon recover in the first shower of rain and, because an organic lawn contains plants other than grass, it has extra drought resistance.



Sweep worm casts from your lawn to stop them making muddy patches



Improve drainage with a hollow-tine aerator – after rain when the ground is soft is easiest



Stop lawn fungi from shedding spores by sweeping them away promptly



Sow grass seed on patchy areas of lawn after using a traditional rake on it



Some grass seed packets come with perforations to aid even distribution



Break up compacted soil, before overseeding with two fistfuls per square metre

Thicken up your lawn

If your lawn is very thin and sparse, it may be worth overseeding the entire area after scarifying

- **By far the best time** to overseed your lawn is during April and May, when the earth has warmed up a little, but before the hot dry weather of summer, which hinders grass seed germination.
- **Go over the soil** surface with a traditional rake (rather than a spring-tined rake) while the soil is damp, as the seed will need a bit more surface cultivation than that created by raking off moss and dead grass. Concentrate on the bare patches of earth to break up compaction of its surface. You need not cultivate very deeply – 1cm is plenty, but it will allow the seed to germinate and take root more readily than if it were scattered on to a flat, hard ground.
- **Scatter the seed** over the entire area of the lawn at the rate of two clenched fistfuls to the square metre. Then go over the lawn with a rake again, gently working the seed into the surface. You will not cover it all over, but don't worry; there will be sufficient seeds in contact with the soil to ensure germination.
- **Lay twigggy pea sticks** flat upon the surface afterwards to discourage birds from eating the seeds and from having dust baths. They will always take some, but sufficient seed will be left behind to thicken up the greensward before you mow the lawn a few weeks later. Make sure you wait until a month after sowing before you apply any feed.



Remove moss and dead grass and add to the compost heap

Having an organic lawn needs an adjustment of mindset

distributor for an even application, and my lawn feed of choice is... good old blood, fish and bone meal. Grass loves it. It is less likely to scorch than many inorganic lawn feeds, but it's worth watering it in if there's no rain within a day or two. (Watch the forecast and apply it just before rain to save yourself the job.) You'll notice that the effects of the blood, fish and bone are not quite as instant as those 'overnight' greening products, but in my experience they tend to be longer lasting. Another application during a damp spell in midsummer will be all your lawn needs to stay well fed and healthy.

All of which is fine and dandy, but what about the weeds? Well, many of them you'll learn to live with. Provided they are green and fine leaved, they'll become an integral part of the low-growing botanic garden that is now your lawn. The larger-leaved ones? See 'Steps to success...' on the previous page.

Having an organic lawn requires an adjusted mindset, but it's given me a clearer conscience without affecting the beauty of my garden. And Mrs Blackbird is happy, too. □



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Coming up: Alan secrets to success with...

- **April** tackling pests organically
- **May** raising young plants
- **June** plants for problem places
- **July** making compost



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Lawn problem solving



Get your grass into great shape with our guide to choosing the right products and tools

Improving the health of your lawn is the key to improving its looks. Start by identifying any problems, then use our guide to find the right treatments. There's a wealth of products to suit all approaches: both organic and chemical, including ready-to-use products that are super-convenient (if a little pricier) and newer, environmentally friendly treatments. Do take

care to follow the packet instructions for safe and effective results, and never be tempted to over-apply: too much can often be more harmful than none at all.

Having the right tools makes maintaining your lawn easier, and good cultivation can prevent many common problems. So overleaf we guide you through the key kit for a lush lawn.



Patches

The nitrogen in dog urine can leave scorched patches on lawns



Re-seeding

Sow with treated or coated seeds for best results, to thicken a sparse or patchy lawn. Patch repair kits are handy for small areas.

- **How to use** In spring or autumn. Keep watered until the new grass is established.
- **Try** Johnsons After Moss Lawn Seed, Miracle-Gro Patch Magic

Dog spot repairs

Tackle yellow patches caused by dog wee with products containing grass seeds and growing medium. Urine neutraliser can be applied as a repair. Or neutralising products can be added to dog's drinking water.

- **How to use** From spring to autumn.
- **Try** Dog Rocks, Envii Neuturine, Westland Aftercut Patch Fix



Pests

Chafer grubs feed on the roots of grass plants



Biological pest controls

Chafer grubs, leatherjackets and ants can cause lawn damage directly, as well as indirectly when larger creatures feed on them. Applying microscopic nematodes is a safe, environmentally friendly control method.

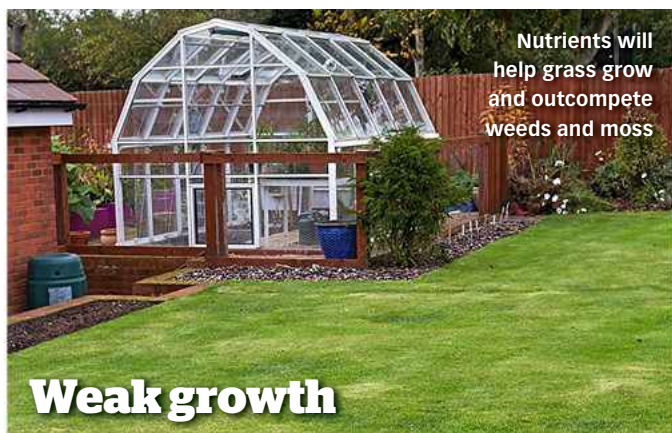
- **How to use** In April to September onto moist grass, when the weather is sufficiently warm.
- **Try** Nemasys

Worm deterrents

Worms are great, but some lawn lovers don't like the piles of fine soil (casts) they produce. Applying a sulphur-based product creates acidic conditions that worms avoid.

- **How to use** In any periods of high worm activity. Check the lawn pH first, as treatment may make conditions too acidic.
- **Try** CastClear, Sulphurlawn Spray-on





Weak growth



Spring lawn feeds

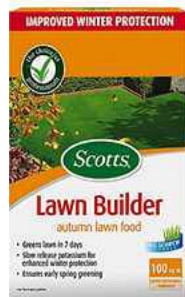
These are rich in nitrogen, which boosts strong, green, leafy growth. Correct feeding helps grass to outperform weeds and moss.

- **How to use** Apply evenly from March to May, when the soil is moist and the grass dry, then water in.
- **Try** EverGreen Extreme Green, Neudorff Organic Lawn Feed & Improver

Liquid feeds

These give fast results, as you dilute and water the product on, so the grass can take it up immediately. It will green up a tired lawn within days.

- **How to use** From April to August. A few days after mowing, and then at regular intervals.
- **Try** Empathy Lawn Feed, Maxicrop Ultra Lawn, PlantGrow Natural Lawn Food



Autumn feeds

These are rich in potash to encourage root growth, laying the foundation for a healthy lawn the following year. If you only feed once, go for an autumn feed.

- **How to use** In September or October, as for spring lawn feed (above).
- **Try** Nutranatural Autumn & Winter Lawn Food, Scotts Lawn Builder



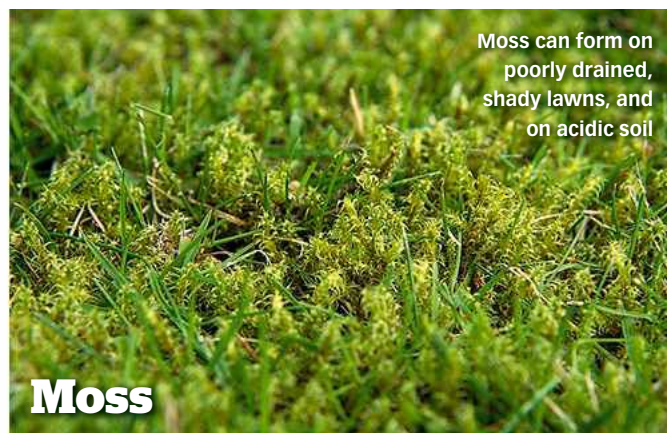
Weeds

Daisies add cheery colour but can spread too readily

Lawn weedkillers

These attack just the weeds, not the grass. Weeds may increase or become distorted before they die, and more than one application is usually required.

- **How to use** From April to September, in dry weather. Identify your weeds so you buy the right treatment.
- **Try** Verdone Extra Lawn Weedkiller, Westland Resolva Lawn Weedkiller



Moss



Moss killers

Apply mosskiller alone if your lawn doesn't need feeding, otherwise you can buy combined products containing mosskiller and fertiliser.

- **How to use** In spring or autumn. Dead moss needs raking out, then the lawn may need overseeding.
- **Try** Nutra-Iron Spray-On, Vitax Green Up Lawn Sand, VivaGreen MossOff

All-in-one treatments

Combined fertiliser, weedkiller and mosskiller for all-over chemical treatment of established lawns. Rake out the moss and weeds once they've died off.

- **How to use** In spring to summer, but only when the weather conditions are right.
- **Try** EverGreen Complete 4 in 1, Westland Aftercut All In One



Natural combination treatments

As well as feeding the lawn and killing moss, these newer products contain friendly bacteria that digest the dead material. This means there's no need to rake out the debris afterwards.

- **How to use** From April to September.
- **Try** Viano MO Bacter Organic Lawn Fertiliser, Westland SafeLawn



Diseases

Red thread affects grass lacking nitrogen, usually in autumn

Lawn disease control

Fungal diseases, like red thread and fusarium can attack grass. There is only one licensed lawn fungicide for amateur gardeners.

- **How to use** Any time, except in drought or frosty weather.
- **Try** Bayer Garden Lawn Disease Control Sachets



Lawn tools

FIND TIPS ON looking after your lawn at gardenersworld.com/lawn-care



Spring-tined lawn rake

This rake has flexible metal tines with cranked ends for scarifying to remove moss and thatch (dead grass) and control spreading weeds such as speedwell and buttercups. You can also use it to gather grass clippings and leaves.

● **How to use:** Rake carefully in spring, and more vigorously in autumn.



Leaf rake

An efficient tool for removing leaves from lawns, it has plastic or rubber tines that don't skewer the leaves. This makes it easier to use, as the rake doesn't clog up readily.

● **How to use:** Rake up autumn leaves every few days, so they don't build up into a thick layer that excludes the light and can kill the grass.



Aerators and scarifiers

Use to make drainage holes in the lawn or rake out moss and thatch. A wide range of manually operated designs are available to suit small lawns or energetic gardeners.

● **How to use:** Aerating is ideally done in autumn before the winter rains. Scarify to remove moss and thatch in spring or autumn.



Spreader

For even application of lawn feed and lawn seeds. Wheeled models are good for level, regularly shaped lawns, while hand-held types suit small or awkward spaces. There is a wide range of models, prices and quality.

● **How to use:** Use the correct distribution rate and avoid overlap or gaps when applying.



Half-moon edger

This creates a neat vertical edge when cutting a fresh outline on lawns adjoining a border or path. The sharp, straight blade gives a crisper finish than a spade, which has a curved blade.

● **How to use:** Press down firmly with your foot, so the blade slices cleanly through the grass and its roots. Compost the trimmings.



Lawn shears

Use to trim unmowable spots, such as around posts or use edging shears as shown above. Specialist lawn shears have angled blades and are much easier to use. Choose from short- or long-handled models.

● **How to use:** Trim when the grass is dry. Clean the blades after use and keep sharp.



Short-handled weeders

For removing rosette-forming or deep-rooted weeds. Different types include daisy grubbers, lawn knives and dandelion weeder.

● **How to use:** Choose a long-bladed weeder for deep-rooted perennials, which regrow from any piece of root left behind. To minimise back strain, kneel rather than bend down.



Long-handled weeders

These efficiently extract deep-rooted weeds. The choice of designs include pronged, corkscrew and clawed models. Some have a foot plate for greater leverage.

● **How to use:** Weeds come out more easily and cleanly when the soil is damp. Insert the tool to the full blade depth and remove steadily.



Besom broom

Traditionally made from birch twigs, this is ideal for scattering unwanted worm casts so they don't suffocate grass and become a seedbed for lawn weeds. The splayed ends are also handy for sweeping in corners.

● **How to use:** Once the worm casts have dried out, and before mowing.



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The Safer Way to Feed your Lawn

New lawn for summer

Follow our step-by-step guide to sowing a lawn from seed

If your lawn is looking really threadbare, it may be best to start anew. Growing from seed is easy and you'll get a new lawn for just a few pounds – around a tenth of the price of buying turf.

Now's the time to do the groundwork, ready for sowing when the soil warms up in April or May.

Be sure to choose a seed mix that suits your needs, whether that's a hard-wearing family-friendly lawn, a shade-tolerant sward or a fine bowling-green finish. The seeds will germinate in just 10-14 days and your new lawn will be ready for light use this summer.



Step by step

- 1 STRIP OFF** any old grass, using a spade to slice the turf from the soil. Dig out the cream-coloured roots of dandelions and other perennial weeds whenever you find them. Then fork through the cleared soil thoroughly, removing any large stones.
- 2 LEVEL** the area roughly, then spread a 2-3cm layer of quality topsoil over it. Use the heels of your boots to firm the surface, working backwards and forward across the plot, and scuff any excess soil into low spots.
- 3 RAKE** the whole area level. Hold the handle low and push the head of the rake to skim through the surface in long sweeping strokes. Rake first in one direction, then repeat at right angles to make levelling easy.
- 4 CHECK FOR** bumps and hollows using the side of a long (approx 2m) length of board on its edge. Rake soil from any high spots to fill in any dips. Check and adjust the levels first in one direction, then repeat the process at right angles.
- 5 MARK** out a metre square using canes and string. Measure out the grass seeds according to the instructions on the packet,

- and sow thinly and evenly within the marked area. Leave this in place to act as a visual guide, and try to sow the rest of the lawn at the same seed density. Rake over gently.
- 6 WATER** with a fine spray, taking care not to wash the seeds out of place. Repeat twice a week until the seeds have germinated. Hang up old CDs or tin foil to deter birds. After six weeks, with the mower blades at their highest setting, give the lawn its first cut.

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WORDS: DAVID HURRION. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE, NEIL HEPWORTH

DIGITALIS

(Foxglove)



1. *Digitalis purpurea* Candy Mountain

THE NAME FOXGLOVE is said to have arisen from a story about playful fairies, wanting to help the wily foxes. They slipped a foxglove over each paw and ever since, the fox has had the attribute of stealth. They even left their little fairy fingerprints on the blooms in the form of tiny spots as proof.

Humans admire them today for their gorgeous, bell-shaped flowers which appear on long tall spikes, making an impressive statement in the garden during late spring and summer. Wonderful drifts of vertical spires create interest in the border by adding a third dimension. Excellent for cutting too – lasting 7-10 days in a vase, although you may not wish to deprive the passing wildlife of a nectar-rich feast. Deadhead as each flower is spent to encourage more flowers and promote seed production for self-seeding in the second year.

Delivered in April – the perfect time for planting



A

DIGITALIS DALMATION

A unique collection bred to flower in the first year. Deadhead spent blooms in the first year to encourage a second year of flowers. Height 50cm (20"). Spread 40cm (16"). Hardy biennials.

A. Peach	6 plants	YPDPE06-GW0317	£10
B. Purple	6 plants	YDPDU06-GW0317	£10
C. White	6 plants	YPDWH06-GW0317	£10
9 plants (3 of each)		YPDDMX09-GW0317	£11



B



C



2. *Digitalis obscura* Dusky Maid

1. *Digitalis purpurea* Candy Mountain

Nicknamed Viagra in the trials garden, due to the upwards facing flowers. Height 120cm (48"). Spread 30cm (12"). Hardy biennial.
6 plants YPDCM06-GW0317 £10

2. *Digitalis obscura* Dusky Maid

Looking like an elusive orange Penstemon it is in fact a rarely offered Spanish Foxglove. Height & spread 45cm (18"). Fully hardy perennial.
6 plants YPDDM06-GW0317 £10

3. *Digitalis purpurea* Sugar Plum

Often referred to as one of the most gorgeous pale pink blooms with raspberry jam lips. Height 120cm (48"). Spread 45cm (18"). Hardy biennial.
6 plants YPDSP06-GW0317 £10

4. *Digitalis x mertonensis*

An award winning variety with huge blooms known as the strawberry foxglove. Height 90cm (36"). Spread 30cm (12"). Fully hardy perennial.
6 plants YPDME06-GW0317 £10

5. *Digitalis grandiflora* Carillon

Dainty and compact, evergreen foliage with gorgeous chocolate speckles on the inside of the flower. Height 30-40cm (12-16"). Spread 30-45cm (12-18"). Fully hardy perennial.
6 plants YPDGC06-GW0317 £10

6. *Digitalis purpurea* Alba

The height and colour carries the eye to the furthest part of the garden when planted at the back of the border. Height 120cm (48"). Spread 30cm (12"). Hardy biennial.
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3. *Digitalis purpurea* Sugar Plum

4. *Digitalis x mertonensis*

5. *Digitalis grandiflora* Carillon

6. *Digitalis purpurea* Alba

B

C

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	9 plants (3 of each)	YDPDMX09-GW0317	£11

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x mertonensis x 6	YPDME06-GW0317	£10		
grandiflora Carillon x 6	YPDGC06-GW0317	£10		
purpurea Alba x 6	YPDAL06-GW0317	£10		
Dalmation Peach x 6	YDPPE06-GW0317	£10		
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Polkadot Pandora x 6	YDPDA06-GW0317	£10		
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Family gardens

Real Gardens

How can you encourage children out into the garden more often? The Family Garden finalists from our Garden of the Year competition share their tips on creating outdoor fun for adults and kids alike

THE GARDEN is an easy and relaxing place to spend time outdoors with the whole family, whether it's your own kids, your grandchildren or friends who have come for a visit. Last year we launched a competition to find our readers' best gardens and this month we show you round those of our three finalists in the 'family garden' category.

Garden owners Magda D'Ingeo, Cathy Harrison and Richard Prior share their top family-friendly tips. We pick out some of their best garden features and explain how to recreate them in your own plot to make the best garden you can for all the family.

Football-proof flower borders

Raised beds made from brick, hardwood or sleepers will go some way to keep footballs at bay and stop plants getting trampled. If you choose to plant at ground level, use low hedging or edging to delineate the beds, particularly those alongside the lawn.

Plant choice is key too. Prickly plants can pierce not just footballs but little hands too, however you do need tough plants that will bounce back. Avoid planting tall, brittle or floppy plants near potential play areas and opt for robust evergreens, grasses and sturdy perennials like achilleas and stachys instead.

