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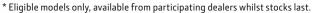




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EDITOR'S F CENTRE'S

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### 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.

### Monty's toms

Watch Monty's multi-part video guide to growing flavoursome tomatoes at gardenersworld.com/ monty-tomato-trial





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Follow Alan's guidance on raising cut flowers, including your free flowers with this issue, bit.ly/flowersfor-cutting

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Despatched early May, offer closes 14 May. T&Cs page 40.

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### Our promise to you...

Every month we bring you the very best of our discoveries - from inspiring gardens and amazing plants to shopping tips and advice on how to keep your garden blooming. If you ever feel we can improve, let us know. After all, it's your magazine.

### How to get in touch

For our contacts, turn to page 154

# N)elconne



**Gardeners are famous** for ingenuity - after all, we're generally a practical bunch and if you want something enough, you'll find a way to make it happen. So we think you'll like the ingenious ideas throughout this issue, designed to help you get more from your garden.

We go back to basics with Monty and Carol, on the right way to grow those two essentials: tomatoes and dahlias. We've got long-term solutions for the age-old problems of pests and weeds; and we've mapped out a foolproof plan to guarantee you fresh veg on Christmas Day (clue: you start now!).

Most ingenious of all, our 16-page

Small Space Solutions section shows you 20 achievable, economic - and clever - ways to grow on any size plot. Since Gardeners' World launched 50 years ago (see page 25) our gardens have flourished in many ways, but size isn't one of them. We mostly now live cheek by jowl in cities or suburbs, and gardens are shrinking, yet the need to get our hands in soil runs as deep as ever. So from a garden in a gutter and greening up walls, to an allotment on your windowsill, get stuck in with our ideas on page 63.

And we're inviting you to share with us the creativity you've poured into your own plot, for our **Garden of the Year Competition**. We've got amazing prizes on offer, and it's easy to enter, so find out more on page 72. Enjoy this great gardening month, and see you here next time...



### Lucy Hall, Editor

Keep in touch on Twitter: @GWmag @lucyhall\_GW

### **YOUR SUMMER SORTED!**

Your 2 for 1 Entry Card & Guide 2017 is on its way, FREE with the May issue -



**PS** Don't miss out on the year's biggest bargain! Our legendary **2 for 1 Entry** Card & Guide returns for 2017 with over 415 gardens taking part - the most gardens ever and the biggest scheme of this type in the world! Yup, it's big...

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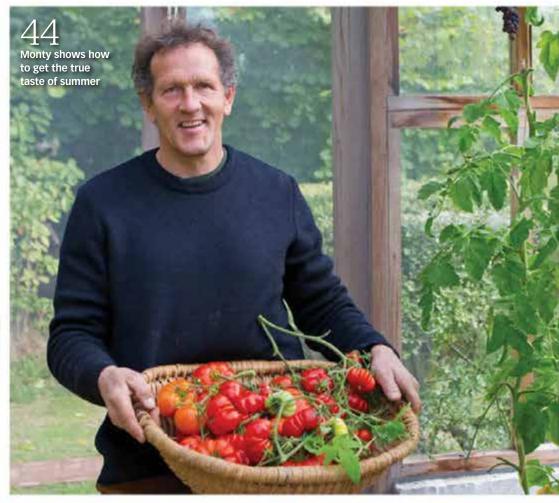


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Grow our cover star - buy 5 plants for £12.95. See page 3.





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Plus great offers on scented summer-flowering blooms

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**59 SAVE ON climbers** With free postage

103 **SCENTED** sweet peas

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# your planner for April

### **50 THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH**

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# Me love ADITIL for fresh, delicate beginnings

The worst of the miserable weather is over and the thick coats can go back on their pegs. April is the month when we finally emerge yawning and stretching like cute dormice from a long winter's hibernation. Our gardens are doing the same, with bulbs shoving their way through the soil at an alarming rate, perennials unfurling young leaves and trees busting out buds. This is it, people, we are off on another cartwheeling, romantic, rose-scented season of gardening. Tighten your garters and sharpen your spades, it's going to be fun!

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

### STAR OF THE MONTH Magnolia × loebneri 'Leonard Messel'

This is named after the former owner of Nymans in Sussex – a fantastic garden brimming with wonderful shrubs (now owned by the National Trust). This particular magnolia has big, pale-pink flowers with raggedy petals that swirl like Cinderella's skirts. The flowers appear before the leaves and are often delicately scented. Some of the great magnolias are enormous and probably unsuitable for most normal-sized gardens. Not this one: it can be grown as a tree or a shrub, and is a great choice for a medium-sized plot.

● Care Best in full sun and neutral-to-acid soil, but can tolerate a bit of shade. Shelter from cold winds and prune only lighty when in full leaf. ● Height x Spread 6m x 7m









# • Hosta and ajuga

### Plant partners

# Pairings in perfect harmony

Add interest to dull corners with frisky couples that provide fun and frolics as spring takes hold

### • Saxifraga x arendsii and Bergenia cordifolia 'Winterglow'

Two similar flowers snuggled up together as contentedly as a married couple sharing a box of chocolates and a good film. The plants are different sizes, the pinks aren't identical, and the flowers are different shapes - but together they liven up a corner.