A lawn for playing games

A lawn is the ideal soft surface for ball games, as well as for general running and tumbling and playing with pets. If you're starting from scratch, pick a hardwearing lawn seed or turf mix that includes perennial rye grass and fescues. These will grow quickly but need regular mowing, especially if you want a neat finish. You could also consider the low-maintenance option of artificial turf, which is great for shady areas.

“We’ve incorporated a large circular lawn for playing outdoor activities on”
Richard Prior



Multi-function furniture

Garden features that have more than one use are particularly handy if you're short on space or don't want play equipment and toys cluttering up the garden and spoiling the view. A low coffee table that doubles as a sand pit or even a paddling pool once the top is raised, or box benching with a lift-up seat for handy toy storage, are great solutions and help to make the garden work well for both children and adults alike.

“We can relax and play together, and entertain friends of all ages”
Magda D’Ingeo



Seating that suits everyone

Nothing is nicer than sitting down to a family meal in the garden. Seating areas can be either formal or relaxed, but you must ensure that furniture is sturdy enough for all ages to sit on. Stackable fold-up chairs will allow you to add to the table if extra guests arrive.

Choose a spot that receives sun at the time you're most likely to use it and provide shade, either with a parasol or a pergola clothed in plants – deciduous climbers are good, casting shade in summer but not in late autumn or winter when light levels and temperatures are lower.



Safe ponds for finding frogs

Water is an essential element in any garden, beneficial to both wildlife and us, and a pond is a soothing place to sit and relax. For safety reasons, keep ponds covered with a metal grill or behind a secure gate while children are very young. For older children, a pond is a great learning tool, where they can enjoy pond dipping and can quietly watch visiting dragonflies and birds.

“In summer, my favourite part of the garden is the fruit area. The children love helping to grow and pick”

Cathy Harrison

Picking your own food

Growing edible plants is a lovely way to involve children and encourage them to eat fruit and veg – they can even graze as they play! Edible flowers such as nasturtiums and violas are fun, as are jewel-like berries such as redcurrants and blackberries – just choose thornless varieties like ‘Loch Ness’. If you have space, give kids their own mini veg plot, even if it’s only a large pot. They’ll love growing their own strawberries, as well as speedy crops like salad leaves and carrots.

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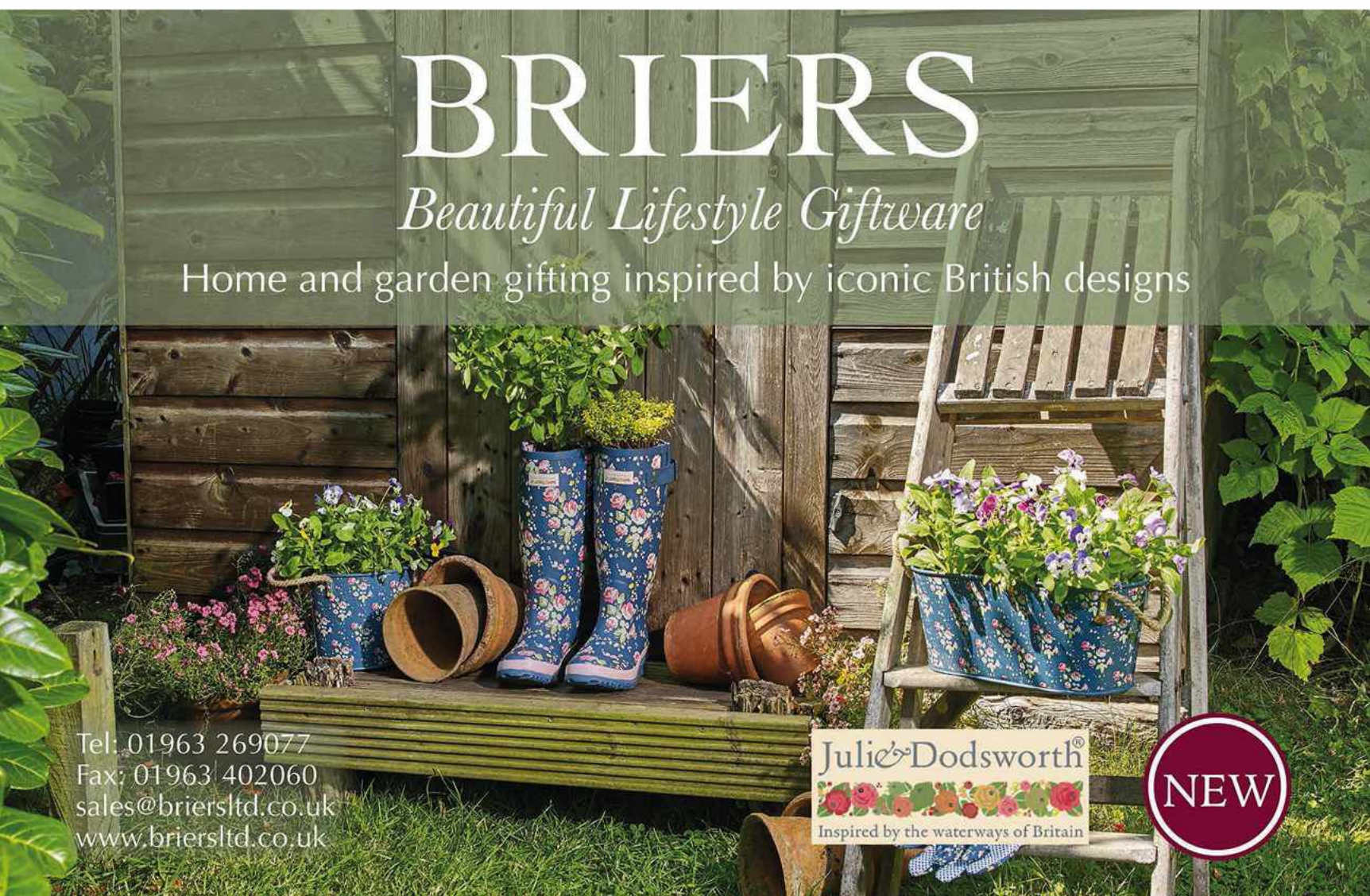
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“The garden offers a relaxing space for adults, while integrating areas for my daughter to play in”
Magda D’Ingeo

Disguise play kit with plants

Use plants to camouflage or screen off large play equipment, such as swings and climbing frames, so they don’t draw the eye and dominate the garden. With structures like this swing, you can train climbers up the sides to soften their appearance, or plant large shrubs at staggered angles to mask them from view. Trellis or slatted fencing clothed in lacy plants and climbers will lessen their impact, but still allow you to keep an eye on the kids as they play.



Make your own fun features

A family garden should be a place of fun as well as beauty, and adding crafty features such as this quirky watering-can fountain helps to bring another layer of interest to your space. Involve your children by encouraging them to create original artworks for the garden, either from clay or painted wood, or ask them to collect stones and lay them in patterns and shapes along paths or decking.





Paths to avoid muddy boots

Clear, defined pathways in hard materials help to make the garden usable all year round and will allow kids to play outside without muddy footprints being traipsed through the house afterwards. Smooth surfaces of stone or decking are hardwearing, wheel friendly and kind to bare feet, while large stepping stones running through a lawn, veg plot or gravel are lots of fun.



Space for family pets

Pets and poultry love to rummage and play in the garden, but they can also ruin a patch of newly dug ground or trample prized plants. Tough shrubs will allow larger pets to play safely without causing damage, while gravel paths will give chickens a place to peck and provide them with grit, which is essential for their digestion. You can designate a sheltered spot for rabbit or guinea pig hutches and screen them with planted trellis or add an attractive sedum roof.

“The garden offers something for everyone – including the chickens”
Cathy Harrison

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; NEIL HEPPWORTH

NEXT MONTH We bring you a bumper section of real garden solutions for small spaces

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Have you got **the Garden**

Enter our competition and you could win a share of over £10,000 of great gardening kit!



Have you created a garden you're really proud of, full of innovative ideas and beautiful planting, and buzzing with wildlife? Then why not enter our 2017 Garden of the Year Competition? There's a total of £10,000-worth of the latest Cobra gardening equipment to be won, as well as the exciting opportunity to have your garden photographed professionally, to appear in future issues of *Gardeners' World Magazine*.

You can enter your garden into one of three categories: **Wildlife Garden, Small Space or Challenging Plot**. A panel of expert judges will select a shortlist of three gardens in each category, from which they'll choose three category winners, as well as an overall Judges' Choice. We'll share all the results in the November 2017 issue.

Readers will have their say, too, with a vote in the People's Choice award later this year – and all voters will be entered into a prize draw to win great Cobra kit! For more inspiration and to see last year's finalists, go to: bit.ly/gw-goty

Who can enter?

To be eligible for our Garden of the Year Competition, sponsored by Cobra, you must not earn a living by designing or maintaining gardens. The garden may be open to the public for charity, but not make any profit for the owner. The garden must be maintained by the owner with no more than one full-time or two part-time helpers. See full terms and conditions at gardenersworld.com/garden-competition

WILDLIFE GARDEN

You'll be able to show how you're making the right conditions for a host of visiting creatures, in any size of garden. You may have created features such as:

- A range of habitats to give shelter and food
- Lots of nectar-rich flowers
- A pond
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- Bird feeders

Is your garden home to bugs and beasties?



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- Planting that provides variety and interest over a long season
- Climbers to disguise boundaries

Is your space little but lovely?



To enter go to: gardenersworld.com/garden-competition

of the Year 2017?

PLUS the chance for your garden to feature in a magazine photoshoot!

**Deadline
for entries**
2 May 2017

**NEW
CATEGORY**

CHALLENGING PLOT

We want to know how you've used your creative talents to make a fantastic garden, of any size, that overcomes the challenges presented by tricky terrain. These could include:

- A shady plot
- A sloping site
- An exposed location
- Difficult soil or growing conditions
- An overgrown or neglected space

Have you tackled a tricky plot?

What you could win

Our winning gardeners deserve great prizes, so we've teamed up with gardening equipment manufacturer Cobra, which offers more than 100 products across its range. Designed in the UK to cater for British gardening conditions, Cobra products are available across the UK through its network of approved specialist dealers. Discover more about Cobra, and the full range, on its website at cobragarden.co.uk

Short-listed gardens may also receive a visit from a professional photographer, this June-July, for a photoshoot of the garden to appear in *Gardeners' World Magazine*.

The prizes:

- 3 category winners will each win **£1,500 (RRP) of Cobra garden equipment**
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To achieve neat and clean circles around trees and shrubs, use an EverEdge Garden Ring, which is simply assembled with two coach bolts at each joint.



REMOVE OLD STEMS

- Cut old branches down to the base to encourage new shoots. Don't worry if you can't see any buds – shoots will soon sprout from within the bark.

Your **PRUNING MONTH**

Encourage vigorous new growth by cutting back shrubs and trees now, says **David Hurrien**. It's a great way to reinvigorate old plants, stimulating colourful young stems and large, dramatic leaves

Many trees, shrubs and fruit bushes start into growth in March, and the pace quickens as day length increases and temperatures rise. This means that you only have a narrow window of opportunity to get the last of your pruning and cutting back done.

When pruned now, most deciduous woody shrubs and trees respond by producing strong growth. And the harder you prune, the more vigorous the re-growth will be. This is useful for shrubs with brightly coloured juvenile stems, such as dogwoods and willows,

or attractive young leaves, such as ornamental elders.

Hold back on pruning winter- and spring-flowering shrubs until they've finished blooming, unless they're really overgrown, in which case, cut a third of the branches hard back.

It's also time to cut back herbaceous perennials and ornamental grasses, as well as summer-flowering shrubs such as buddleia that will bloom at the tips of new shoots made this season.

Coming up: pruning to encourage a better floral display



The smoke bush's new shoots produce translucent leaves in bright shades

Stem and foliage effects

Take a look at most shrubs at this time of year and you'll see different types of growth. The oldest, thickest stems are usually brown, due to a coarse coating of woody bark. Then you'll find thinner stems, often a couple of years old and usually somewhere between brown and tan, with some signs of bark on the surface. But the youngest, most vigorous 'juvenile' stems, arising from low down on the shrub, are often more brightly coloured.

A selection of plants are grown specifically for this – including dogwoods with red,

black or lime stems; willows with scarlet, orange or yellow stems; and white-stemmed brambles for their ghostly stems. They all look their best in winter, devoid of leaves, and the best colour is on the youngest stems. To keep these plants looking their best each winter, you need to cut the whole shrub right back now, so that all the stems will be juvenile – and colourful!

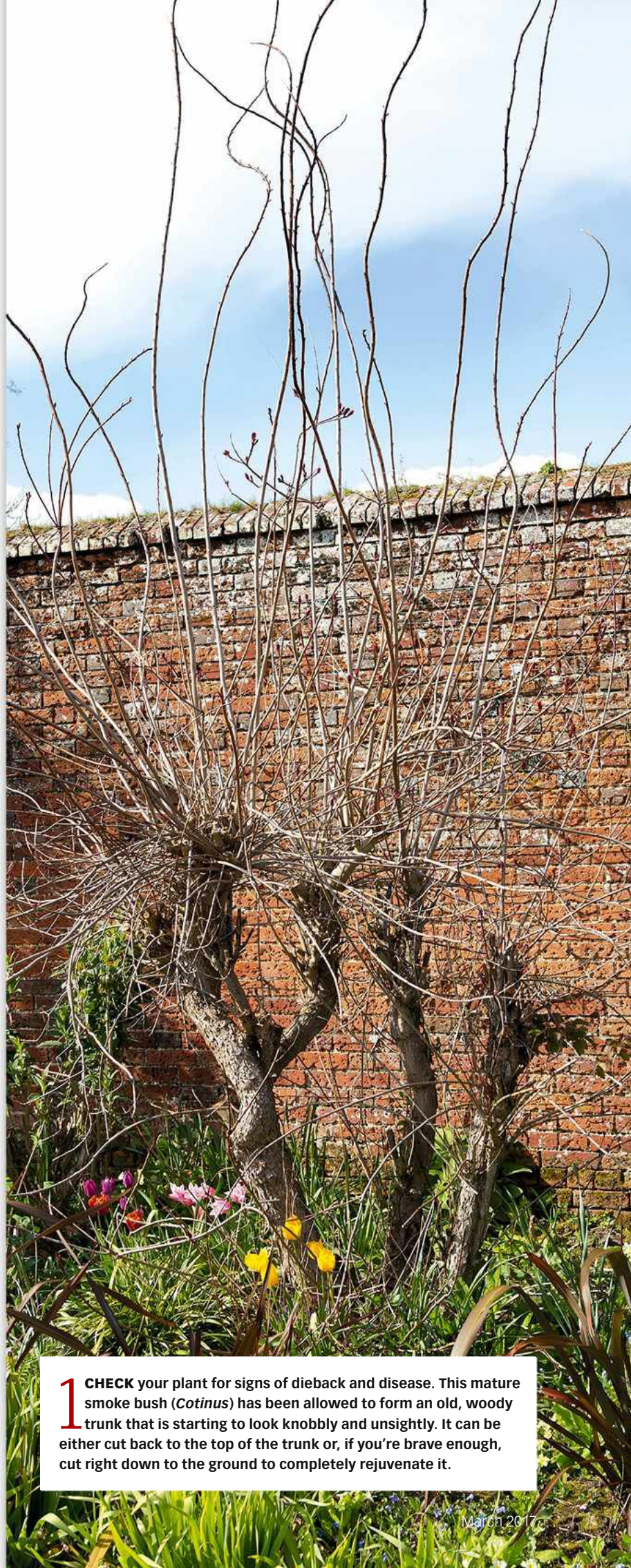
Another feature of most of these vigorous juvenile stems is their super-sized leaves. New shoots from the base often produce leaves that are up to 50 per cent larger than the shrub's normal leaves. If you cut the whole plant to the base in March, all the nutrient-rich sap will be channelled into just a few buds, which produce vigorous stems with extra-large leaves. Foliage colour and some variegations may be intensified too. Plants that will grow these dramatic leaves include ornamental elders, catalpas and variegated poplars.



Prune all stems of dogwoods down to the base in March

PLANTS TO PRUNE LIKE THIS NOW

- Dogwoods (*Cornus*)
- Elders (*Sambucus*) with purple or lime foliage
- Foxglove tree (*Paulownia*)
- Indian bean tree (*Catalpa*)
- Smoke bush (*Cotinus*)
- Variegated poplar (*Populus x jackii* 'Aurora')
- White-stemmed brambles, such as *Rubus thibetanus*
- Willows, including *Salix alba vitellina*



1 CHECK your plant for signs of dieback and disease. This mature smoke bush (*Cotinus*) has been allowed to form an old, woody trunk that is starting to look knobbly and unsightly. It can be either cut back to the top of the trunk or, if you're brave enough, cut right down to the ground to completely rejuvenate it.



2 USE SECATEURS to remove all the thin, twiggy growth from around the base of your shrub, cutting it down to as close to the ground as possible. This will give you much easier access to the main trunk with a pruning saw or loppers.

“New shoots from the base often produce leaves that are up to 50 per cent larger than the shrub’s normal leaves”



4 CUT BACK any thick branches or trunk as close to ground level as possible. Support their weight as you work, to prevent the wood ripping. Any such damage can lead to dieback of stems or rotting.



pruning

3 USE A PRUNING SAW to remove the tallest top growth (in several sections if necessary). This will reduce the weight and make it easier to saw through the stems lower down, leaving a neat cut, without any splitting or tearing of the wood.



5 BY MIDSUMMER, vigorous shoots will be tall and covered in large, colourful foliage. Thin out weak, whippy shoots at the base by cutting them out completely – this will channel the plant’s energy into the most vigorous and attractive stems and foliage.

Now on iPad

Your essential guide to pruning

Our 132-page pruning special, packed with expert advice, is now available for iPhone and iPad from the iTunes store for only £3.99. Download the free GW Magazine app and look under Special Editions.



Cotinus 'Grace' (no flowers if cut back hard every year)

Calendar	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
PRUNING												
ATTRactions	Purple-black stems			Spring growth		Large, vibrant leaves				Purple-black stems		

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The presenters

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101 Plant out woody shrubs



115 Pot up dahlia cuttings

WHAT TO DO NOW

This practical section is packed with advice from the *Gardeners' World* team on...

- Making a new lawn edge ● Checking soil temperature ● Sowing sweet peas
- Preparing beds for sowing ● Attracting wildlife to your garden

TURN THE PAGE FOR 50 THINGS TO DO IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH



104 Lift and divide snowdrops



116 Keep your wildlife healthy



111 Look after the new crop of seedlings

PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

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Monty uses cold frames to protect plants from harsh March weather

Monty's **month**

MARCH HAS ITS flowers, but in truth it is mostly a month of expectation, anticipation and preparation. It is time to sow many seeds and get the whole propagation process going, but at Longmeadow there are very few years when the ground is dry enough to sow direct in March, or even plant out seedlings. The winds can be biting, and snow and harsh frosts are not at all unusual.

So a balance has to be struck between growing on plants as much as possible, yet not exposing

them to unduly harsh conditions too early. This is where cold frames are invaluable. In fact, in spring I would rather forego my greenhouses than my cold frames. They offer enough protection to keep the youngest seedling from the harshest weather and yet can be opened right up to start the essential hardening-off process. And as the month progresses, my cold frames are the real measure of progress, regardless of how bare the garden might be.



Monty prunes this dark-leaved elder every March, just as the buds start to break

Encourage vigorous new growth

THE FIRST HALF of March is the best time to prune shrubs and climbers that flower on new stems, such as late-flowering clematis, roses, buddleia and caryopteris. I like to do this when I start to see new shoots appearing, but resist the temptation to start in a mild February, as the subsequent regrowth can be nipped back by a late frost.

For many gardeners, pruning is a cause of anxiety. However, there is one simple rule to follow: always cut back to something, be it a sideshoot or a leaf bud. Other than that, do not worry unduly about outward-facing buds or any such

finessing. Cut with abandon or don't cut at all. Either way, the plant will almost certainly be fine.

The reason for pruning now is to encourage vigorous new growth that will produce lots of flowers. In climbers such as clematis in the Viticella Group, it is also a way to remedy the problem of flowers being produced ever higher up the plant with correspondingly bare lower stems. Shrubs such as elder, cornus and willow can also be cut back hard to encourage fresh new shoots that will carry large vibrant leaves this summer or display colourful bark next winter.



Vigorous elder can be cut back hard, and any congested, damaged or diseased stems removed



With no leaves to support yet, shrubs can focus all their efforts on root growth



Dig a wide hole so the roots can easily penetrate the looser soil

Plant shrubs now so they get off to a good start

MARCH IS the perfect time to plant woody shrubs, as the roots can start to grow before the demands of new foliage become too stressful. Because each new shrub will hopefully be a valuable addition to your garden for years to come, it is well worth taking the trouble to plant them well.

First, make sure that every scrap of perennial weed is removed from the planting site,

then dig a wide but shallow hole at the same depth as the rootball height. Loosen the subsoil with a fork, but do not add compost or soil improver. I like to dust mycorrhizal powder over the roots to help establishment. I also plant slightly proud of the soil surface to avoid waterlogging, firming down the roots to form a slight cone. Always water in well, then cover the soil with a thick layer of garden compost.

Plant out broad bean seedlings

ALTHOUGH BROAD BEANS are one of the hardiest vegetables, and certain varieties can be sown outside in autumn and late winter, we don't risk sowing our earliest batches outdoors. Longmeadow's clay soil is too cold and wet for direct sowing of beans in winter, and even when protected by cloches, few make it through to spring.

Instead, we sow our first broad beans under cover and plant out the resulting seedlings this month, when they're sturdy and have well-formed roots. For a long harvesting season, we sow batches at regular intervals and we'll direct sow some once the soil warms up later this month.



Transplant sturdy young broad beans outdoors, spaced about 25cm apart



WATCH Monty's videos on spring jobs at gardenersworld.com/monty-don

✓CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Continue** mulching, especially after planting out, to maintain soil health
- ☐ **Feed** and water amaryllis plants after flowering
- ☐ **Plant** out salad rocket plugs if it's warm, for a peppery harvest
- ☐ **Remove** weeds from paving and gravel



WATCH Monty's videos on growing fruit and vegetables at gardenersworld.com/fruit-veg

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Once established, this tough little mallow with unusual grey-green heart shaped leaves, needs little maintenance and will even tolerate short periods of drought. Long flowering period from June to September. *Height: 75cm (30"). Spread: 60cm (24").*

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Deadhead your early bulbs

ALL SPRING BULBS are best deadheaded as soon as the flowers fade. This prevents them setting seed, which would divert valuable energy away from feeding the bulb – the source of next year's flowers.

Simply pinch out or snip off the flower, along with the slight swelling behind it, from the top of the stalk. Don't remove the green stalk or any foliage, as these allow the plant to make its own sugars, which feed and swell the bulb further. Leave the foliage in place for at least eight weeks after flowering, or until it turns yellow and dies down naturally.



Remove faded flowers, along with the swelling behind them



VISIT [gardenersworld.com/what-to-do-now](https://www.gardenersworld.com/what-to-do-now)

for lots more seasonal flower-growing advice



Remove any old, dead stems, so the new shoots can grow unhindered

Finish cutting back hardy perennials

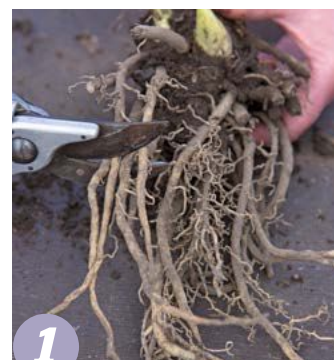
REMOVE ANY remaining dead stems from clumps of herbaceous perennials before the spring growth really gets under way. Snip them off at ground level or pull them out, and

stack them loosely upright beside the compost heap for a month or so. This will allow any insects, eggs and pupae to emerge and vacate the twigs before you compost them.

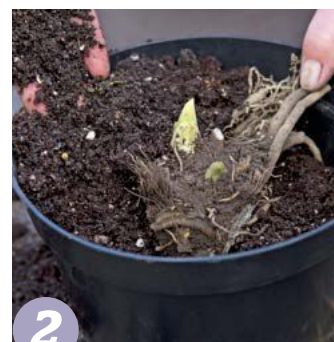
STEP BY STEP

Make new hosta plants for free

YOU CAN NEVER have too many hostas – they're great in shady pots and borders. Luckily they're easy to propagate by division now, just as they're starting into growth. You can make several new plants from one large clump by dividing it into smaller sections. Pot these up and grow on in a sheltered spot or cold frame, then plant out later this year.



1 Dig up the clump, then cut it into smaller sections, each with one or more pointed buds and plenty of roots. Trim the roots to fit in a pot.



2 Pot up each division in an equal parts mix (by volume) of multi-purpose compost and fine grit. Fill any gaps around the sides.



3 Firm the compost around the roots, and top up if necessary. Water well, then stand the pots in a sheltered position to grow on.



Place mulch between perennials, leaving space around the stem bases

Apply mulch to your beds

COVER GROUND with a thick layer of organic mulch to deter weed germination among your border plants and hold moisture in the soil. Aim to do it before the new spring growth really gets going, so access is easier and you cause as little damage as possible. Take particular care when working near prickly shrubs such as roses.

With little room to manoeuvre in a packed border, it's best to decant the mulch into a small tub or bucket, then place handfuls between your plants. Don't cover developing buds and foliage, and keep the mulch away from the stems of roses, to prevent rotting.



Open up the centre of the bush, removing any congested stems

Prune bush roses for better blooms

BY CUTTING BACK bush roses now (both cluster-flowered and single-bloomed hybrids), you'll concentrate their energy into fewer shoots that will carry good quality flowers this summer. First remove thin, weedy growth and any dead or damaged stems. Next prune out any stems growing into the centre of the bush. Finally, cut all remaining stems down to about three buds from their base. Cut just above an outward-facing bud, at the same angle as the bud.

✓CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Plant** roses and other flowering shrubs
- ☐ **Tidy** displays of alpine plants as they head towards peak flowering time
- ☐ **Weed**, and feed with blood fish and bone, herbaceous borders before you mulch
- ☐ **Finish** pruning climbing roses
- ☐ **Sow** hardy annuals in a cool greenhouse or outdoors
- ☐ **Plant** out hardy perennials, gladiolus corms, lily bulbs and rock plants

Lift and divide snowdrops

SNOWDROPS are one of the few flowers we see in winter and if you divide your clumps you can spread their loveliness around your garden. Now is the time to do this, when they're still growing but the flowers are fading.

Choose a large, well-established clump, then dig it up carefully. The bulbs will be quite deep, so take care not to decapitate them. Soak the clump in a bucket of water then gently tease it apart. Replant small clusters of bulbs about 10cm apart, at the same depth as before.



Pull apart large clumps of snowdrops into several pieces, then replant

STEP BY STEP How to take basal cuttings

IN EARLY SPRING you can take basal cuttings from a wide range of herbaceous perennials. The vigorous new shoots that sprout from the crown have the ability to produce roots at the base, and

this is how the majority of these plants spread naturally. Gardeners can take advantage of this to produce new plants that will quickly bulk up to produce their first flowers next year.

Once rooted, the cuttings can be potted up individually. Place them in a bright, sheltered spot and keep them well watered through summer. They will be large enough to plant into your borders by autumn.



1

Choose healthy, vigorous, medium-sized shoots to use as cuttings, avoiding both the thickest and the thinnest. Use a sharp knife to cut cleanly through the stem, as close to the base of the plant as possible.



2

Put the collected material straight into a polythene bag to help prevent wilting. Bring the bag indoors, out of the sun, and aim to get the cuttings prepared and inserted into the compost within 20 minutes.



3

Cut the stem just under the lowest bud or leaf joint, and trim the top to make the cutting 5-8cm long. Remove any leaves from the lower half of the stem and reduce the leaf area by cutting the remaining leaves in half.



4

Insert several cuttings in a small pot of compost. Water them thoroughly and cover with an inflated, clear polythene bag to maintain a humid atmosphere. Place the pot on a bright windowsill.

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✓CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Sow** broad beans, Brussels sprouts, leeks, lettuces, onions, parsley, parsnips, peas, radishes, rocket, spinach and turnips outdoors
- ☐ **Protect** new sowings with cloches if it's cold
- ☐ **Sow** beetroot, celeriac, cucumbers, parsley and basil under glass
- ☐ **Plant** asparagus, onion sets and rhubarb crowns
- ☐ **Divide** clump-forming herbs
- ☐ **Pollinate** peaches by hand if it's cool



Cut the heads of radicchio just before you want to use them

Harvest chicory heads

The slightly bitter salad leaves of red chicory or radicchio are at their reddest in early spring and survive the winter with little protection. If you cut the entire head away from the root, leaving a short stub, another head will develop. It will tend to bolt in longer spring days, so sow more soon for the next supply of heads.

STEP BY STEP Prepare beds for sowing

BEDS THAT HAVE been properly prepared for sowing contain plenty of warm air, some moisture, extra nutrients and have good drainage. Be sure to remove all weed seedlings as you work.

As the season warms up, the soil microbes start their work and help the plants access nutrients. Adding organic matter improves this process by feeding the microbes as well as improving soil structure.

Manure is richer than garden compost, but use whatever you have and add fertiliser to balance it. Add more organic matter to the surface through the season if you prefer not to dig.



1 Raised beds can be filled with soil rather than bought compost, and mixed well with organic matter and grit. Organic matter improves soil structure and releases nutrients slowly, while grit improves drainage.



2 Warm air pockets in the soil are important, but so is root stability. Shuffle across the soil with your feet to firm the soil surface. This gives the ideal pressure and only firms the top layers, where rooting takes place.



3 A fine tilth is needed to get even growing conditions, so rake into the very top surface of soil to break down larger lumps and make it level. If raking disturbs more lumps, tread them in or discard before the final rake.



4 Use the back of the rake to do a final surface preparation before drilling lines or broadcast sowing your spring seeds. If you can't reach the bed when sowing, stand on boards to avoid making footprints.



Remove forcing pots to reveal pale rhubarb shoots grown in the dark

Cut new stalks of forced rhubarb

THE BLANCHED, sweet, first new shoots from rhubarb grown under forcing pots are the best and should be harvested with great ceremony. Shoots will be thin, pale and may reach the top of the pot.

Avoid snapping the stems by holding them low down and gently pulling to the side. Pulling them cleanly from the base gives the next shoots space to develop and avoids rot. Leave the forcing pot off to allow the crown to shoot in the light, but avoid harvesting again from this plant this year.

WORDS: EMMA CRAWFORTH; ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/KALULU; NEIL HEPPWORTH; JASON INGRAM
WITH THANKS TO HAMPTON COURT PALACE FOR THEIR LOCATION



Make sure roots are moist before planting strawberry runners

Plant out strawberries

YOU WILL GET a small crop this summer and a bumper harvest next year by planting strawberry runners this spring. Place them 30cm apart in weed-free, free-draining soil.

Keep the crown (at the centre of the plant) on the surface or it will rot. Remove flowers this year for a bigger crop next year.

QUICK solution

WEED SEEDLINGS

In warm, damp weather, weed seeds already in the soil will quickly germinate. Use a hoe to slice through the stems of annual weeds in dry weather to kill them before they get a chance to flower and set seed.



The seeds of most edible crops won't germinate below 7°C

Check the soil's temperature

PLANTS HAVE different ideal germination and growing temperatures, and if you press the back of your hand against the soil surface you'll get a good feel for whether the soil is warm or not. For sowing vegetables, it's more accurate to use a

metal-tipped soil thermometer. Beets and cabbages can be sown at 7°C or above, while carrots do better at 10°C and sweetcorn at 12°C. Whatever method you use, take the temperature at sowing or planting depth and at a range of times through the day.

STEP BY STEP

Plant early potatoes now

START YOUR early spuds this month. (The same method is used for the later varieties, but they need 10-15cm more space.) Plant into well-prepared, weed-free soil.



1

Early potatoes need 30cm between the plants, so plan by counting how many you have before digging the trenches 15cm deep and 60cm apart.



2

Eyes sprout and form the stems that bear the new potato crop. Make sure you have them the right way up – the new shoots (the rose) should be upwards.



3

Space the seed potatoes along the trench, then rake the soil over them. Tamp gently until the surface is just below the level of the surrounding soil.

Pot up plugs of hardy herbs

HERBS SUPPLIED as small plugs are cheap to buy and easy to grow on. Rosemary will grow quickly into bushy plants that can be planted in the garden or used as hedging. Water the plugs and trim the newest foliage with a pair of scissors or penknife to encourage strong, compact growth. Pot the plugs into small pots using multi-purpose compost and grit, then grow on outside.



Make sure the blades are sharp and clean

Sow tomatoes



WORDS: EMMA CRAWFORTH. PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/5PH, STUART BLYTHE; JASON INGRAM

YOU CAN START sowing both your lettuce and tomato seeds now. They're versatile crops, happy in the ground or large pots – the tomatoes need a sunny spot, while lettuces are fine in shade. The lettuce seeds can be sown in batches throughout the spring and summer for continuous crops. Both need fertile soil or compost and frequent watering, but watch out for hungry pests! We will keep you supplied with growing tips over the next few months.



Sow your hearting lettuce 'Frisée de Beauregard' now for a summer of salads



TELL US how yours are doing by writing to **Gardeners' World Magazine**, Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, London W6 7BT or email letters@gardenersworld.com

QUICK solution

KEEP PLANTS COSY Spring temperatures can vary a lot and while these lettuces tolerate cool temperatures they need protection from cold nights. They'll grow faster if kept warm, too. Rather than building a cloche, you can cover them with a sheet of fleece, held down at the sides. As the lettuces grow, they'll push the fleece up. Don't forget to check underneath for slugs and to keep the soil moist.



Top tips for vine tomatoes

- **This type** of tomato is called vine, cordon or indeterminate.
- **Ensure** you get the best crop by removing any sideshoots competing with the plant's one, large main stem.
- **Tie** the single stem to a cane as it grows. This will support the plant and its heavy fruit, as well as making it easy to maintain the plant.
- **Remove** shoots that sprout in the axil between the main stem and leaves (see below).
- **Keep** plants well watered when they're growing vigorously, and water consistently to help the development of the fruits.
- **After planting**, feed the plants once a week with liquid tomato fertiliser, following the instructions carefully.
- **Trim away** the lower leaves as the first tomato trusses ripen. This will allow more air and light to get to the fruit.
- **Give** the plants plenty of warmth and light, but in high summer protect the plants from direct sun with shading.
- **Grow** French marigolds alongside greenhouse tomatoes to deter whitefly.



Vine tomatoes like 'Red Cherry' grow a tall main stem, and the sideshoots need to be removed

STEP BY STEP Sow lettuces

YOU CAN sow lettuce seeds indoors or outdoors as they will germinate in cool temperatures. If you sow in rows, you can give the crop optimum spacing and it will be easy to spot weeds. Either place the seeds or scatter them along the row. After they have germinated, thin out the seedlings in stages until the plants are 30cm apart. You can eat the thinnings.



1

Prepare the ground by removing all weeds, adding well-rotted garden compost or manure and raking the surface level.



2

Mark out a row with string, then sow seeds along it in a drill, 1.5cm deep. Trickle water along the row and cover with soil.



3

Label your 'Frisée de Beauregard' lettuces and mark the row. You'll be glad of the reminder when you've sown a few crops.



Our free 'Red Cherry' tomato seeds will provide several trusses of small sweet fruits

STEP BY STEP

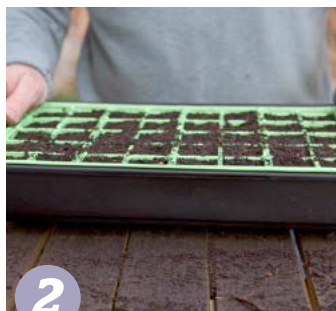
Sow cosmos

LONG flowering and reliable, cosmos make a great addition to the garden and cutting border. They grow well in low summer temperatures, so flowering will continue long into the autumn.

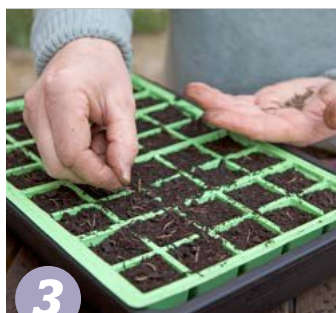
Dwarf forms are good fillers while the strong, tall-stemmed varieties need little support and supply cut flowers throughout the season. Grow in free-draining soil in a sunny position.



Firm multi-purpose compost into the cells of a modular tray. The compost needs to be moist, so soak the filled tray in another tray of warm water for 30 mins.



Cosmos germinates easily, so just place one seed on the surface of each cell, then cover with a 2mm layer of sieved compost or vermiculite.



The seeds will germinate fast in temperatures above 20°C, so place in a warm position, either on a heated base or in a sunny position in the greenhouse.



Look after early seedlings

NEWLY GERMINATED SEEDLINGS need plenty of light, so move them into a bright spot, but protect them from midday sun. Check them daily for watering and only water as the compost begins to dry out.