### Saxifraga x arendsii

- Care Best kept cool so provide some shade. Trim after flowering to remove fading stems. Good in pots.
- H x S 20cm x 25cm

### Bergenia cordifolia 'Winterglow'

- Care A good ground-cover plant, especially for slopes and dry shade. Mulch well in autumn. Divide plants after flowering.
- **H x S** 35cm x 45cm

### **2** Viola sororia and Hedera helix 'Goldchild'

Good old ivy: as reliable as the sunrise and as rugged as a rhinoceros rump. It is so good in so many situations, be it as ground cover under trees or as a screening climber. Here, the chirpy little viola provides a bit of delicacy and sophistication.

### Viola sororia

- Care Beautifully scented and easy to grow, sow seed in late winter and deadhead to prolong flowering.
- **H x S** 25cm x 25cm

### Hedera helix 'Goldchild'

- **Care** A small-leaved variegated variety, so not as thuggy as some of its larger cousins. Good for growing in the ground, in a container or climbing up a wall.
- **H x S** 3m x 3m

### 3 Hosta 'Barbara Ann' and Ajuga reptans 'Braunherz'

Although this picture shows the hosta doing an admirable job of protecting that ajuga from the elements, it really need not have bothered as ajuga is one of the most bomb-proof plants I know. Great for a tough spot in sun or shade.

### Hosta 'Barbara Ann'

- Care Large, bluish leaves with slight variegation to the edge. White flowers in midsummer. You don't need me to tell you, but watch out for slugs!
- **H x S** 50cm x 70cm

### Ajuga reptans 'Braunherz'

- Care Spreads rapidly, so makes good ground cover. Glossy, purplish-green leaves. Easy to divide in spring or early autumn.
- **H x S** 20cm x 100cm

### Border euphorbias

Add springtime zing and year-round structure with these bold perennials – **Graham Rice** picks his favourites

**From sprawling** alpines to spiny desert succulents, annuals for cutting to summer container flowers, and the classic Christmas poinsettia, euphorbias are one of the most varied plant groups. Yet the 2,000 species all share two distinctive features: their unique flower structure and their milky sap. At this time of year it's the spring-flowering Mediterranean sun-lovers and the perennials for dappled shade that catch our attention – just be sure to give each group the right conditions.

Evergreen *Euphorbia mellifera* is big and bold, with honey-scented spring blooms. It's impressive at its best, but needs warmth and sharp drainage. More manageable, still impressive, and much easier to grow is *E. characias*, with its huge upright golden-chartreuse flowerheads. Top varieties include dramatic 'Lambrook Gold' and neater, blue-grey-leaved 'Portuguese Velvet'. All are happiest in full sun and well-drained soil.

At the other extreme size-wise, but enjoying similar conditions, are the sprawling types, such as *Euphorbia myrsinites*, which looks great tumbling over rocks, and *E. rigid*a with bluish leaves spiralling around its stems.

Dappled shade and richer soil is ideal for *Euphorbia epithymoides* and its colourful-leaved varieties, which include purple 'Candy' and variegated 'First Blush'.

- **Position** Grow in full sun with good drainage, although *Euphorbia epithymoides* will take a little shade and richer soil conditions.
- **Care** Cut out flower stems once they fade, except on *E. epithymoides*, which is best sheared down by half, or supported to prevent it collapsing outwards. *E. characias* may need support in windy sites.
- **Warning** The white sap is a skin irritant, so wear gloves and roll down your sleeves when handling these plants. The sap is also poisonous if ingested.
- Where to buy The Beth Chatto Gardens, bethchatto.co.uk, 01206 822007; Crocus, crocus.co.uk, 01344 578111; Plant Providers, plantproviders.co.uk, 01452 770151.

**PLANT DIRECTORY** Find the perfect euphorbias for you by using our plant finder at **gardenersworld.com/plant-finder** 

Sep Oct Nov Dec Euphorbia characias Dark green to silvery-blue foliage on woody stems, and dense heads of vellow flowers, often with black eves. Flowers Feb-May. H x S 1-2m x 1.2m

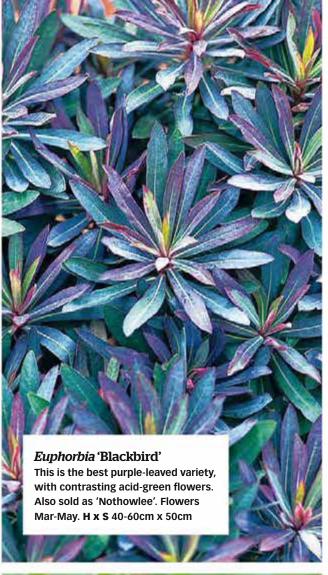
Spring euphorbias

 Jan
 Feb
 Mar
 Apr
 May
 Jun
 Jul
 Aug
 Sep
 Oct
 Nov
 Decomposition

 Foliage interest
 Deadheading
 Image: Color of the property of the pr

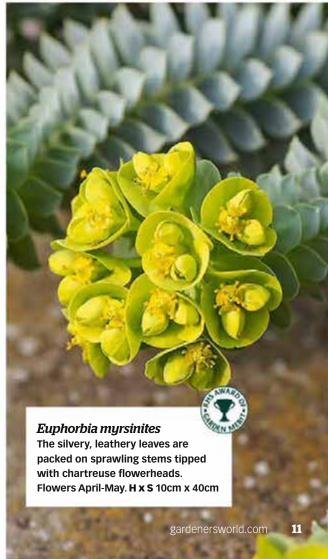
gardenersworld.com April 2017











# CONTAINER (LNOW-NOW) alpines

**With alpines** at their best this month, put them centre stage in a container display. This gorgeous pink and silvery-gold planted basket is a great way to show alpines off without manhandling heavy troughs or giant boulders.

It's light and easy to move to the most suitable part of the garden depending on the plants' changing needs through the year. Start now and they'll have time to get established as the growing season progresses.

### Get it right

- Place this display in a sunny, open location. In winter, move it to a well-lit sheltered spot, such as in a greenhouse or lean-to, to keep the plants and basket dry.
- Use a free-draining mix of 50:50 John Innes No.2 and horticultural grit (below).
   Keep the foliage off the compost by mulching with extra grit.
- Handle alpine plants carefully (right).
   If a piece of sedum does snap off, just pop it into the compost and it should root.
- Water well before planting and trim off spent flowers. Once the plants put down roots they'll be able to find their own moisture and will need little watering.

**FIND** more container ideas at **gardeners** world.com/pots-containers





# **GRIT MULCH** Spread horticultural grit under the plants to create a unifying effect and keep their foliage dry. Our pink-ish grit complements some of the flower colours.



### MORE GREAT OFFERS ON SCENTED SUMMER FLOWERING PLANTS



### **Buddleia Buzz Collection**

Collection includes one each of 'Hot Raspberry', 'Lavender' and 'Magenta'. Flowers Jun-Sep. **H x S** 120cm x 60cm

3 plants (1 of each) £10.95 6 plants (2 of each) £16.90 SAVE £5



### Chocolate Cosmos 'Eclipse'

The deep burgundy flowers emit a wonderful chocolate-like fragrance through the summer months. Flowers Jul-Oct. H x S 60cm x 40cm

5 plants £9.95 10 plants £16.90 **SAVE £3** 



### **Garden Pinks Collection**

One each of 'Gran's Favourite', 'Doris', 'Monica Wyatt', 'Haytor', and 'Houndspool Cheryl'. Flowers Jul-Oct. H x S 30cm x 30cm

5plants(1 of each) £8.95 10 plants (2 of each) £12.90 SAVE £5



### Petunia Tumbelina 'Scented Falls'

Scented double flowers in a mix of blues and whites. Flowers Jun-Oct. H x S 20cm x 40cm. Trails to 40cm 6 plants (2 of each) £9.95 12 plants (4 of each) £14.90 SAVE £5

# **BONUS**



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### Heliotrope 'Midnight Sky'

A delicious cherry pie-like fragrance mixed with a hint of vanilla. Flowers Jun-Oct.

**H x S** 30cm x 30cm 5 plants £9.95 10 plants £14.90 **SAVE £5** 



### Pelargonium 'Orange Fizz'

A classic Victorian variety with a distinctive orange fragrance and pretty soft pink flowers. Flowers Jul-Oct. **H x S** 30cm x 25cm 5 plants £9.95

10 plants £14.90 SAVE £5

charge. \*\*Not including FREE lavender plants



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### FREE Lavender offer

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DESCRIPTION		PRICE	Club	QTY	TOTAL
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50796 51151	Buddleia Buzz Collection 3 plants (1 of each) Buddleia Buzz Collection 6 plants (2 of each) SAVE £5	£10.95 £16.90	£9.89 £15.21		
49334 51152	Chocolate Cosmos 'Eclipse' 5 plants Chocolate Cosmos 'Eclipse' 10 plants SAVE £3	£9.95 £16.90	£8.96 £15.21		
42637 51153	Garden Pinks Collection 5 plants (1 of each) Garden Pinks Collection 10 plants (2 of each) SAVE £5	£8.95 £12.90	£8.06 £11.61		
50870 51154	Heliotrope 'Midnight Sky' 5 plants Heliotrope 'Midnight Sky' 10 plants SAVE £5	£9.95 £14.90	£8.96 £13.41		
45259 51155	Pelargonium 'Orange Fizz' 5 plants Pelargonium 'Orange Fizz' 10 plants SAVE £5	£9.95 £14.90	£8.96 £13.41		
49373 51156	Petunia 'Scented Falls' 6 plants (2 of each) Petunia 'Scented Falls' 12 plants (4 of each) SAVE £5	£9.95 £14.90	£8.96 £13.41		
51159	<b>BONUS OFFER!</b> Buy <b>42 Pelargonium Mixed F1 plants</b> for only £9.95 when you spend £10 or more <b>** SAVE £10</b>	£9.95	£8.96		
	Subscribers: insert your discount code here	see p26			

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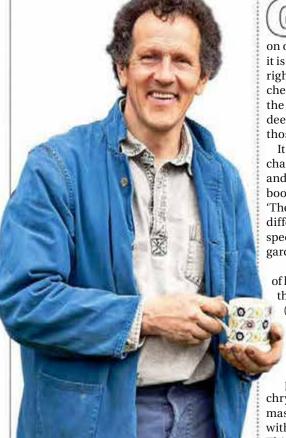
Formulated to provide deep hydration when you most need it - overnight. It penetrates 10 layers deep while you sleep, so you can awake to firmer looking skin.