All seedlings need space to develop into strong plants, so prick them out as soon as they are touching each other or if the roots can be seen at the base of the container. Space pots out if you

can. Avoid mixing different plants together – keeping them in their groups helps you spot problems such as paling foliage, which means they need feeding, or leaf rot, which you should pinch out.

MONEY-SAVER TIP: ORDER PLUG PLANTS

Plug plants are readily available at this time of year and very cost effective. You'll have to do the work of growing them on, but they will establish quickly. Take them out of the pack as soon as you can and plant them into 9cm pots of compost.



EARLY APHIDS

Even cool greenhouses may be warm enough for aphids to breed now, so inspect plants all over frequently. Spray off any aphids you spot with soapy water before they become an infestation.



WORDS: EMMA CRAWFORTH; ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; TIM SANDALL



Nestle the tubers into the compost before covering them

Start begonias into growth

BEGONIA TUBERS need warmth to encourage them into growth before bedding out or planting in containers for the summer. Look for the old stem scar, normally in a hollow, and keep that face up.

Loosely fill a tray with compost and press the tubers into it – the top should be just under the surface as roots will emerge from high up on the tuber. Water well and place in a heated propagator.



VISIT gardenersworld.com/greenhouse for greenhouse and indoor projects you can do in March

How to use a heated propagator

A HEATED PROPAGATOR speeds up germination and almost guarantees the rooting of many cuttings. A ventilated cover is useful, as good airflow reduces the risk of fungal diseases that can rot young seedlings. The cover reduces light getting to the

plants, which is fine for cuttings, but seedlings must be moved into the light as soon as possible.

Check the propagator daily; water plants sparingly, air for half an hour if necessary and clean before filling with a batch of new plants.



Heated propagators encourage growth, but plants need checking daily

✓CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Order** biological control nematodes to kill greenhouse vine weevil larvae
- ☐ **Plant** early potatoes in containers for an extra-early harvest
- ☐ **Leave** heaters on during the night and on cold days
- ☐ **Open** vents around midday on warm days, but close them by mid-afternoon
- ☐ **Sow** seeds of chillies, sweet peppers and tomatoes (see p106)
- ☐ **Start** off gloxinias, arum lilies, cannas and achimenes
- ☐ **Harden** off veg sown in winter by placing the pots in cold frames and cloches outside



VISIT gardenersworld.com/seeds-bulbs to find out how to start off new plants under cover

STEP BY STEP How to sow sweet peas

SWEET PEAS sown now will give a mid-season crop of fragrant flowers growing up supports. Once sown, the seeds will germinate in a cold greenhouse, but you can speed up the process by warming the base.

- 1** Fill pots with a multi-purpose compost that has been kept in a warm place for a day or two.
- 2** Press one seed 1cm deep into the compost in the centre of a small pot or several around the edge of a larger one.
- 3** Soak the pots in a tray of tepid water for a couple of hours. The seeds must absorb this moisture before germination can take place.



Back to basics



Renew your garden's design by reshaping your lawn and beds

Make a new lawn edge

Many seasoned gardeners will tell you that a neat, sharp edge to the lawn will make the whole garden look good. Left to its own devices, grass from a lawn will always try to invade borders and regular trimming with edging shears during the growing season will help keep it in check – spring is a good time to sharpen up the edge.

Cutting down through the grass and soil underneath, using an edging iron or spade, will redefine the edge of the lawn and border. It's also a good way to reshape a border or to cut out a new one in an existing area of lawn. Once cut, a metal or plastic edging strip can be installed to stop it collapsing into the border, or you can simply keep it clipped with a pair shears.

It's also worth creating a shallow gulley in the border alongside this cut edge. This will look neat, limit the spread of grass into the border and help to stop soil washing onto the lawn.



VISIT [gardenersworld.com/12-mowing-tips](https://www.gardenersworld.com/12-mowing-tips) for more tips and advice on how to keep your lawn looking good all year

STEP BY STEP How to make a new lawn edge



1

Mark the lawn edge with a string line or biodegradable paint spray and cut along this line with a half-moon lawn edging iron or spade. Cut straight down through the grass leaves and roots.



2

Use the tool to cut the unwanted turf into 30 x 30cm pieces. Next, use the spade to cut horizontally about 5cm deep under the grass to remove each turf. Lift it away on the spade or roll the turf for removal.



3

Work slowly and methodically to ensure you don't remove too much heavy soil as you lift each turf. Bend your knees when lifting to avoid injury, as the spade will act as a lever, putting strain on your back.



4

Stack removed turf to make topsoil. Place a few pieces, grass side down, and continue to stack layers of inverted turf. As the turf rots down it forms loam – great for adding to raised beds.

WORDS: DAVID HURRION. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE

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Start dahlias now for plenty of late-summer blooms

Dahlia cuttings

IT'S HARD to work up any enthusiasm for those dry tubers that are offered for sale in little plastic bags behind glossy cardboard flaps that show illustrations of dahlia flowers, but they really are a brilliant buy if you use them as source material for cuttings. Not only do such cuttings root easily, but they also mean that each tuber is capable of producing several plants that will grow lustily and flower in the first summer after rooting.

Start the tubers off in trays or pots of damp potting compost. Bury them so that just the dry stem at the top is visible. If you don't have a greenhouse, then a porch or a bright windowsill will do just as well at starting them into growth. Good light and a temperature of 16-18°C (60-65°F) will do; if you can manage 21°C (70°F) then growth will be faster still. Make sure the compost does not dry out.

Alan's top five dahlias

- **'David Howard'** Decorative variety in a tasteful orange shade
- **'Bishop of Llandaff'** Bright red flowers over bronzed foliage
- **'Susan Carey'** A semi-cactus variety with yellow blooms
- **'Moor Place'** Wine red pompon with exquisitely shaped flowers
- **'White Alva'** Pure white variety for those who shun yellows

STEP BY STEP How to take dahlia cuttings



1 Remove shoots about 8cm long, each with a small piece of the parent tuber attached, which will encourage faster rooting. It's not vital but it really does help.



2 Trim the area of cut so that the small piece of tuber remains, but any wispy or torn sections are cut away. This will minimise the likelihood of rotting during rooting.



3 Place cuttings in a mixture of equal parts multi-purpose compost and sharp sand. Position the pots in good light at the temperatures suggested above.



4 Pinch out the growing tips to encourage a bushy habit, and make sure light is good to avoid them becoming drawn and leggy. Pot on when established.



Garden for wildlife

WILDLIFE ADDS a whole different dimension to a garden. One of the most wonderful things that happened to me last year was finding that we had resident swallows in our new home. I spent hours watching them. Best of all, encouraging wildlife into your garden really is simple. All that most creatures require is somewhere safe to shelter and breed, plus a place to forage and feed.

Don't think that now the winter is over, everything will be fine for our wildlife – creatures that have survived the cold weather could now be coming out of hibernation, mating and rearing their young, so it's really important to continue helping them. Providing shelter for wildlife is easily done; why not add a box for birds or bats to your plot? Make sure you choose a box that suits the ones in your area. You may assume you've missed the nesting period, but they'll still be used for shelter if the weather turns bad; you may well find you have a visitor.

Catch up with Adam Frost on TV

Gardeners' World returns

Adam, Monty, Carol and the team will return with plenty of useful advice when the new series starts on 10 March, 8.30pm



FOUR WAYS... to promote wildlife in your garden



MAKE COMPOST The process of decomposition generates heat, which makes for a great habitat and attracts all kinds of creatures. I've seen slow worms, toads, even a grass snake in a compost heap!



FEED THE BIRDS Many people think that come the spring, all is fine, but it really does help to keep feeding the birds, who will still be grateful for any extra nutrition, as most are busy raising their young.



GROW A MEADOW Leave an area of long grass or wildflowers, creating a diverse environment that offers pollen, seeds and shelter. You could just mow between July and late autumn to make a spring meadow.



MULCH YOUR SOIL If you dig and feed the garden too much, it can actually end up with less wildlife. However, it's good to keep adding organic matter and let worms, bugs and beetles keep the soil healthy.

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

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Dig up and divide vigorous perennials to make space for new plantings

Tackle overcrowded borders

FAST-GROWING herbaceous plants, such as asters, Shasta daisies and achilleas, can quickly fill a border. While in larger gardens this can be a positive benefit, in smaller gardens they can soon outgrow

their welcome, taking up valuable space that could be used to grow a wider range of plants.

The simple remedy is to lift and divide clumps of vigorous plants now, replanting a small portion and

sharing the rest with friends or replanting elsewhere in the garden.

To free up additional space in your borders, you can also trim back any shrubs that are overgrown or have low overhanging branches.

Propagate your daphne

WITH THEIR highly fragrant flowers, daphnes are delightful shrubs. And if you have one, you can try making more using a simple technique called layering.

First select a low, lax branch that can be bent down to the soil surface. Make a shallow, steeply angled cut with a sharp knife on the underside of the branch where it touches the soil. Bury the stem shallowly at this point and hold it in place with a U-shaped pin of wire. After 12 months, the stem will be well rooted and can be cut from the parent plant.



Pin a low branch into the ground and it should root within a year

Beechgrove ✓CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Check** and replace string and rubber ties on climbers and vines
- ☐ **Get** on top of weeding now, when the weeds are raring to go and establish quickly
- ☐ **Start** achimenes, oxalis and gloxinias into growth for an indoor display
- ☐ **Mix** and aerate seed and potting compost to open it up prior to use

VIEW FROM BEECHGROVE

Get beds set for growing



**Beechgrove
Garden**

BEECHGROVE GARDEN

Back on air on Thursdays at 7.30pm, BBC2 Scotland, from 30 March, and Sundays, BBC2, from 2 April.



PART of our spring routine, when the soil is full of moisture and warming up, is to treat some of the established borders to a weed, feed and mulch, in that order. Weed competition is removed, nutrients are made available at an optimum time, and the mulch retains moisture, improves structure and suppresses the next generation of weeds.

A balanced granular fertiliser with similar proportions of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, is lightly forked in around the base of the plants as a top dressing every few years. Plant condition and soil tests can help to reveal which, if any, single nutrient may be required. Always ensure the soil is moist before feeding and mulching.



Before mulching, ensure beds are weed-free and damp

BEECHGROVE WORDS: MAIRI RATTRAY. WORDS: EMMA CRAWFORTH; DAVID HURRION. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

STEP BY STEP

Neaten up sacred bamboo

Sacred bamboo (*Nandina domestica*) is a great choice for a small garden, offering attractive foliage, flowers and berries. It's slow growing and rarely needs pruning. However, it does benefit from a little maintenance at this time of year. Removing some of the oldest stems and any dead material will ensure you can fully appreciate this shrub's elegant architectural shape.



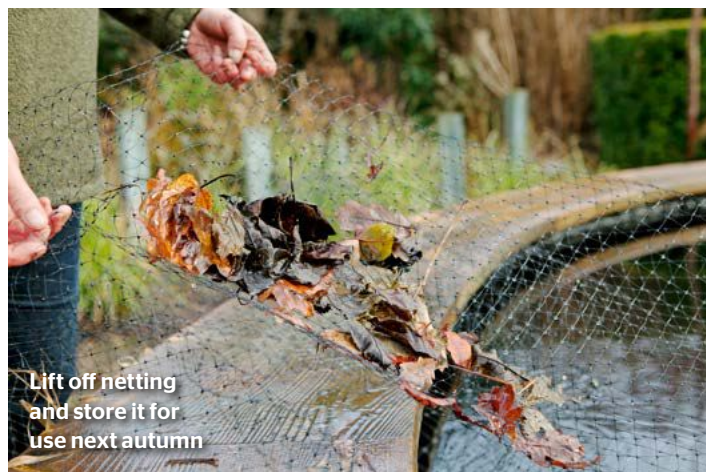
Use secateurs to remove about a third of the oldest upright stems, cutting them back to a low joint or right down the ground.



Prune out the old flower stalks and any remains of old berries, cutting back to the top of the stem, or just above a leaf.



Check the rest of the plant, cutting out any dead or weak shoots back to where they meet a strong stems with leaves attached.



Remove netting from ponds

NOW THAT last autumn's leaves have been collected or have rotted down into the soil, there's no risk they'll be blown into the pond. Any netting in place since last autumn can now be removed. It's important to do this before marginal plants start to grow up through it, to avoid damaging the delicate new shoots.

Pick off any debris from the netting, then lay it out flat so you can fold or roll it up neatly. Store it indoors for use again in autumn.

SPACE-SAVER TIP: PLANT BOUNDARIES

Fruit trees, vines and climbing ornamentals add another dimension to the garden when trained on boundaries. Now's the time to prepare the ground and plant them, so they can benefit from spring rain and get established before summer.

Top up gravel around alpines

NEW GROWTH and flower buds are starting to develop on rock garden plants and alpines, so to stop raindrops splattering them with soil, add a fresh layer of gravel, stone chippings or grit. These types of mulch allow rain to wash down through them, without letting soil splash back up. Rinse the mulch before applying it, to get rid of any

powdered stone or sand that can splash onto the leaves and flowers.

Topping up this mulch every spring will also help to maintain good drainage around the crowns of these plants. Most of them are able to cope with low temperatures, but don't like to sit in heavy, wet soil. A gritty mulch helps to draw the dampness away.



Gravel mulch helps to show off alpines, as well as improving drainage



Cut out damaged wood before disease can get a foothold

Prune out any damage

TAKE A CLOSE look at your trees and shrubs to find any damaged stems and branches. If left in place, these can provide an entry point for disease, so prune them out, removing the damaged area completely. Make a clean cut either just above a healthy bud or right at the base of the stem.



VISIT gardenersworld.com/what-to-do-now for lots more ideas on what to do in the garden this month

STEP BY STEP

Lift and repot pond plants

SUBMERGED in water, pond plants are often left to their own devices, but they will benefit from being lifted and potted up into a larger basket of fresh aquatic compost every few years. You can also take the opportunity to divide the plants, discarding the old, weak central portion, and repot the most vigorous pieces from around the edge of the clump.



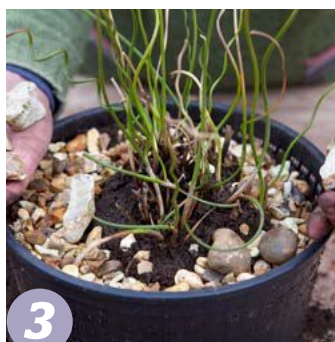
1

Lift the aquatic pot or basket from the pond, then remove the plant – you may need to trim off some of the roots or even cut open the pot.



2

Choose a larger aquatic basket with plenty of space for new root growth. Use a loam-based aquatic compost and firm it down well.



3

Cover the surface with a 2-3cm layer of gravel to hold the compost in place. Then lower the basket slowly back into the pond.



Cut back straggly stems to ensure this summer's flowers are produced low down

Prune late-summer clematis

CLEMATIS that flower from July onwards (known as Group 3) tend to grow vigorously, quickly forming a tangle of straggly stems. This should all be pruned out now, almost down to ground level, to encourage fresh shoots from the base. These will grow rapidly and carry flowers this summer.

You can also lightly prune large-flowered clematis varieties that bloom in May and June (known as Group 2), if they've grown too large. However, these flower on last year's stems, so you should only cut back the longest stems by no more than a third, pruning back to a pair of buds.

TIME-SAVER TIP: GET THE FIRST MOW RIGHT

Resist the temptation to run the mower over unmown grass with the blades set low. Two passes, the first with a strimmer or with the mower blades set higher, will be quicker and easier.

✓CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Clip** long grass around trees with shears before mowing
- ☐ **Plant** winter aconites 'in the green' in any ground under trees and shrubs that was bare last winter
- ☐ **Erect** plant supports for perennials while they're small enough to grow through them
- ☐ **Order** nematodes for slug control in sites where you have plants that get nibbled



VISIT gardenersworld.com/clematis

for more on different clematis varieties and their care, including when to prune



NUTRIENT DEFICIENCY

Shrubs that have been in the ground for a long time can use up all the nutrients in their soil. This shows up as a discoloration of the leaves. Apply a general fertiliser and test the soil if problems persist.



Next month

- ☐ **Monty** takes cuttings of scented pelargoniums
- ☐ **Alan** sows vegetable seeds straight into the soil
- ☐ **Control** attacks of leaf curl on peach trees
- ☐ **PLUS** find out how to pamper houseplants

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Days 1-3. London to Chur. Meet at our dedicated Departure Office at St Pancras International, where we depart by Eurostar to Brussels, connecting with the high-speed service to Cologne for an overnight stay. We continue to Switzerland on Day 2. We journey across the border via Zürich, joining the superb Swiss railway network. Our destination is Chur where we spend three nights at the Hotel Freieck. Day 3 is free to explore and is the perfect opportunity to discover the area using your included Swiss Card for 50% fares.

Day 4. The Bernina Express. Today's excursion takes us on the historic Bernina Express past mighty glaciers, rushing mountain streams and Alpine meadows. The line is over 100 years old and has UNESCO World Heritage status. From Chur we head south, travelling across the Landwasser Viaduct, through the Albula Tunnel and over the Bernina Pass to an altitude of more than 7,000 feet. We descend towards Poschiavo in the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland. We have time for lunch before our return journey.

Day 5. The Glacier Express. We leave Chur today, travelling on the iconic Glacier Express – the 'world's slowest express train'. Our entire journey is accompanied by typically Swiss scenery as we travel along the Rhine Valley, then over the Oberalp Pass. The final part of our journey takes us

to the small town of Brig where we take the local railway to Kandersteg for three nights at the Hotel Victoria.

Days 6-7. Zermatt & a day at leisure. Today we visit the car-free resort of Zermatt. Starting on the narrow-gauge train to Visp, we join the mountain track for the steep ascent to Zermatt, nestled below the peak of the Matterhorn. On arrival you are free to spend your time as you choose, perhaps take the funicular railway to the summit of the Gornergrat. Day 7 is free to explore Kandersteg and the surrounding region. We particularly recommend travelling along the Rhône Valley to Montreux. From here you can enjoy a cruise on Lake Geneva or join the GoldenPass Line panoramic train. The journey on the Centovalli Railway across 'a hundred valleys' to Locarno on the northern shores of Lake Maggiore and is also an excellent choice for today.

Day 8. Return to London. We depart from Kandersteg to Lake Geneva, where we join a direct TGV service to Paris, with the opportunity to see the beautiful scenery along the shores of Lake Geneva and the attractive rolling French hills. After crossing Paris by coach we connect with Eurostar to London.