### #AGELESS



# The Full Monty

**Monty** reviews the transformation in gardening since *Gardeners' World* launched 50 years ago



ardeners' World was first broadcast on 5 January 1968, so this year we are celebrating its 50th year on our screens. However you measure it, it is a landmark. So the celebrations will rightly be loud and long and I will be cheering as loudly as anyone. But when the partying is done, there remains a much deeper fascination with the changes that those 50 years mark.

It goes without saying that the world has changed utterly – I was 12 in January 1968 and, as the opening words of L.P. Hartley's book *The Go-Between* so memorably say, 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.' It was. We did. But more specifically, the changes in gardens and gardening have been fascinating.

My parents had embraced the new age of labour-free gardening with gusto. Until the mid-1960s, we had two greenhouses

(heated by coke wheeled down the garden path in a

barrow to the ancient boiler) full of alyssum, pelargoniums and

chrysanthemums, for mass bedding, along with hardy annuals.

This was all swept away, the ornamental Victorian beds grassed over and shrubs planted – not as part of shrubberies, as my great-grandfather had planted them, but as individual specimens in a sea of grass. My grandfather's hybrid tea roses were daringly replaced with shrub roses.

At just the time when *Gardeners' World* appeared on our screens, three sociological changes were occurring that transformed gardening and gardens for ever. The first was ownership of colour TV sets. The launch of the BBC's colour transmission service in 1967 meant that colour TVs, once the preserve of the very rich, became over the following decade almost ubiquitous. Gardening in black and white had a following, but when broadcast in colour it really took off.

The second huge change was car ownership, which rose dramatically during the 60s, and has continued to do so ever since. This meant that instead of sending off for plants and seeds by mail order and waiting weeks or even months for delivery, families could drive to and buy plants from the third significant change to affect gardening – the garden centre.

Until the mid-1960s, to buy a shrub you had to order it in autumn for spring delivery, and it arrived bare root. But as more and more people owned cars, nurseries realised they could make sales all year round. Plants could be potted up, sold, put in the car, taken home and planted within the hour. This meant gardening could happen on a whim – or in response to a television programme seen the night before.

Work patterns were also changing. Many people worked on Saturday mornings as a matter of course, well into the 1970s. But as this diminished there was more leisure time in which, among other things, to shop and to garden. Gardeners became consumers, because they became mobile and had more opportunities to shop, and plants became consumable goods, because their customers were mobile and had easier access to them.

There was one other significant commercial influence. Until August 1994,

**66** Gardening in black

and white had a following.

but when broadcast in

colour, it really took off 🥦

almost no Sunday shopping was possible. Garden centres, however, were exempt from the Sunday trading ban and had started to capitalise on the itch to spend,

opening cafés and selling anything remotely connected to gardens – and quite a lot that was not. As a result, by the mid-1980s gardening had become a 'lifestyle' activity.

The gardening world has changed beyond recognition since Percy Thrower and Ken Burras first broadcast *Gardeners' World* from Oxford Botanic Garden. In 50 years' time, if the programme is still on air, it doubtless will have changed as much again. But those changes will be driven not so much by science or horticulture but – like all gardening fashions and trends throughout history – by changes in society and, above all, by technology.



### **Monty on TV**

### Gardeners' World

Catch up with Monty and the team tackling spring gardening jobs every Friday at 8pm.



PHOTO: MARSHA ARNOLD

Write to Have your say. Gardeners' World. Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, London W6 7BT or email letters@gardenersworld.com and you could win National Garden Gift Vouchers

### Oh, rats!

### **Many of your features**

express the delights of wildlife in the garden and rightly so, however, while recent issues have debated the delights or otherwise of foxes in the garden, rodents such as rats never seem to get a mention. Where there are popular feathery, furry or prickly creatures, there will also be rats; indeed, they are especially fond of compost heaps.

We garden organically and never use pesticides or rat/ mouse killers. We accept that the occasional rat streaks by and that field mice hop around the hedges. However, it is thought that the trend to recycle organic waste has led to an increase in rodent populations. I think this is an issue that you should tackle, as you stress the advantages of organic- and pesticide-free gardening. What safe and humane methods are there to remove rats?

Jessica Munns, Gloucs

We say Sadly rats can cause a problem in the garden and be difficult to tackle humanely. Traps and poison bait are usually the only option or call in pestcontrol as a last resort.

### Leave those wasps alone

Lucy Hall is right about wasps (Welcome, February issue). They've been a friend of mine ever since I saw one pull a big grub out of an onion leaf. They only get aggressive if you attack them. Keep sweet stuff covered because that's what they are after.

Margaret Hargreaves, by email

Last summer, while enjoying a cream tea in the gardens of a country house, we were warned

that if we sat outside there would be wasps. We weren't put off, and when a single wasp arrived, we poured a drop of juice into a lid and placed a piece of jam and scone next to it, which the wasp happily consumed without bothering us.

I know wasps can be a nuisance, but I recognise their value in the world, and hate to think of them being trapped in jars to drown along with other pollinating insects.

Ursula Bulpitt, by email



DEFRA's update on the use of 'neonicotinoids' post-Brexit

### **DEFRA** responds

### Further to your letters in

Have your say (March issue), in response to our story 'Brexit means bee-exit?' (Clippings, February issue), we've now heard back from DEFRA, which has provided the following statement:

"The Government makes decisions on pesticides based on science. The use of 'neonicotinoids' is restricted and we are committed to ensuring pesticides are available only when the scientific evidence shows they do not pose unacceptable risks to the environment."



### Ivy: home to birds, wasps, bees...



Ivy looks fantastic and protects many beneficial insects

I must agree with Chris Baines (Over the fence, March issue) about the merits of ivy, especially its benefits to wildlife. In my small garden, I have ivy growing everywhere: up walls, trellises and fences, and in hedges. It is home to blackbirds, collared doves, dunnocks, robins, wood pigeons, wrens and a large colony of sparrows. As for snails, a thrush visits my garden daily to polish them off.

My garden would be a poorer place without ivy. It just needs to be kept under control with a good trim a couple of times a year.

**KR Martin, Bedfordshire** 

When we took over our overgrown garden, there was ivy everywhere, mostly mixed with ground elder and Russian vine. I really hated it and spent many years cutting it back and pulling it out. However, I realised that the huge plant hanging onto the front of the house provided a safe haven to blue tits and a robin, and as Chris Baines says, many insects enjoy the flowers.

So, I would advise: ivy in moderation, be careful where you plant it and don't allow it to get out of control.

**Christine Allan, Hants** 

I am fortunate to have an old cob barn in my garden, which has ivy growing up one side. In late autumn and winter, it provides food and shelter to birds, and hibernation crevices for insects.

It gets a light trim in early spring, when I also clear the guttering and check the nesting boxes. A wren often tucks a nest into a natural pocket and a blackbird nests on a ledge. When it's warm enough, solitary bees emerge, and mining bees leave a tell-tale dusting of cob. In late summer, the whole wall hums with wasps, solitary bees and honey bees. What's not to like?

Clare Penney, Devon

### Can gardening save the the NHS? Our readers certainly think so...

In the January issue, we highlighted the benefits of gardening to improve the nation's health with the feature *Can gardening save the the NHS?*We've received many inspiring letters. Here is a selection, with more to be found on our Facebook page at **bit.ly/gw-fb-letters** 

Eleven years ago, at the age of 39, my life came to a crashing halt when I became ill with severe clinical depression. A year later, I began to feel that I should try to work; I knew I could never go back to my old life, but what could I do? My friend's mother suggested I try gardening. The idea appealed, and she kindly asked me to put her garden to rest for the winter, which I did and earned some money for the first time in ages.

It was the dreariest October, but for the first time in months I was motivated and keen to tackle the slightly overwhelming job ahead – I spent hours raking leaves, cutting back, edging, composting and pruning. I didn't realise at the time but this was the start of my gardening career, which suits me perfectly. I'm outside, on my own in the fresh air, and nurturing my clients' gardens throughout the seasons.

I have eight regular gardens and I've learnt so much about horticulture. Gardening has been a great benefit to my physical health, too. My bingo arms have vanished through endless hours of sweeping leaves and mowing lawns. The fresh air and the quiet solitude have helped me to slowly piece together the fragments of my life, saving my sanity, and enabling me to live a far more rewarding and peaceful life.

Ann-Louise Dyer, by email

I can definitely vouch for the healing powers of gardening. After losing my wife to cancer in November 2015, I have kept up all her good work in our garden and allotment. This has done more for my rehabilitation than anything else. I now volunteer twice a week at Sutton Community Farm and Gatton Park, where I learn something new every week.

David Dale, by email

I spend many hours in the garden and find it therapeutic. After a stressful week at work, I can't think of a better way to unwind than tending my shrubs, raising plants or digging the veg patch.

Having suffered from depression, I know how gardening can lift my mood and when feeling anxious it can be extremely calming. Angry feelings can be dealt with by a bit of hard digging and pruning. I wish I could prescribe this therapy to people less fortunate than me.

Jenny Lamper, Sussex

After losing our son in tragic circumstances, we returned to our home in France, where we created a memorial garden. Now my husband and I have somewhere lovely to sit and remember the happy times we shared. If I didn't have this space to escape to I would never have been able to move forward. The exercise and the healthy produce we grow and share, helps add to the peace and my mental stability.

Susan Lambert, by email

**After suffering** with bouts of depression and being written off sick by my doctor, I discovered

gardening. My neighbour lan, who had cancer, got me started. He had a beautiful garden that he needed help with. I found myself spending days cutting the lawns, weeding the borders and, best of all, learning. My neighbour was an excellent gardener, and we would sit and talk for hours – we realised we were helping each other.

One day, a passerby stopped to admire the garden and said they needed help in their own garden. Three years later and I'm now a self-employed gardener. I can't believe how much gardening has changed my life.

Craig Spours, by email

We wanted to tell you about the gardening group we created at our surgery. The patients were allotted two plots of land, giving them the chance to garden for therapeutic reasons. The plots have been transformed into an atmospheric space that benefits not only those that tend them, but also visitors and staff.