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- 12 meals, including 7 breakfasts and 5 dinners
- Free time in Chur
- GRJ Swiss Travel Card for 50% discounted fares on free days for rail, boat and most mountain railway journeys

ALL EXCURSIONS INCLUDED

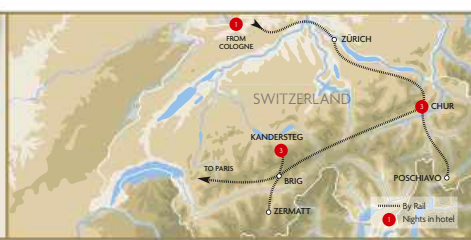
- Full-day excursion on the Bernina Express
- Journey on the iconic Glacier Express
- Mountain railway excursion to Zermatt
- At leisure in Poschiavo
- Explore Kandersteg

DEPARTURES

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Your veg year planner

Find out how and when to sow your favourite crops, and when to harvest

 sow under cover
  sow direct outside
  harvest

Vegetables	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
 Aubergines Sow → 0.5cm Final spacing ↔ 70cm apart ↗ 75cm between rows		SOW					HARVEST					
 Beans (broad) Sow → 8cm Final spacing ↔ 20cm apart ↗ 45cm between rows	SOW			SOW						SOW		
 Beans (French & runner) Sow → 5cm Final spacing ↔ 15cm apart ↗ 60cm between rows				SOW		SOW						
 Beetroot Sow → 2.5cm Final spacing ↔ 10cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows			SOW				SOW					
 Broccoli, calabrese Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 30cm apart ↗ 45cm between rows			SOW	SOW				HARVEST				
 Broccoli, sprouting Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 60cm apart ↗ 60cm between rows		SOW			SOW							
 Brussels sprouts Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 60cm apart ↗ 60cm between rows	HARVEST	SOW						HARVEST				
 Cabbages Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 45cm apart ↗ 45cm between rows		SOW										
 Carrots Sow → 1.5cm Final spacing ↔ 10cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows	HARVEST											
 Cauliflowers Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 60cm apart ↗ 70cm between rows	UNDER CLOCHE		SOW									
 Celery Sow → on surface Final spacing ↔ 25cm apart ↗ 25cm between rows	HARVEST		SOW		SOW				SOW			SOW
 Chicory Sow → 1cm Final spacing ↔ 25cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows			SOW									
 Courgettes Sow → 2.5cm Final spacing ↔ 90cm apart ↗ 90cm between rows	HARVEST			SOW								
 Cucumbers Sow → 2.5cm Final spacing ↔ 30cm apart ↗ 60cm between rows			SOW		SOW							
 Kale Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 60cm apart ↗ 45cm between rows	HARVEST		SOW			SOW					HARVEST	

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	SOW	HARVEST	SOW									
Leeks Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 15cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows								HARVEST				
	SOW			SOW								
Lettuces Sow → 1cm Final spacing ↔ 25cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows												
		SOW		SOW					SOW			
Onions Sow → 1.5cm Final spacing ↔ 10cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows												
	HARVEST											
Parsnips Sow → 1.5cm Final spacing ↔ 15cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows												
	SOW		SOW							SOW		
Peas Sow → 5cm Final spacing ↔ 10cm apart ↗ equal to plant's eventual height												
												
Peppers & chillies Sow → 0.5cm Final spacing ↔ 45cm apart ↗ 60cm between rows												
	SOW UNDERCLOCHE			SOW								
Radishes Sow → 1cm Final spacing ↔ 3cm apart ↗ 15cm between rows												
	SOW		SOW									
Salad leaves Sow → 1cm Final spacing ↔ 2cm apart ↗ 15cm between rows												
												
Spinach Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 15cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows												
												
Spring onions Sow → 1.5cm Final spacing ↔ 2.5cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows												
				SOW								
Squash/pumpkins Sow → 2.5cm Final spacing ↔ 90cm apart ↗ 90cm between rows												
	HARVEST				SOW							
Swedes Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 20cm apart ↗ 40cm between rows												
				SOW								
Sweetcorn Sow → 3cm Final spacing ↔ 35cm apart ↗ 45cm between rows												
			SOW		SOW							
Swiss chard Sow → 2.5cm Final spacing ↔ 20cm apart ↗ 45cm between rows												
		SOW										
Tomatoes Sow → 2cm Final spacing ↔ 40cm apart ↗ 90cm between rows												
Vegetables												



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Night worker

Although rarely seen, the nocturnal badger is one of the UK's most widely recognised animals

FACTFILE

Badger

Meles meles

DID YOU KNOW Badgers are nocturnal, and spend the day underground in a network of tunnels and chambers, known as a sett. They live in and around the sett in social groups of about six, and mark their territory with shallow pits filled with faeces, known as latrines.

DIET Badgers have a wide and varied diet, but seem particularly fond of earthworms, often damaging lawns in their search for them. They also love sweet things, and are attracted to apples, sweetcorn and other fruits and berries. However, if the opportunity presents itself, they will eat other animals, including hedgehogs.

LIFECYCLE Mating takes place in the spring and usually only one female in a social group breeds. Litters of up to three blind and hairless cubs are born the following February. They stay in the nest for around eight weeks before venturing above ground. By late summer, they are fully weaned and feeding independently.

HABITAT Badger setts are often established in urban areas, including gardens and they are most likely to be found in woodland-like habitat. Established setts will have several entrances.

AT RISK Common and widespread in Britain, mainly in the south-west, but rarer in the north and east, especially Scotland; common throughout most of Ireland, but absent from the Isle of Man and Outer Hebrides. Populations have increased since the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which reinforced the banning of badger digging (trapping badgers in their setts for baiting or killing), but are now thought to be stable. Mortality is high at around 20 per cent of adults, with the majority being killed by cars.

CAUSE OF CONTROVERSY There is continuing debate about the role of badgers and cattle infecting each other with bovine tuberculosis (TB). While some badgers are infected with TB, many argue against them being the cause of TB in cattle. However, areas in the west and south-west of the UK are subject to a Defra-controlled cull. Many also blame badgers for the UK's struggling hedgehog population, but the British Hedgehog Preservation Society refutes this, stating that hedgehog numbers are falling in areas where badger populations are low, and in good habitats both species coexist if invertebrates are common.

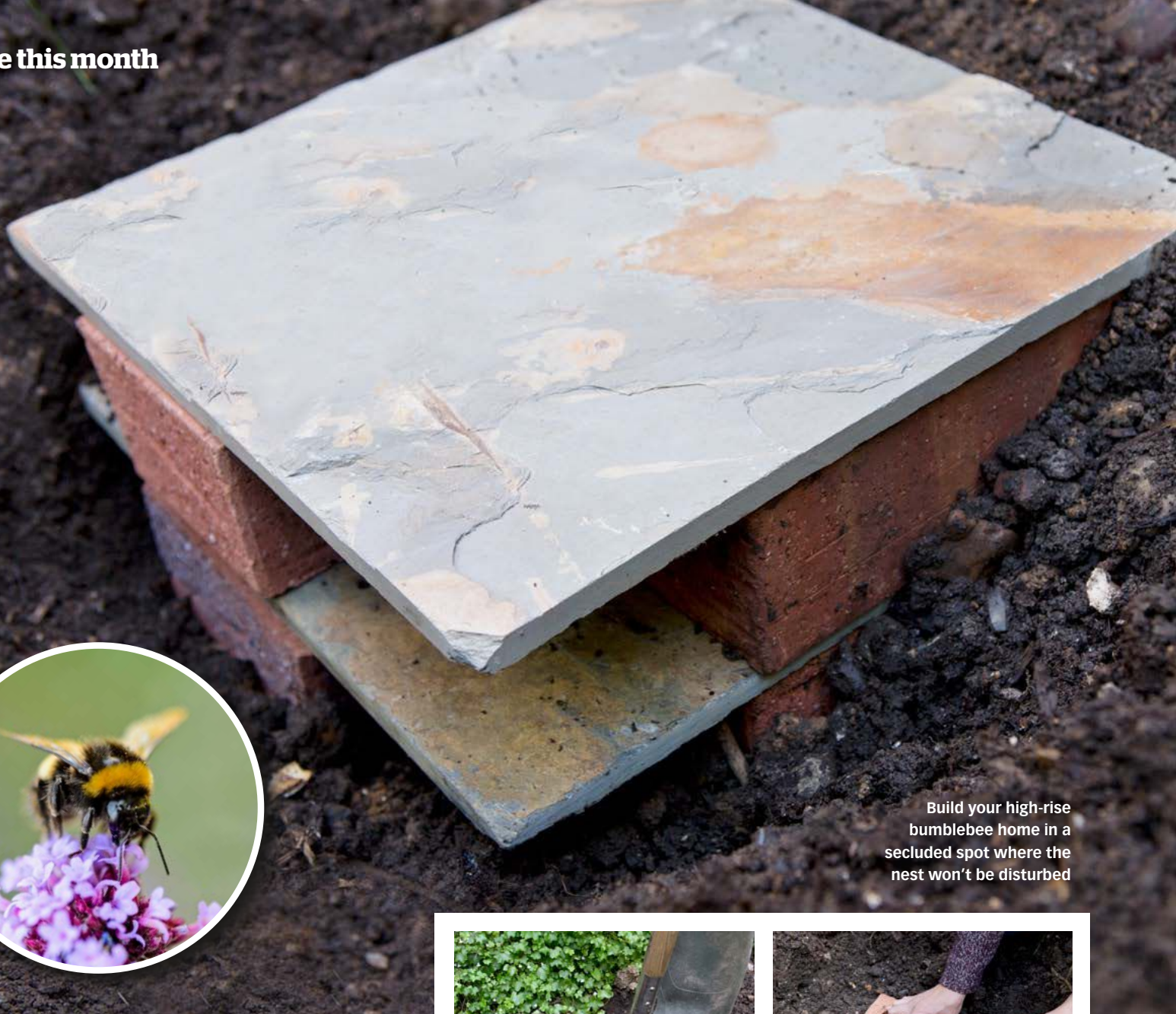
Badgers can be found in woodland gardens



Wildlife gardening

We've reprinted our popular *Gardening for Wildlife* special edition. With stunning images, this 132-page book includes step-by-step projects and expert advice from your favourite BBC presenters. On sale, priced £6.99 at bit.ly/gwwildlife





Build your high-rise bumblebee home in a secluded spot where the nest won't be disturbed

How to...

Make a two-tier bumblebee nester

Bumblebees typically nest in old mouse burrows and compost heaps, but this two-tier design may attract them and will support two nests in a small space. Bumblebee nests are annual, so set up yours now and look out for nest-searching queens over the coming weeks. Activity will peak in summer and decline before the nest dies in autumn. Bumble bees aren't aggressive and there's little chance of being stung.

YOU WILL NEED

- Spade
- Six bricks, two of which have been broken in two
- Insulating material (we used wool insulation)
- Two slate tiles, or similar
- Old mouse/hamster bedding (optional)



1 Find a shady plot (bumblebees don't like sun on their nests) and dig a hole as deep as the height of two bricks and two slates.



2 Arrange the bricks in a quadrangle, creating a chamber in the centre, with a channel leading to it.



3 Fill the chamber with the insulating material, and bedding if using, smoothing out a little cradle that the queen can sit in.



4 Place a tile over the bricks then arrange your second lot of bricks in the same way, on the tile, to create a second tier.



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Fresh from the garden

Aromatic bay leaves add flavour to all kinds of dishes, from soups to milk puddings. A handsome evergreen that clips well into topiary, it suits containers as well as borders

FACT FILE

Bay

DID YOU KNOW? A native of Southern Europe, *Laurus nobilis*, was revered by Ancient Greeks and Romans as a ceremonial laurel symbolising wisdom and glory: wreaths of bay were worn by emperors, poets and athletes, and the Latin word 'laureate' means 'crowned with laurels'. On a practical level, the aromatic leaves deter pests, and can be placed in stored fruit and flour to keep out weevils.

NUTRITION Bay is rich in vitamin C, folic acid and many minerals. Ingested in large amounts it can have a narcotic effect and may be harmful in pregnancy.

HARVEST The foliage can be picked all year. Select healthy undamaged leaves and harvest as required.

STORE Dry whole leaves slowly, out of direct sunlight, then keep in airtight jars for up to a year.

HOW TO GROW Does well in pots or in the ground and can be clipped into topiary shapes. In mild areas, it will reach 7.5m if unpruned. Grow in sun or light shade and free-draining soil, and shelter from the wind, especially in cold areas. Use soil-based potting compost. Raise pots off the ground or stand on a porous surface so water drains freely. Keep moist but don't overwater, and feed in spring with controlled-release fertiliser. Prune in spring or summer and look out for scale insect and bay sucker.

OUR CHOICES *Laurus nobilis* is widely available and grown for culinary use. *L. nobilis* 'Aurea' has yellow leaves and needs a warm, sunny site. *L. nobilis angustifolia* has narrow, green leaves.

Bay

Calendar	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
PLANT												
HARVEST												

Three ways with bay...



... STUFFED SARDINES

SERVES 4

sardines 4 large or 8 small, scaled and gutted
oranges 2, 1 thinly sliced and slices halved, and 1 juiced

bay leaves 4 or 8, depending on number of fish

olive oil

paprika hot or sweet, to dust

cucumber ½, peeled and cut into chunks

Stuff the fish with 2/3 orange slices and a bay leaf, then season. Rub with a little oil and dust with paprika. Cook the fish on a rack under a hot grill for 2 mins on each side for small fish, 4 mins per side for large. When cooked, squeeze over some of the orange juice. Dress the cucumber with the remaining juice, sea salt and black pepper and serve.



... CLEMENTINE GIN

MAKES 750ML

gin 750ml

clementines 3

caster sugar 3 tbsp

ginger 50g, sliced and bashed

bay leaves 3

Pour the gin into a large bowl or jar. Peel the zest from the clementines, setting aside 3 strips, then peel them and remove all the white pith from the segments. Add the segments and zest strips to the gin, along with the remaining ingredients. Leave to infuse for 3 days, then decant into several smaller bottles or 1 large one. Serve with tonic and a couple of orange segments in each glass.

... LAMB HOTPOT

SERVES 6

lamb best end of neck, or stewing, diced 1 kg

olive oil

onions 2, chopped

carrots 2, chopped

bay leaves 2

plain flour 2 tbsp

lamb stock 500ml

Worcestershire sauce

swede 1, peeled, quartered and thinly sliced

butter

parsley chopped to serve

Brown the lamb in batches in a little oil, then put into a deep, ovenproof frying pan with a lid. Brown the onions in a little more oil, followed by the carrots, and add these to the lamb. Tuck in the bay leaves. Add the flour to the browning pan and stir for 2 minutes, then add the stock, bring to a boil and scrape the



base well. Shake in Worcestershire sauce and season, tip onto the lamb. Put a lid on and cook for 1½ hours. Layer the swede on top, seasoning as you go, and dot butter over the top. Put the lid back on and cook for another 20 minutes. Grill lightly to brown the top and scatter with parsley.

BAY LEAF RECIPES taken from *Olive Magazine*. For other recipes using this aromatic herb, log on to olivemagazine.com and search for 'bay'

20 best outdoor tomatoes

Whatever your growing conditions, **Sally Nex** guides you through choosing the best varieties for your garden

There's never been a better time to grow tomatoes outdoors, with warmer summers and new blight-resistant varieties on offer. Stop worrying about fruits not ripening outside, and forget about the need for a greenhouse - outdoor growing can now guarantee a delicious crop. In a sunny, sheltered spot, tomatoes will ripen beautifully outdoors, while rich soil and rainfall mean there's less need for feeding and watering.

It's all about which types you grow, though. Prima donnas, like beefsteaks, demand greenhouse pampering; trying to grow them outside is like taking a Maserati sports car off-roading. You'll do much better with the tomato equivalent of a Land Rover - robust, vigorous and resilient. So overleaf we give you a selection of cherry and salad tomatoes that will all do well outside.

The site where you're going to grow your tomatoes, where in the country you are, and how much time you can spend looking after them, will also affect which varieties are right for you.

Simply check out our top 20 most reliable outdoor varieties, listed overleaf. And use our tomato selector to find varieties that are tailor-made for you and your garden - then get sowing!

Next month, Monty shares how he grows his tomatoes at Longmeadow.



Outdoor tomato checklist

Where do you want to grow?

If you have plenty of spare ground, you can grow heftier tomatoes that need lots of room to stretch their roots. Plants in the ground require less watering. Growing bags, especially stacked two deep, are a good option if you have poor soil

or no space in the ground, but they need regular feeding and watering. Containers and large hanging baskets are a great way to squeeze a tomato into a small space, but both need daily watering and a weekly feed to keep them healthy.



Which type do you want to grow?

There are two main tomato types: cordon (also known as indeterminate), which grow straight up, and bush (determinate), which reach about 60cm tall then spread into cascades of branches and fruit.

Cordon tomatoes give the heaviest crops, but need training and support. Train the main stem up a sturdy cane. Check the plant several times a week and pinch or cut out the sideshoots that appear between the leaf stem and the main stem. If you leave these, they'll take energy away from the productive

main stem. When the main stem reaches 2m tall, remove the top to focus efforts on ripening the fruit.

Vigorous cordons give you maximum harvests in the ground and in growing bags, but can make pots unstable and top heavy.

Bush tomatoes are smaller plants, so ideal for pots and hanging baskets, and need no support or training. Don't remove the sideshoots, as these will bear fruit on this type of tomato. If necessary, you can provide just enough support to keep the fruit off the ground.



How do you want to grow?



Growing from seed is cheap and you have a vast choice of varieties, but raising seedlings demands time and indoor space. (See p108 for our guide to growing toms from seed.) Buying young plants is pricier but easier. Variety choice is more limited, but you can buy a selection of different varieties.

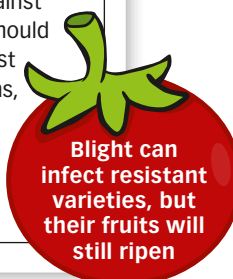
The most expensive option is grafted plants, where sweet-fruited varieties have been spliced onto turbo-charged roots to give stronger plants that crop for longer outside. They're a great choice on poor soils, but too vigorous for growing bags or hanging baskets. Although widely available, variety choice is limited.

Are you at risk of blight?



So-called 'late blight' thrives in warm, damp summers. Look out for tell-tale brown patches on leaves, which spread rapidly to reduce the plant to a rotten mess. Minimise the risk of infection by watering your plants with tap water, taking care not to wet the foliage.