The group recently won an award in recognition of making the gardens accessible to patients of all physical abilities. We are going from strength to strength and would encourage others to do a bit of gardening.

Yvonne Fernando and Kay Alcott, The Gardening Group at Charing Surgery, Kent **Your feature** resonated with the work we do, and our flagship garden, the Queen Elizabeth Hall Roof Garden on London's Southbank, is a prime example.

There are many benefits to

working with the earth and plants, caring for growing things and being outdoors. The current impetus towards promoting gardening as part of a broader NHS is undeniably gaining strength, and our company is part of this groundswell. In particular, Jinny Blom's quote rang true for our volunteers: "... the physical process of digging, handling earth and being alongside nature really helped calm people". This aptly describes the positive effects that gardening brings to people who gain self-respect and feel proud being part of a successful team. We are doing our bit to help save the NHS and more recognition will help the momentum grow.

Lucy Cullen, Grounded Ecotherapy, London

I was reading your feature and felt I must write in to say I'm sure gardening is good for mind and body! There is nothing more fulfilling than working among the flower beds, cutting grass and watching wildlife. I urge everyone to give it a go.

Dianne Blair, Hampshire





# Any tips on rabbit-proofing my garden?

• Oriental poppies and aromatic herbs are fairly resistant. With wire fencing, lay 30cm flat just below the soil surface to stop them burrowing under, and 90-120cm vertically. And never leave the gate open.

### raisingirl

- The rabbits that visit my yard every night feast on the bird seed. As long as there is a pile of seeds under the feeders, they leave my plants alone.
  - Johnny canoe
- I put four canes and a ring of chicken wire around young shrubs to protect them in winter, when rabbits are most likely to eat them. I find they leave them alone in summer.

### lindseytaylor01

• Grow resistant plants such as daffs and snowdrops, potentillas, berberis, rhododendrons and azaleas, vincas, junipers and other conifers. Use a tree guard round the base of climbers like clematis and honeysuckle. Mature plants can withstand the onslaught better.

### Fairygirl

• I place wire cloches over some plants till they're strong enough to handle a gnawing. Also a sprinkling of chilli powder puts them off.

### Grannybee

 Block up any holes in fences – they like to have an escape route.

Zoomer44

# **GARDENERSWORLD. COM/FORUM** features lots of lively debate, with readers asking questions and offering advice. To join this thread go

to gardenersworld.com/rabbit-proofing

### Over the fence



# Are gardens turning into theme parks?

As gardens strive to attract more visitors,

are they losing the magic that appealed to us in the first place?

hildren's play trail? Check. Café serving gluten-free organic lemon drizzle cake and macchiato? Check. Exit via the gift shop? Check. Gardens are transforming at a startling rate in an attempt to keep pace with our increasing demand for attractions that indulge our every need. It seems that visitor centres, activity areas and endless opportunities to eat and drink are becoming fundamental to our experience of visiting gardens. As such, we're in danger of stripping away their identities and losing what it is that made them so popular in the first place.

Some of Britain's most beloved gardens – pioneered by horticultural heroes such as Christopher Lloyd, Vita Sackville-West and Gertrude Jekyll – evolved with a strong

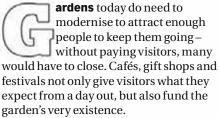


identity, full of romanticism, simple charm and bags of eccentricity. They inspired us to visit other

similar gardens and to explore and engage with the world of plants in our own lives and in our own homes. This sense of identity should be cherished and nurtured, rather than diluted to ensure gardens retain their five-star TripAdvisor rating. Rather than constructing indoor play centres, we should aim to engage young gardeners intelligently, through stimulation rather than exhaustion.

In a few years' time, we don't want to be reminiscing about these 'unusual' gardens that have lost their magic. Much better, surely, to celebrate individuality and quirkiness, and to champion vision and creativity? Let's admit that it's okay not to have a light festival or tulip extravaganza, but allow us to simply enjoy becoming immersed in a garden's past and present, and, above all, in its great planting – isn't that what gardens are truly about?

**Tom Brown** is the Head Gardener of Parham House and Gardens, West Sussex



It is particularly important for botanic gardens such as Kew to engage with visitors in an educational way, especially with children. And this can be theme based, without turning a garden into a theme park. Children are our future and we need to get them interested in our parks, gardens and plants now, in the hope that they'll look after them in the decades to come, but we have a lot to compete with in this digital age.

Some of the events Kew holds can seem a bit theme-parky, for example movie and music evenings, but they attract a new audience at a time when the gardens are usually closed. Our popular Christmas lights trail brings in thousands of families, many for the first time, to see some of Kew's landscape and large trees lit up in a magical way. These events help to fund the heritage landscapes for the day-time visitors.

At Kew, we are currently building a new children's garden based around plants and play. It won't detract from the surrounding landscape, but will in fact enhance it, with

plants used in new and exciting ways. Many of today's garden designers will, I'm sure, be the garden heroes of

66 Cafés and gift shops fund the garden's very existence 99

the future, like Gertrude Jekyll was in the 19th and 20th centuries, when she changed the landscapes of her predecessors.

But there will hopefully always be room for quieter areas within gardens to provide the relaxation that many visitors enjoy.