For outdoor growing, it's safest to choose blight-resistant varieties. These hold out longer against infection, so you should still get a crop. Most will show symptoms, but crucially the fruits will remain unaffected long enough to ripen.



How to choose the right tomato for your space



GROUND

HANGING BASKET

bush

cordon

Cordons give big harvests, but need to be trained up supports

tumbling/bush

seeds

grafted

seeds

grafted

seeds

CHERRY
● 'Koralik'

SALAD
● 'Defiant'
● 'Latah'

CHERRY
● 'Lizzano'

CHERRY
● 'Gardener's Delight'
● 'Red Cherry'

SALAD
● 'Mountain Magic'
● 'Outdoor Girl'

CHERRY
● 'Crimson Cherry'

SALAD
● 'Crimson Crush'
● 'Shirley'

CHERRY
● 'Losetto'
● 'Romello'

Our 20 best varieties

'CRIMSON CHERRY'
Outstanding resistance to late blight, producing tasty, bite-sized fruits.

'CRIMSON CRUSH'
First in the new wave of blight-resistant toms, with large, thin-skinned fruits.

'DEFIANT'
A blight-resistant all-rounder, producing good-sized salad toms on sprawling plants.

'DORADA'
The sweet yellow fruits ripen really early, before blight hits.

'FANDANGO'
Large, scarlet fruits on plants that hold off blight well and resist verticillium and fusarium wilt.

'GARDENER'S DELIGHT'
Perennially popular for its flavour, reliability and long fruit-laden trusses.

'GLACIER'
An early ripening toughie, unbothered by cold summers, producing medium-sized red toms.

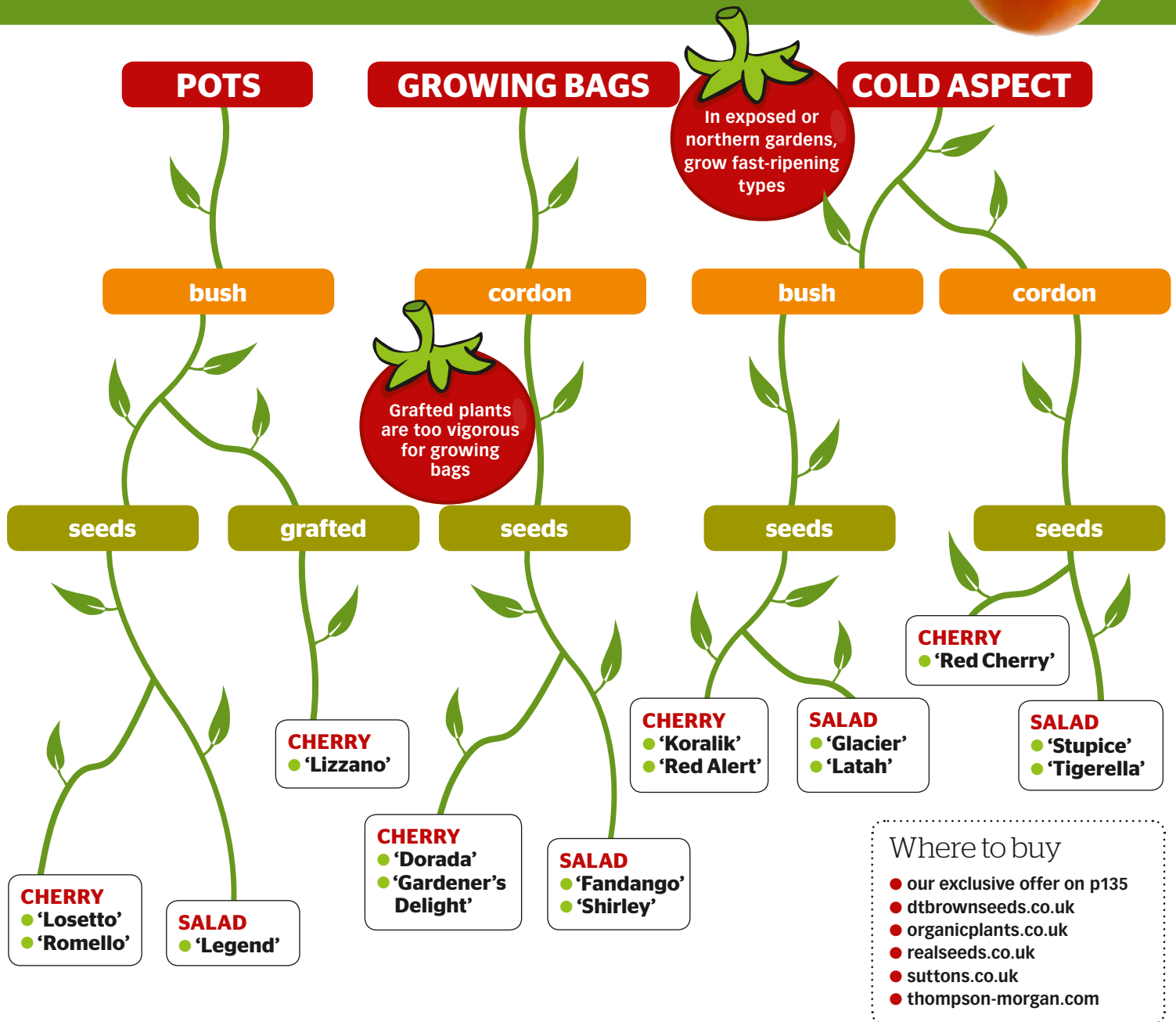
'KORALIK'
A blight-resistant Polish heirloom variety. The prolific, jungly plants are laden with sweet fruits.

'LATAH'
Always the first to fruit, with smallish but delicious toms on sprawling bushes.

'LEGEND'
Holds off blight long enough for an early crop of medium-sized, tasty fruits.



Start with where you're going to grow your tomatoes, then choose between vigorous cordons or low-maintenance bush types, then whether you want to sow seeds or try grafted plants. For each, we only recommend the types that will thrive in that situation, so you're sure to end up with the perfect choice.



'LIZZANO'

Shrugs off blight to froth over containers, laden with cherry toms.

'LOSETTO'

Outstanding blight resistance and a pretty cascading habit.

'MOUNTAIN MAGIC'

A reliable all-rounder, heavily laden with smallish fruits even in blight-prone areas.

'OUTDOOR GIRL'

A compact cordon – sometimes grown as a bush – with reliably early, flavoursome fruits.

'RED ALERT'

Super-early, its plump fruits are among the first to ripen.

'RED CHERRY'

The abundant trusses of sweet, scarlet cherry-sized fruits ripen successional through the summer.

'ROMELLO'

This is the only baby plum that's also blight resistant. It offers large crops of fat, sweet fruits.

'SHIRLEY'

This thrives in growing bags and produces loads of fleshy red fruits.

'STUPICE'

A cold-tolerant Czech variety that gives a heavy crop of early-ripening, scrumptious fruits.

'TIGERELLA'

The striped fruits mature very early, even outside. Plants have some blight resistance.



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Tomato 'Losetto'
A blight-resistant bush cherry variety, with sweet-tasting fruits in Jul-Oct.
5 x 3cm plug plants £6.95



Tomato 'Gardener's Delight'
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Chilli Pepper 'Basket of Fire'
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3 x 3cm plug plants £6.45

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Subscribers: To claim your extra 10% discount, see page 26 for your exclusive discount code



Ts&Cs: Plants and herb collections delivered from late April. Offer is subject to availability and closes 12 April 2017. Your contract for supply of goods is with Mr Fothergill's Seeds Ltd, which reserves the right to substitute any varieties for others of equal or greater value. Please note that this offer is not available in conjunction with any other. To receive your free herbs you must order at least one pack of veg plants from this offer. †Order at least one pack of veg plants and add the herb collection to your basket at full price. The herbs will be discounted when you enter your promotional code. *Calls cost 3p per minute plus your network access charge.

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GWF17MAR

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Postcode

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Start date Expiry date Card security code

(Last 3 digits printed on signature strip)

Signature _____ Date _____

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47559	Tomato 'Losetto' 5 plugs	£6.95	£6.26		
50955	Tomato 'Gardener's Delight' 5 plugs	£6.95	£6.26		
49243	Onion 'Exhibition' 40 plugs	£8.45	£7.61		
50311	Pepper 'King of the North' 3 plugs	£6.45	£5.81		
50314	Chilli 'Basket of Fire' 3 plugs	£6.45	£5.81		
50954	FREE Herb Collection with any order	FREE	FREE	1	FREE
I have bought three or more veg collections, please send me the cheapest for free				Tick ☐	
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GRAND TOTAL					£

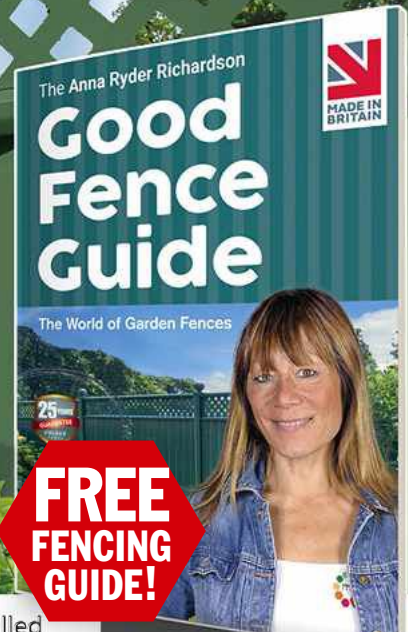
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Back-door Herbs

Get a summer of herbs for just £10. **Kay Maguire** shows you how

Fresh herbs can transform a meal. But you don't need to buy expensive packets from the shops; home-grown herbs are a perfect crop. The seeds are cheap to buy, they are quick and easy to grow, the plants are happy in space-saving pots and their constant supply of young leaves are full of flavour.

Most herb seed packs contain between 500 and 1,500 seeds giving you enough for several months. If you start sowing now, and keep sowing every three or four weeks throughout the spring and summer, you will

quickly have your own supply of fresh, tasty leaves from May until the first frosts. Many can also be brought inside for the winter to keep the harvests coming. It's simple, rewarding and costs a fraction of the price of those bags of leaves from the supermarket.

How to save £££s

The average cost of a packet of herb seed is just £1.50 and if you shop around it's possible to get coriander and basil seeds for as little as 99p. You can even get multipacks of three or five

different herbs for less than a fiver, meaning sowing your own is incredibly good value. In fact, the seed for our featured eight different fresh herbs costs just under £10. If you were to buy the same herbs regularly from the supermarket throughout the summer it would cost nearly £70, giving a total saving of around £60. And your leaves will be far fresher, with none going to waste. **See our free herb seeds offer on p135.**



What to sow

Always grow what you like to eat, so if you love curries, then coriander is a must-have, and if Italian food is your thing, opt for basil and oregano. You'll get most value from herbs that you use a lot of but are expensive or, like chervil, difficult to buy in those little bags in the supermarket. And opt for those that are easy to grow from seed. We chose a mix of annual, biennial and perennial herbs that are all simple and quick to grow from seed.

Coriander

Use Whole plant is edible. The toasted seeds are a favourite in curries, and the leaves are used in salads, Indian and Thai food.

Grow Water in the morning as it hates sitting in a wet compost. Quickly runs to seed if it dries out, so sow every three to four weeks for a continuous supply.

Harvest in 6 weeks

Parsley (curly and flat leaf)

Use Add the leaves to a dish just before serving for a more pungent flavour, and don't over cook if using in sauces. Also delicious in dressings and stuffings.

Grow Prefers a rich, moist compost and needs some shade to stop it from flowering and going over.

Harvest in 6 weeks

PHOTO: PAUL DEBOIS

Dill

Use The leaves and the sharper-tasting seed can be eaten. Good with fish, particularly salmon.

Grow Plants are leggy, so may need staking. It's quick to bolt, so grow successionaly, sowing every three to four weeks.

Harvest in 8 weeks

Oregano

Use The small, pungent leaves go well with chilli or garlic, and can be used fresh or dried.

Grow Prefers a warm and sunny, sheltered spot. Cut this perennial herb back to the ground in winter or move indoors in autumn.

Harvest in 12 weeks

Basil (large and small leaved)

Use The leaves and flowers tasty eaten raw in salads. Leaves are best torn rather than cut to stop the edges browning. Delicious with tomatoes and in pesto.

Grow Needs a very warm, sunny, sheltered spot and is best watered before midday as it doesn't like sitting in wet compost.

Harvest in 8 weeks

Chervil

Use A favourite in French cooking. Best added just before serving to preserve the mild aniseed flavour of the leaves.

Grow Prefers a rich, moist compost. Happy in cool shade, which will also stop it flowering too quickly.

Harvest in 6 weeks

Step by step

How to sow

- 1 Choose a deep, 20cm-wide pot with drainage holes in the bottom and fill with a free-draining compost such as John Innes No.1. Leave a 4cm gap at the top for sowing seed.
- 2 Sow, scattering finer seeds such as basil, parsley or oregano thinly across the surface. Station sow larger seeds such as coriander individually, dropping them onto the compost, 2cm apart.
- 3 Sprinkle a very thin layer of compost over the top of the seeds, ensuring they are all evenly covered.
- 4 Water using a can with a fine rose so you don't disturb the surface of the compost or the seeds below.



Keep the harvests coming

Hardy herbs, such as parsley and chervil, can be sown directly without heat from March, but wait to sow tender herbs – basil, coriander and dill – until frosts have passed, from May.

Water carefully as herbs such as dill will run to seed very quickly if left to get too dry, but others, like basil and oregano, don't like sitting in very wet soil and may rot.

Harvest your herbs regularly, picking leaves evenly across the plant. This will stop them from flowering, produce healthy, compact plants and ensure you have fresh, young leaves to harvest.

Pinch out the shoot tips regularly to help keep plants bushy and productive.

Unless you want to harvest the seeds of herbs such as coriander and dill, pinch out flowers as soon as you spot them to concentrate the plants' energy on leaf production rather than seed.

Sow all of these herbs, particularly those that bolt when dry, like dill and coriander, little and often, in new pots throughout summer for a continuous supply.

Bring pots of parsley, chervil and basil inside for winter, and grow on a sunny windowsill for a longer harvest.

FOR MORE advice on growing herbs visit [gardenersworld.com/herbs](https://www.gardenersworld.com/herbs)

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Your questions answered

Q&A

Edited by **Emma Crawford**

Budding genius

The bursting open of buds this month signals a new season of warmth, fresh leaves and abundant flowers. It's also a great time to do a spring bud survey, to learn more about how your plants grow.

All leaves, flowers and shoots begin as buds, so any damage to them can have drastic consequences. Pests eating into buds can cause a chinese lantern effect, with neat rows of holes appearing when the leaf within unfolds. It's also worth checking buds for signs of disease, such as bud blast on rhododendrons – removing any darkened buds now will help to limit the spread of this disease.

Knowing more about buds and how they work will help you when it comes to pruning, too. Buds at the ends of shoots are known as terminal buds, while those on the sides are lateral buds. Terminal buds contain plant hormones that stop lateral buds from sprouting (unless cut off). Roses also have hidden buds (called bud eyes), which expand if you remove a terminal bud. It's useful, too, to be able to distinguish leaf buds from flower buds – as a general rule, leaf buds are thinner, while flower buds are fatter.

Emma

Emma Crawford,
Gardening Editor

This month

144 **The Big Question**

When can I plant outdoors?

146 **Gardeners' Question Time**

The BBC Radio 4 experts answer this month's pick of readers' queries

PHOTO: TIM SANDALL



TOP TIP

The old flowers of mophead hydrangeas protect the buds over winter. Deadhead now, cutting just above the buds.

Contact us: email your questions to Q&A@gardenersworld.com or write in to **Q&A, Gardeners' World Magazine, Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, London W6 7BT**

... We regret that we cannot offer a personal garden advisory service.



Your big question

Whatever your gardening problem, David Hurron has advice on how to solve it

Q When can I start planting outdoors?

A The simplest answer is as soon as it's warm enough, but this varies according to the type of plant, the particular year and the part of the country you are in. In the UK, we can grow an enormous range of plants in our gardens, particularly during the summer, but we do have fickle weather, often with widely varying temperatures in spring, so it pays to know what you can plant now and what should be left until later in the season.

Plants are grouped according to their levels of hardiness: hardy plants are generally those that will stand temperatures below freezing for a long period; frost hardy means they can tolerate a short period of light frost; half-hardy plants are able to cope with the cold, but not a frost; and plants known as tender require warm temperatures – preferably Celsius in double figures – to survive and grow.

It's useful to find out when the last frosts occur in your region. Maps (see facing page) and charts give you a broad idea, but talk to locals and neighbours, too. Plus, different parts of your garden have their own 'microclimates'; the soil and air temperatures at the foot of a north-facing border, for example, are colder (in spring, especially) than a sunny south-facing spot by the house.

The last frost date will also vary from year to year, so watch the forecast when planting out less hardy plants. Just because half-hardy and tender plants (summer bedding and veg) are for sale in the garden centres, it doesn't mean that you can plant them outdoors in cold conditions, even if it doesn't drop below freezing.

A wide range of plant species are able to cope with frost due to thousands of years of adaptation.

Plants that come from cold, frosty regions of the world survive either by becoming dormant or by producing high levels of anti-freeze proteins in their tissues that stop the growth of ice crystals. The latter can be seen in a number of spring bulbs and hellebores, for example, where the flowers and foliage may appear to 'wilt' in frosty weather, only to recover when temperatures rise again.

What happens to plants in the cold?

Plants without the 'anti-freeze' proteins (tender and half-hardy species) will collapse as large ice crystals form in their tissues. Even without frost, cold temperatures can cause damage to the tissues of half-hardy and tender plants, which both need warmth for their cellular processes to occur and keep them alive and growing. Prolonged cold will see them gradually decline and it may leave them prone to disease infestation and eventual collapse.

So protect your investment and wait to plant these until outdoor temperatures are high enough to allow them to grow away strongly.



Tender bedding scabiosa must be planted out after the last frost



DAVID SAYS

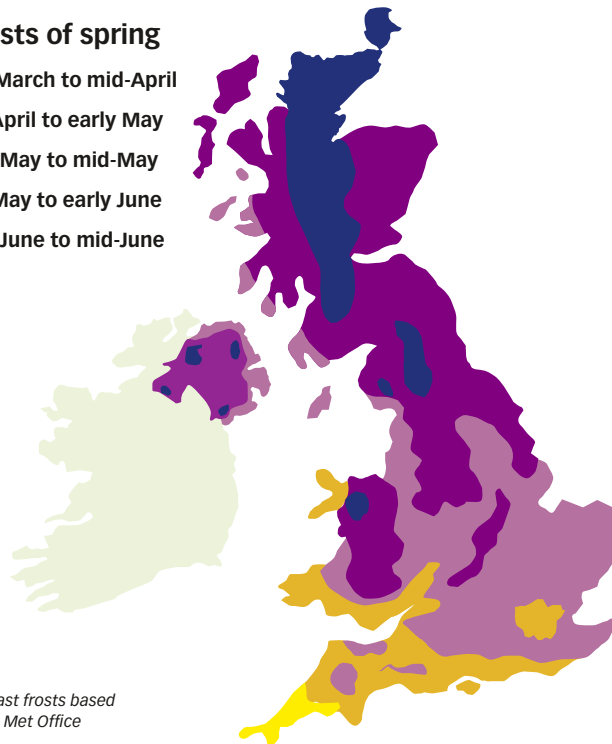
Protect tender and half-hardy plants in cold frames, so that their tissues can toughen up and acclimatise to the cooler conditions outdoors, before planting out in their final positions.



Predicting the last frost

Last frosts of spring

- Late March to mid-April
- Mid-April to early May
- Early May to mid-May
- Mid-May to early June
- Early June to mid-June



Estimate of last frosts based on data from Met Office

What to plant out now

The bedding plants that are in garden centres now are not frost hardy. They need to be grown on under the protection of a greenhouse, or on a windowsill indoors. Houseplants also need warmth but can be taken outside in summer. The four groups below can be planted out now.



Deciduous trees/shrubs

If container grown, hardy, woody plants can be planted all year round, but if planting in the summer, keep them well watered.



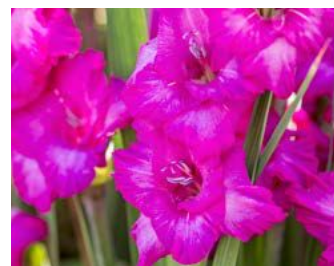
Evergreen trees/shrubs

Newly planted evergreens are also vulnerable to cold, so they are best planted out between late March and May.



Herbaceous perennials

These can be planted all year round if hardy. But March and April are best as there's moisture in the soil to help roots establish.



Summer bulbs and tubers

Plant summer-flowering bulbs in March and April; though they're not fully hardy, they're protected from frosts by being under the soil.

Readers' tips...

On protecting plants in spring

I only plant out summer bedding once all risk of frost has passed – that's usually the first week of June up here.

Christine Leigh, Cheshire

I harden off my bedding plants in a perspex cold frame before planting.

Margaret McMillan, Fife

Ventilate cold frames by opening them during the day time when the weather's warm enough.

Manas Bose, Avon

I plant up some pots in March and they can be moved under cover if necessary.

Jackie, South Yorkshire

When it's time to harden them off, put tender plants out in the morning and bring them in the evening.

Gill Grocott, Bucks

Cold frames are great for growing lettuce in the cold months but do keep checking for slugs.

Frederick Gree, Carmarthenshire

I'm happy to plant out shrubs and other hardy plants in March, but not if the soil is sodden and cold. Position them carefully, out of the morning sun.

Diane Bolland, Yorkshire

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GOT

Gardeners' Question Time

Our experts tackle your gardening problems, from destructive vine weevils to ailing orchids, honey fungus to rose blackspot, and much more



Be sure to plant bulbs deeply, at three times the bulb's height

Q Why did my bulbs in pots all come up blind?

EN Ruffell, by email

A CHRISTINE SAYS I'm surprised that none of your bulbs produced any flowers, as this is quite unusual. You don't say what they were and if they were different types, making it difficult to comment specifically. Perhaps the bulbs hadn't reached flowering size, otherwise I would have expected at least some to bloom. If they were small bulbs at planting, they may take a year or two to grow to flowering size.

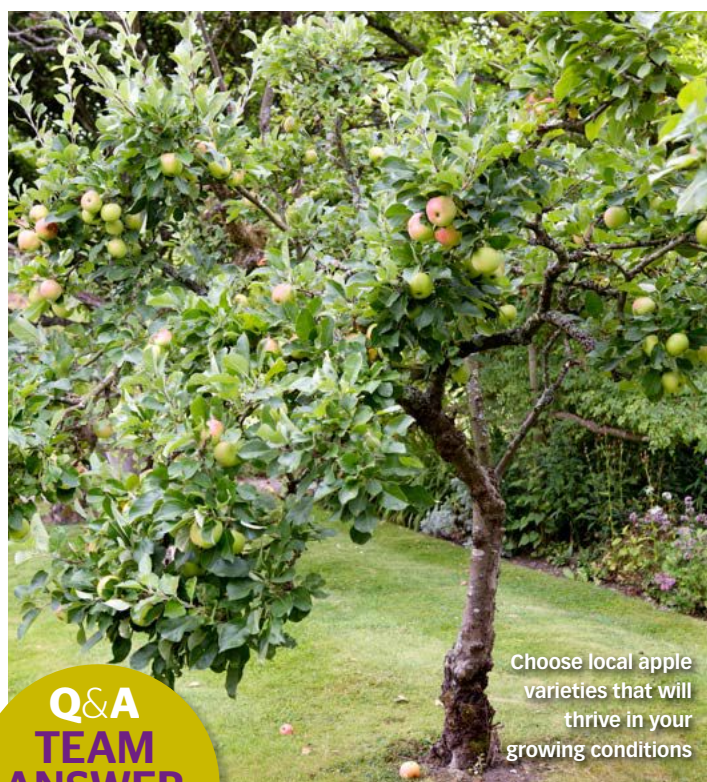
You also ask if you should try replanting them into the garden. That's a good idea, but do dig in some good quality fertiliser, such as blood, fish and bone, which will feed the bulbs as the nutrients are slowly released into in the soil. Plant the bulbs at a depth equal to about three times the bulb's height, as shallow planting can result in blindness.

Q Our gardening club is planting an orchard – any tips?

Sue Cross, Yorkshire

A MATTHEW SAYS The UK is technically a 'marginal' region for commercial fruit production, due to the comparatively low sunlight intensity compared with countries such as New Zealand and Chile. The further north you are in the UK, the less reliable fruit set and ripening become, which has long been a challenge for growers in the north and has led to the selection of specific varieties suitable for the conditions.

You say your site is wet and windy, so apricots, nectarines and peaches are best avoided, but apples and plums should do well. In fact, the north of England is one of the best places in the country for growing damsons. You could include some unusual Yorkshire apple varieties, such as 'Dog's Snout', 'Grandpa Buxton' and 'Yorkshire Beauty', and my favourite plum, 'Opal'.



Choose local apple varieties that will thrive in your growing conditions

Q&A TEAM ANSWER
grow fruit trees



Even in cold areas, damson trees produce a reliable crop for desserts or jam

A PIPPA SAYS What an exciting project! My advice is to avoid trees on very dwarfing rootstocks, as they'll need much more maintenance and are likely to struggle in all but perfect growing conditions – plus in years to come, wouldn't it be great to see kids climbing some large trees? And on the subject of kids and scrumping, be sure to include plenty of really sweet apples!

When buying the trees, it's best to go to a local fruit specialist, as they'll be able to advise you on which varieties will suit your specific location. Nothing beats local knowledge and experience.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE, TIM SANDALL

Christine Walkden

Garden writer
Christine appears on BBC1's *The One Show*. She is also a lecturer and tour leader.



Matthew Wilson

Garden designer
Matthew was curator of RHS Hyde Hall and Harlow Carr, and often appears on television.



Pippa Greenwood

Pippa is one of the foremost experts on pests and diseases. She gardens using organic methods.



Q Would adding mulch bury my bulbs too deeply?

Adrian Street, Suffolk

A PIPPA SAYS With organic mulch, such as garden compost or bark chippings, through which water and oxygen penetrate easily, there should be no problem, especially as bulbs are often planted too shallowly in the first place. Also bear in mind that

even a thick layer of mulch will disappear amazingly quickly, either getting dragged into the soil by earthworms or being scattered by birds searching for food and by gardeners weeding. Organic mulch rots down over time too, which further reduces the depth. So there's no risk to your bulbs with normal levels of mulching.



Mulch helps to deter weeds and hold in moisture, without harming bulbs



Hidden below ground, vine weevil grubs feast on roots and corms

Q Is there a way to get rid of vine weevils in pots?

Alan Wylie, Renfrewshire

A MATTHEW SAYS Vine weevils can be a major problem, especially in pots, where the larvae feed on underground roots, tubers and corms, often killing the plants. The C-shaped grubs have a creamy-white body and brown head. The most effective treatment is a nematode drench, which is available online or in garden centres, and should be applied when the soil temperature is above 5°C.

Q Will a 'Morello' cherry thrive on an east-facing wall?

David Vale, Northamptonshire

A CHRISTINE SAYS Although a classic north-wall fruit, the 'Morello' cherry is more hardy than sweet cherries, so should be fine against your east-facing wall. The fruit can be picked when very sour, at the dark red stage, or protected from birds using netting until nearly black and bitter-sweet. This is a compact but spreading variety.



Moth orchids (*Phalaenopsis*) don't like strong sun or too much water

Q What can I do to help my ailing moth orchid?

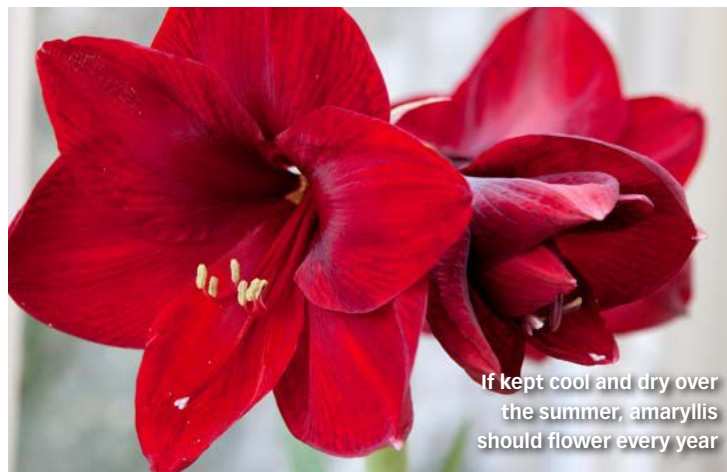
Anthony B Dodsley, by email

A PIPPA SAYS Start by ensuring it gets adequate light, but not direct sun or too much heat. Make sure it is potted into moth-orchid compost, which is very free-draining, and water sparingly. Humid air is good for moth orchids but always let excess water drain away. Use rainwater if possible, or cooled kettle water, especially in a hard water area. Do this, and apply an orchid feed, and your orchid should soon start to improve.

Q How can I get my amaryllis to flower again?

Pete Wright, Cambridgeshire

A CHRISTINE SAYS Once the flowers fade, remove just the flowers, not the stalk. Water and feed the plant for a couple of months or until the leaves go yellow, then stop and allow the bulb to dry off. Keep it in a cool, dry place until September, then start to water it again. Once new shoots appear, begin feeding.



If kept cool and dry over the summer, amaryllis should flower every year

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Q What is this stripy beetle on my rosemary?

Helen, Cambridgeshire

A PIPPA SAYS This is the pretty but destructive rosemary beetle. Both the larvae and adults eat the shoot tips and flower spikes of rosemary, thyme and lavender, with damage most noticeable from midsummer onwards. To control them, pick off adults and larvae regularly.



Rosemary beetles (above the ladybird) eat woody herbs

Q How can I get rid of wild garlic?

Rosanne, by email

A MATTHEW SAYS Wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*) is an attractive native plant, but it spreads quickly by underground bulbs. To banish it, you need to wage a war of attrition. Divide the infested area into manageable chunks and tackle in sequence. Dig out the bulbs in winter when dormant – if done at any other time it just encourages the bulbs to spread. Once an area is clear, cover with black plastic, dug in at the sides so bulbs can't spread back in.



Wild garlic has pretty flowers and edible leaves, but spreads rapidly

Q Is it possible to cure roses of blackspot disease?

JR Evans, Dorset

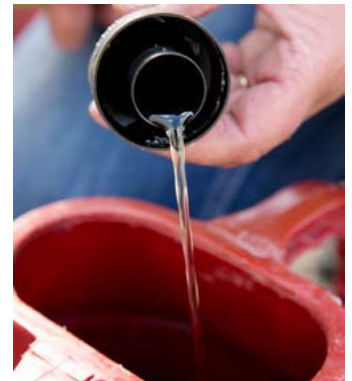
A CHRISTINE SAYS Rose blackspot is one of the trickiest plant diseases to control, and even if you do manage to get rid of it, it can easily return via diseased roses in nearby gardens.

Good hygiene is important – this involves removing all diseased leaves in late autumn to prevent overwintering of the fungal spores on the soil. However, many spores

overwinter on the bare stems, resulting in reinfection in spring. Mulch the bed in February to bury any blackspot spores that are on the soil surface, then spray the dormant bushes with Westland Rose Rescue or Bayer's Multirose, following the instructions carefully. To improve the general health of your roses, you can also feed them on a regular basis using a good quality rose fertiliser, such as Vitax Rose Food.



Although unsightly and difficult to control, blackspot won't kill rose plants



Encourage flowering by adding houseplant feed in summer

Q Will my coffee plants ever flower?

Jane, by email

A MATTHEW SAYS Coffee plants (usually *Coffea arabica*) make handsome houseplants with glossy evergreen foliage. They can bloom indoors, producing small, white, starry flowers, but rarely do so regularly and usually only produce a few at a time.

Coffee plants thrive in hot, humid climates, so you need to replicate this in your home. They need a bright location, but not direct sun, and moist but not wet compost. Place a water-filled pebble tray under the pot to raise humidity and mist the foliage regularly. Never let the compost dry out, as this can cause the plants to drop their leaves. Tomato feed might boost flowering, but houseplant fertiliser is a better option.

Q Are there any pesticides to control wireworms?

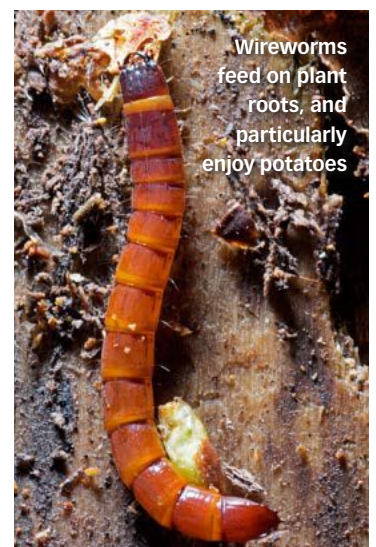
Peter Harrison, by email

A PIPPA SAYS There were once several chemicals for controlling soil pests, including wireworms, but if you look at what they were and what they did, you'll understand why they've been withdrawn. Unpleasant is an understatement! There are no chemicals available now to combat wireworms, so you need to consider other options.

First, bear in mind that this pest, the larval stage of the click beetle, is generally only present in seriously damaging numbers in soil that hasn't been regularly cultivated. So if you've created a

vegetable plot from grassland or taken on a neglected allotment, you may have problems initially on potato tubers and other root crops. However, after three or four years, wireworm damage generally becomes insignificant. I can vouch for this from personal experience, as all my veg-growing areas are former grassland!

In the meantime, try growing early potato varieties, as the crop will be harvested before too much damage can be inflicted. Lift all root crops as soon as they're ready, and dig over any vacant areas of ground regularly to expose the wireworms to predators such as birds.



Wireworms feed on plant roots, and particularly enjoy potatoes

Q How can I create an instant low hedge?

Laurie, by email

A MATTHEW SAYS As you want your hedge to reach a maximum height of 90cm, you should avoid fast-growing plants, as they'll need regular trimming to keep them in check. My suggestion would be to plant a beech hedge – in the Netherlands I've often seen them kept to about that height. If you plant a dense row of 90cm-tall beech whips (saplings), you'll get an almost instant hedge.



Simply trim a beech hedge every August to keep it at the right size

Q Can you identify my mystery shrub?

Pat Crompton, by email

A CHRISTINE SAYS This is the lovely honey spurge, *Euphorbia mellifera*, an evergreen roundish shrub grown for its long rich-green leaves with a cream mid-rib. The flowers, which appear in late spring, are small, brownish-pink and honey scented. It will eventually reach a height and spread of 3m and grows best in full sun.



Prized for its bold foliage, honey spurge also offers scented flowers



Kerria should be fine in a site infected with honey fungus

Q What should I do after felling a tree with honey fungus?

Ros Heaven, Dorset

A PIPPA SAYS The most important thing is to get the stump removed, along with as much of the root system as possible, so ask your tree surgeon to winch or dig out the stump after felling the tree. If this is really not feasible, then the next best option is to have the stump ground out. You must also trace back and remove as many of the woody roots as you can – the fungus 'feeds' on this woody material, so even if it's not yet infected, it poses a risk later on. You should also check for dead, dying or sickly plants throughout your garden, as the fungus may be in more than one spot.

When replanting the site where your diseased tree stood, choose trees and shrubs that aren't usually affected by honey fungus. Suitable candidates include abelia, bottlebrush, box, kerria, mulberry, myrtle, olive and spiraea.

Q Which trees can I plant in claggy, damp, clay soil?

Alice, by email

A CHRISTINE SAYS The best course of action, whatever you decide to plant, is to improve the conditions. If drainage is a problem over winter, add lots of sharp grit to the entire planting area – not just to the planting hole, as this would simply create a sump. A couple of barrowloads dug through the soil would improve things no end, as would

incorporating a couple of barrowloads of well-rotted garden compost or manure.

Trees that would cope with these conditions include *Crataegus laevigata* (Midland hawthorn), a lovely compact tree with polished oval leaves and clusters of red fruits in autumn, and alders, such as *Alnus incana* 'Aurea', which has yellow twigs and conspicuous red catkins in spring. Another good choice is a fruiting crab apple.



Hawthorns are tough, and produce attractive blossom and berries

Q I accidentally left my seed potatoes in the dark – are they still worth planting?

Heather Tock, by email

A MATTHEW SAYS I'm always doing things like this – I recently discovered two bags of shallots from 2015 and a sack of unplanted daffodils. You say your potatoes have formed long spaghetti-like shoots, and the reality is that you probably won't be able to plant them without these brittle elongated shoots breaking off. Once potatoes have started to

sprout (or chit), they're using up their store of energy, so this will now be depleted. There is a chance they either won't sprout a second time round or may not perform as well once in the ground.