**Tony Hall** is the Arboretum and Gardens Manager at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew



**HAVE YOUR SAY** Should visitor gardens offer various extra non-horticultural attractions, or purely be places we go to to engage with plants? Write in and tell us, at the address on p18



# **Clippings**

Our monthly roundup of the hotttest gardening news and views



### Good bugs, bad bugs

### There's little worse

than seeing new shoots and seedlings destroyed by garden pests. Research project The Big Bug Hunt is asking gardeners to log pest sightings at bigbughunt.com, so that nearby gardeners will be warned of bugs active in their area. The scheme uses weather data and methods developed at York University to predict where bugs will strike.

However, some bugs are to be welcomed - the stag beetle, for example, is not only on the endangered list, but performs handy tasks, like pollinating plants or recycling decaying matter. The People's Trust For Endangered Species is running a survey from April to August and wants volunteers to monitor stag beetle sightings. To join in and to see how to hold a stag (beetle) party in your plot see ptes.org or call 020 7498 4533.

## Copycat neighbours

55% of people admit they copy their neighbours' gardens. They are also more likely to copy gardens than any other part of a neighbour's home or property.\*

### Reader design to appear at GWL 2017

**GW Magazine** subscriber, Nia Blake, will create one of the Beautiful Borders at this year's Gardeners' World Live at the NEC. Inspired by GW TV's 50th birthday, her design draws on Monty's 2016 visit to the world's longest double herbaceous borders in Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Nia says: "Monty likened the Great Broad
Walk Borders of Kew to a
'once-in-a-lifetime
experience'. So I went to
have a look. I loved the
way the plants were
grouped together in zones
reflecting different
botanical and horticultural
types, while creating a
fabulous display of colour,
texture and shape. My

design re-creates this concept, focusing on plants from the Asteraceae and Lamiaceae family and monocots. I'd like visitors to be inspired by the science of the groupings, while enjoying the visual display." Look out for Nia's border at the show, which runs 15-18 June at the NEC. See p60 for tickets.



### Keep your eyes peeled for lily beetle

Help the RHS track red lily beetle progress, which are active again this month, by reporting



sightings on rhs.org.uk/ science/help-ourresearch/lily-beetle

The beetles will eat fritillaries as well as lilies, and can quickly ruin a display. Adult beetles can be picked off plants by hand, while pesticides are likely to be more effective on larvae (which will become most prevalent in the next few weeks).

Heavy infestations can be treated with pesticides, such as Westland Resolva Bug Killer or Bayer Sprayday Greenfly Killer. Organic insecticides containing natural pyrethrins may also have some effect. Plants in flower should not be sprayed due to the danger to pollinating insects.

### **News in brief**

### UK rainforests

You don't have to go to Brazil for rainforests; only to Scotland's West Coast! The National Trust for Scotland and Plantlife are promoting Celtic rainforests. Visit nts.org.uk or call 01599 566325 to book a guided walk.

### National Gardening Week

Running 10-16 April, don't miss a week of activities across all four RHS gardens – Wisley, Harlow Carr, Hyde Hall and Rosemoor. Visit nationalgardening week.org.uk for more.

### Most-loved herb

Coriander was the most popular herb of 2016 according Johnsons, supplier of Jekka McVicar's seed range.

### • Flowers at the castle

The RHS's first flower show of the year is at RHS Cardiff Castle, 7-9 April. Tickets from £9. Visit rhs.org.uk

### • Hear Dan's chat

Award-winning garden designer, Dan Pearson, will give a lecture in aid of the Beth Chatto Education Trust at the University of Essex on 30 June – just three days after Beth's 94th birthday! Tickets from £25. Visit bethchatto. co.uk for details.



### **Nematodes** to the rescue

A combination of nematodes and fungi has been used to protect Welsh forests from large pine weevils – the most damaging pests in UK woodland. A five-year trial for Natural Resources Wales by the Forestry Commission agency Forest Research mixed microscopic nematode worms (that eat larvae, pupae and young adult weevils) with fungi to reduce the Hylobius abietis beetles by 90%.

Nematodes can be used to control garden pests such as slugs, chafer grubs, ants and vine weevils using BASF's Nemasys and Nemaslug products. "British gardeners are increasingly using nematodes to control slugs and other pests and we are delighted to be able to offer them the chance to use the same type of products as the professionals," says Gavin Wood, BASF's UK Business Manager.



planted 1,400 native trees in the Lake District to help prevent future flooding. New woodlands and wildlife corridors have been created by groups, including schoolchildren, who

rangers to plant trees in five locations in February, this year.

The National Trust's first mass planting project included 500 trees planted at Coledale, two miles from by landslides during 2015's Storm Desmond. The storm left the National Trust with a £1million clean-up bill and it is hoped the trees will help trap rainwater to prevent similar events.

### **Gardening** enemy No 1

Slugs, snails and honey fungus were the most troublesome garden pests and diseases in 2016, according to the Royal Horticultural Society.

There was a record number of enquiries to the RHS Gardening Advice team about hungry gastropods which were knocked off the top spot in 2015 by box tree moths - while honey fungus has been gardeners' enemy number one for the past 21 years.