Still, on balance, given that you have the tubers, you may as well break off the long shoots and try chitting them again in a cool, bright location. As a back-up, you could try and get hold of some late-crop potatoes to plant, too.



Ideally don't let shoots grow more than 3cm long before planting

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Q How can I get my six-year-old wisteria to flower?

Diane, by email

A MATTHEW SAYS Young wisteria plants are notoriously shy to flower; some can take more than a decade to get started, so you may need to be patient for a little longer. You can try giving your plant some fertiliser such as tomato feed to help kick-start flowering.



To deter red or green algae, clean bird baths regularly in summer

Q Why is my bird bath water red?

Sandra, Hertfordshire

A PIPPA SAYS Oh dear, it looks more like a blood bath than a bird bath! The colour is caused by red-pigmented algae, which tends to build up during warm weather. I don't think it is a danger to birds.

Q What should I feed my bulbs after flowering?

David Thomson, Scotland

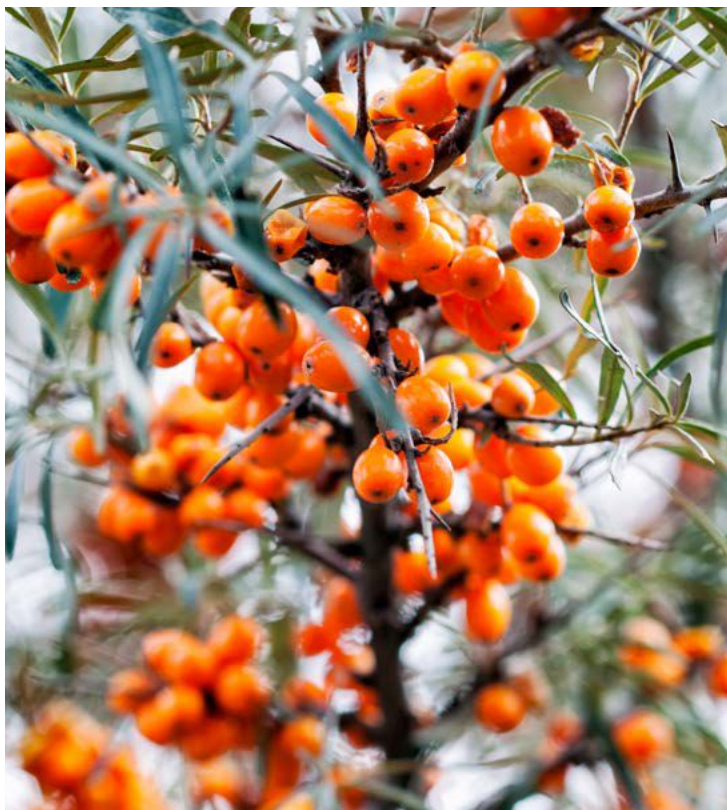
A CHRISTINE SAYS After flowering, you can apply a general fertiliser such as blood, fish and bone to the soil to feed the bulbs, from which the plants will regrow next year.

Q After removing an old hedge, what can I plant to add colour to my coastal garden?

Patricia Robinson, West Sussex

A CHRISTINE SAYS The soil where your previous hedge grew will probably be in poor condition, compacted and lacking in nutrients and structure. So before you replant, dig in plenty of well-rotted manure or garden compost, mixing it through the soil to ensure it is well distributed.

My suggestion for a good replacement in your windy, coastal garden is sea buckthorn, *Hippophae rhamnoides*. This lovely shrub thrives near the sea in exposed sites. It has attractive silvery willow-like deciduous leaves and produces bright orange-yellow berries in autumn. These are not usually taken by birds, so remain on the plant right through the winter, giving a long season of interest. Plant 45cm apart, in a double row, and keep well watered for the first year after planting. Mulch the soil to hold water around the roots and help the plants to establish.



For abundant berries, you need both male and female sea buckthorn plants



Ideally wait until the flowers have faded before transplanting bulbs

Q Is it possible to transplant hyacinths while still in flower?

Pete, by email

A MATTHEW SAYS In general, it's best to move plants when they're fully dormant and not in flower, as this will cause them less stress. Sometimes, however, you just have to get on and do it. With bulbous plants like hyacinths, dig them up with as much of the surrounding soil or compost as possible, to avoid damaging their fine roots.

Ways to find more help

If you have a gardening problem, email the details (and your location) to Q&A@gardenersworld.com or write to Emma Crawforth at **Gardeners' World Magazine, Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, London W6 7BT**. We regret that we cannot offer a personal advisory service or guarantee a reply.

You'll also find lots of pest and disease advice, along with creative and problem-solving projects, at gardenersworld.com/how-to

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Show & tell



Send your tips and photos to **Show & tell, Gardeners' World Magazine, Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, London W6 7BT** or email letters@gardenersworld.com and you could win National Garden Gift Vouchers.



A beautiful pond to attract wildlife

Out of the rubble, into bloom

We had a lovely garden when we moved into our new home but, unfortunately, when the other half wanted a workshop, it got wrecked by building work. Two years later it

has been fully restored, and with the addition of a lovely wildlife pond that's home to a couple of frogs, a toad and numerous newts.

Claire Osborne, Peterborough

Un-seasonable caterpillars

Among the natural-world visitors to my garden, I was surprised to see cabbage white caterpillars in January. Is this normal for Norfolk?

Kathryn Moore, by email

Bugman Jones says No, this is unusual. Normally there are two broods of the large white that all pupate and overwinter in the chrysalis stage, but occasionally there's a third generation in September. I think these are third generation larvae still feeding through the mild winter.



A winter feast for lingering larvae



Hedgehog hotel

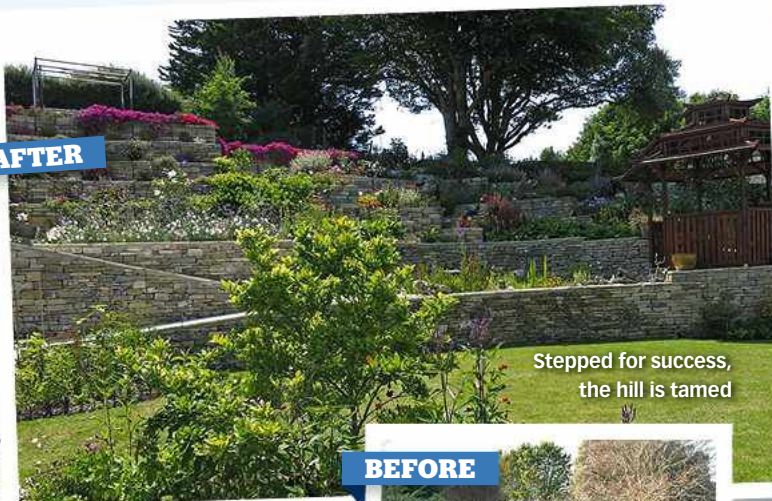


Winter retreat

Meet our regular visitor – during the winter months this hedgehog hibernates in an upturned broken chimenea, full of dried leaves and wood. How privileged we are!

Wendy and Mike Brown, Devon

AFTER



Stepped for success, the hill is tamed

BEFORE



A tangled slope

READER MAKEOVER

Stepping up

When we moved into our new house in 2011, the garden was an overgrown hill, full of brambles, ivy, old man's beard and worse. Once we had it all cleared, we set about taming the hill. Now we no longer

feel like we have to go climbing to reach the top of our garden.

Ann Seedall, Dorset

Floral hotspots

I enjoyed your feature *Wildflower wonders* (January issue) and wanted to tell you of other floral gems. Texas in early summer displays the legacy of Lady Bird Johnson, a former First Lady whose love of wildflowers resulted in legislation preserving them. Also worth a visit is Northern Ireland, with its coastal bluffs covered in thrift, woodlands full of jewel-like flowers and rocky outcrops swathed in wild heather.

Amy Kelly, Northern Ireland



A coastal bluff, pretty in pink thrift

OUR APOLOGIES AND A CORRECTION

HERE ARE THE CORRECT SOLUTIONS TO THE FEBRUARY ISSUE CROSSWORD

FEBRUARY SOLUTIONS

ACROSS
1 Snowdrops 7 Pear 8 Leather 9 Irises 10 Hollies 12 Agnes 14 Turks cap 16 Roses
18 Chive 20 Section 21 Lilies 22 Stigma
DOWN
1 Sulphate 2 Oca 3 Dahlias 4 Orris 5 Spring 6 Raceme 11 Larch 12 Apricot 13
Nesting 15 Cress 17 Senna 18 Chit 19 Ixia

MARCH SOLUTIONS – see page 156 for puzzle

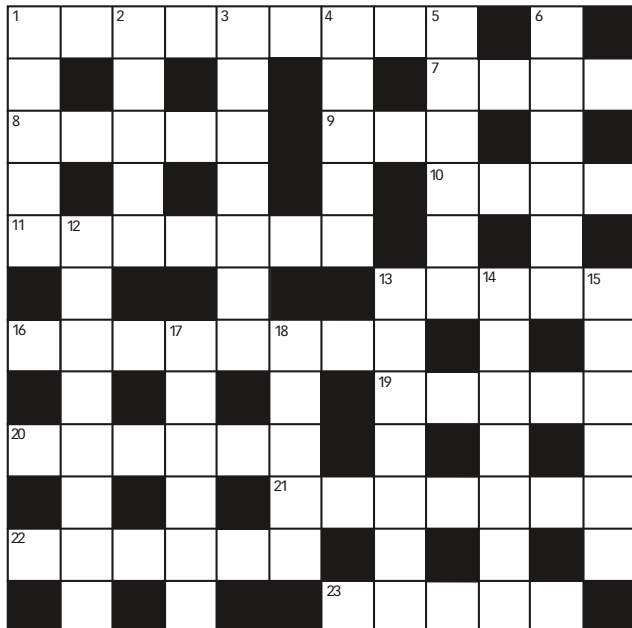
ACROSS
1 Raspberry 7 Acid 8 Nuts 9 Ear 10 Rain 11 Stamens 13 Sweet 16 Goats Rue 19
Queen 20 Wisley 21 Aconite 22 Carpel 23 Mango
DOWN
1 Rings 2 Stipa 3 Baskets 4 Reeds 5 Yarrow 6 Divide 12 Tropical 13 Sequoia 14
Evening 15 Tunnel 17 Tulips 18 Royal



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Crossword

Put down your trowel, pick up a pen and exercise those brain muscles instead...



ACROSS

- 1 A good month to plant soft fruits, such as new ___ canes (9)
- 7 Describes soil with a pH value below 7.0 (4)
- 8 '___ de Young' is a moss rose with highly scented blooms (5)
- 9 The seed-bearing head of a cereal plant (3)
- 10 'Purple ___' is a striking variety of allium (4)
- 11 The male organs of a flower (7)
- 13 ___ peas can be sown now in deep pots (5)
- 16 Common name for *Galega* (5, 3)
- 19 '___ of night' is a popular variety of 17 down (5)
- 20 RHS flagship garden in the heart of Surrey (6)
- 21 *Eranthis hyemalis* is also known as winter ___ (7)
- 22 Female part of a flower, consisting of a style, stigma and ovary (6)
- 23 Sweet, fleshy fruit of a 12 down tree, popular as a chutney (5)

DOWN

- 1 Protect pots from slugs and snails by adding copper ___ (5)
- 2 Feather grass is a popular name for this plant genus (5)
- 3 Plant strawberry runners in hanging ___ in the greenhouse for an early-summer crop (7)
- 4 Tall, grass-like and found in wet or marshy ground (5)
- 5 Common name for *Achillea* (4)
- 6 Time to lift and ___ congested border plants (6)
- 12 Describes plants from regions with a hot, steamy climate (8)
- 13 Genus of tall, fast-growing trees from California (7)
- 14 *Oenothera* is better known as ___ primrose (7)
- 15 Use ___ cloches to warm beds, ready for early sowings (6)
- 17 These colourful bulbous perennials brighten the spring garden (6)
- 18 *Magnolia* '___ Star' opens its fragrant, white blooms around about now (5)

The solution to this crossword can be found in Show & Tell on p155

Gardeners' World magazine

Issue number 313

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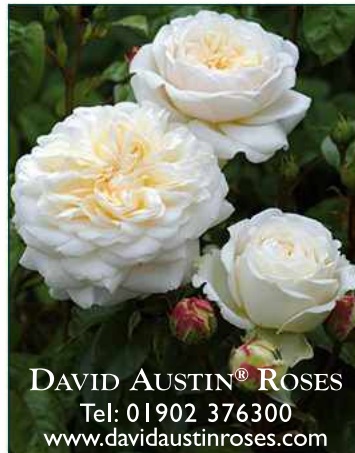
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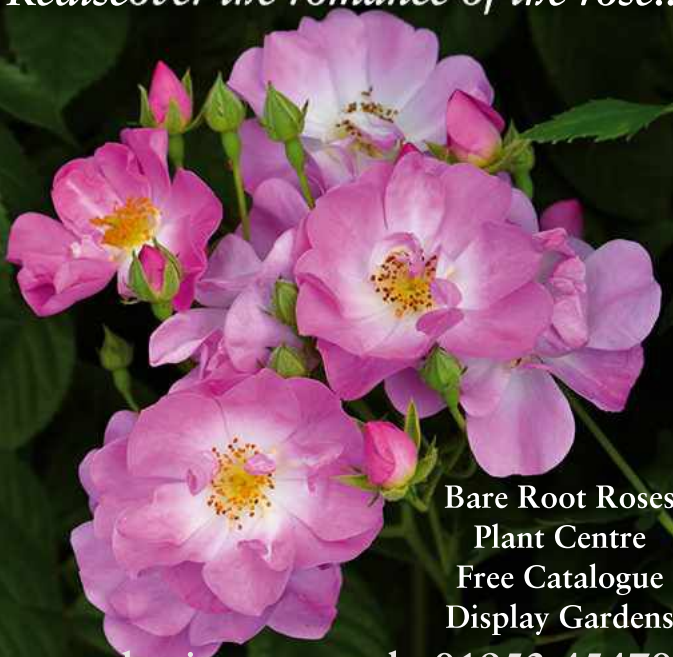
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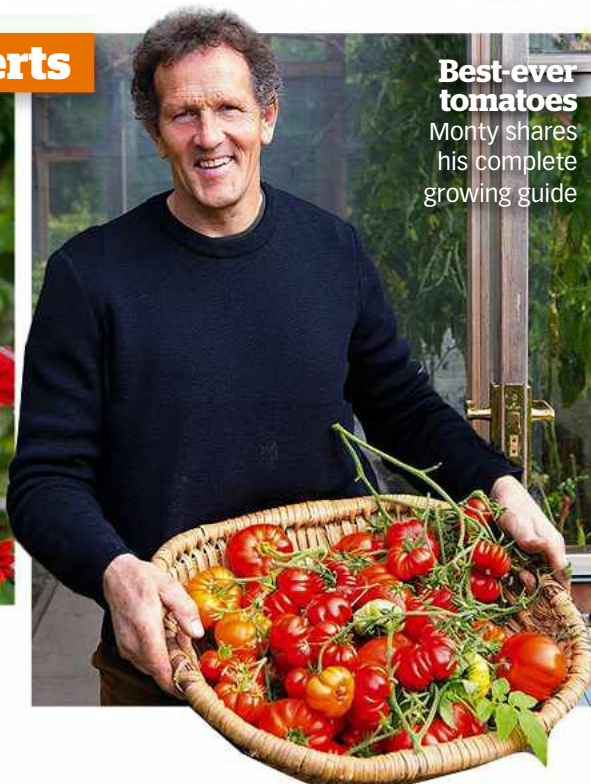


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And finally...

Tales from *Titchmarsh*

Mindfulness may be the latest trend, but it's an activity that is ingrained in the hearts of gardeners, says **Alan**



A friend of mind went on one of these 'mindfulness' courses. His wife made him do it. She said it would make him slow down. I have always known him to be a refreshingly energetic sort, although, in her eyes, he was manic rather than energetic, and I bow to her wisdom, borne of proximity. He lasted two evenings. He said that after having a raisin put in his hand, and being told to gaze at it and nothing else for the next 10 minutes, he knew that 'mindfulness' was not for him. I rather like my friend the way he is, but then I do have sympathy with some aspects of 'mindfulness', if not the term itself, which smacks of cod psychology and has clearly become the new 'big thing'.

There is nothing new about it at all. WH Davies put pen to paper reminding us of the need to be still and observe just over 100 years ago when he wrote: "What

is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare." I like to think that gardening is the obvious occupation for those of a 'mindful' disposition. We gardeners do stand and stare, and we do see what lies before us, most of the time at any rate. What's more, we take a long-term view of our activities – we don't design clothes that will next year be out of fashion or cook meals that are gone in a moment, both of which are activities loudly trumpeted by the media. No, we are, quite simply, passionate about the land beneath our feet, and do our level best to look after it and assure it of a healthy future

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Few would argue with such sentiments. But to many, this means nothing more than tuning in to *Countryfile* and *Planet Earth* – two impressive television series of laudable intent, which open our eyes to the land that surrounds and sustains us. And yet, at the same time, I feel saddened that to many viewers they neatly encapsulate the natural world and keep it safe within that little box that can be opened, marvelled at and safely packed away again between episodes: nature at the flick of a switch, the only sensual involvement being that of the eyes; nature portrayed as a vicarious pleasure – all admiration and no actual physical involvement.

There is an inherent danger in the general being regarded as more important than the particular. The particular – getting out on a bit of ground of your own, however small, and tending it, and sowing

seeds and planting things – is forgotten about, or regarded as being less important and certainly less worth trumpeting in the wider scheme of things. The opposite, I reckon, is true.

This, I think, is where 'productive mindfulness' comes in: taking time not only to consider that broad bean seed in your hand and marvel at its construction – from the hilum (the scar where it was attached to the parent pod) to the dormant radicle (the first root), and the fact that as long as it is kept cool and dry it will remain viable for 10 years or more – but also to push it with your index finger into a pot of moist, aromatic compost and watch it grow into a plant that can feed you. This simple action, and the subsequent cultivation of the plant, can offer you more real solace than gazing upon a withered raisin or even a spectacular and expensively produced television series about animals eating one another.

Many will not discover this magic. It is, after all, harder to sell this kind of unglamorous activity to a generally indolent public than something they can sit back and watch, and feel they have therefore experienced. We, the converts who know of its deeply satisfying (and, yes, more than occasionally frustrating) qualities – raising plants from seeds, rooting cuttings, the smell of a new-mown lawn, watching a sapling grow into a tree – have a lot of work to do if we are to raise such awareness. Perhaps we would be more successful if we simply called it... mindfulness.



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