More surprising was the rise of pests such as glasshouse thrips - in at number four, when it was outside the top 10 in previous years - and fuchsia gall mites, which crawled up five places to become the third most problematic pest in 2016. The latter was only detected in mainland Britain in 2007, but is now widespread over southern England, while glasshouse thrips (also known as thunder flies) are now thriving outdoors - mostly in sheltered shrubs in urban areas. For help dealing with problems go to gardenersworld. com/problems



This quirky east London garden has won a design award

### Community garden winner

### A former scrapyard

now transformed into a community garden has won the Judges' Award in the garden design 'Oscars'. Breaker's Yard, at the National Trust property Sutton House, aims to inspire locals through a

mix of edibl borders, art and education. An upcycled bus, ice-cream van and '70s caravan house a greenhouse and displays. Visit this Society of Garden Designers' winner on Wed-Sun (daily 24 July-3 Sep). See nationaltrust.org

### Our pick of garden trugs



### Kitchen garden trug

Robust and lightweight trug made from corrosion-proof galvanised steel.

£19.99, crocus.co.uk



### **Stewart Garden Trug**

A practical, long-lasting plastic trug with a simple design and budget price tag.

£7.99, longacres.co.uk



Sarah Raven, Willow Trug Made from strong and durable willow, this baskets looks good inside and outside the house. £27.95, sarahraven.com



### **Burgon & Ball Traditional Wooden Trug**

This attractive handmade trug makes a stylish garden accessory. £29.95, thebasketcompany.com



**Celebrating its 50th year** 

in production, BBC Gardeners' World is as treasured today in 2017 as it was back in the 1960s. From the first pioneering programmes aired in colour (with Percy Thrower wearing a tie!) to the beautiful HD, hour-long shows we enjoy today, it's been quite a ride. The presenters and gardens have come and gone, with Percy, Geoff and Alan all making their mark along the way. Of course one thing has remained constant - our nation's love for all

things gardening. Read more from Monty on p17.

### Share your memories

Join us in the coming months as we celebrate 50 years share your GW memories with us by post or email (see page 18) and use the hashtag #gw50 on your social media messages.





**Geoff Hamilton at** Barnsdale; Percy Thrower was one presenters; Alan Titchmarsh at the helm from 1996

### The celebration continues in GW Magazine

 Find out how you can vote in the Golden Jubilee Award (see right)

### June

- Our special 50th birthday edition, including a look back into the Gardeners' World photo archive
- Alan Titchmarsh reflects on his GW years
- The celebrations culminate with a special TV programme from GW Live on 16 June - see p60 for tickets

### July

• Discover the winner of the Golden Jubilee Award - which plant has had the most impact in the past 50 years?

Your show – we share your memories of Gardeners' World TV through the years. Get in touch and use #gw50 on social media!





### To mark five decades

of TV gardening, the Gardeners' World programme team has launched the Golden Jubilee Award. The accolade will be awarded to the plant that's had the most impact on our gardens in the past 50 years, as voted for by you, GW readers and viewers.

Monty and the other nine GW presenters are each championing a plant for the shortlist, and you'll get a chance to vote from Friday 19 May. The winner will be revealed on TV and at Gardeners' World Live on 16 June.

Monty's choice was

revealed on the first programme of the series, and he explains why bedding plants deserve your vote: "People could drive to a garden centre, see the plants the wanted - and in the case of bedding, usually in flower - buy them, load the car and have them planted within half an hour. This dramatically changed the way we gardened." And Nick Bailey put dahlias into the mix, revealing why they should take the crown: "The way dahlias have transformed from a niche show-bench plant to a fashionable garden essential is remarkable."

### Tunein

### Gardeners' World

See more from the Golden Jubilee Award shortlist. Gardeners' World every Friday at 8pm (off air 28 April).



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hundreds, nay thousands, of other dahlias which deserve a chance to enter the mainstream. Of those with bronze foliage, 'David Howard' is one of the best. It produces double, soft orange flowers in profusion and, although not as ostentatious as some, is always arresting. It needs little attention, standing up for itself without the help of stakes or supports. Most of the

**There've** been exciting developments in recent years in dahlia seed combos offered for sale

singles and many of the more compact doubles can stand up without help, but some of the larger cactus blooms may need a stout bamboo cane per flower to hold their heads high. The single-flowered forms cope best with rain, while the heads of

some doubles can become sodden or dishevelled in wet weather.

The single 'Moonfire' is a favourite of mine for the really startling hues of its blooms. It has a yellow background colour and rings of orange and red around its central disc. It is lovely with some of the hot-toned achillea and with grasses such as Anemanthele lessoniana in olive and orange, throwing up its tall airy flowerheads, while the foliage creates ribbons of underlying colour. We grew it, and other singles grown from seed, in huge containers last year alongside orange Agastache aurantiaca and a single African marigold, Tagetes linnaeus.

### Seed. tuber or ready-grown?

Of the three main ways of introducing new dahlias into your garden, the cheapest is to sow seeds. And there have been exciting developments in recent years in dahlia seed combos offered for sale. One of the best is 'Bishop's Children' bred from 'Bishop of Llandaff'. All the seedlings from this mix share the same dark foliage and the range of their flower colour runs from scintillating magenta and rich crimson through orange and red, to yellow and pink. Most are singleflowered - a huge benefit to bees and other pollinators, as the pollen and nectar is easily accessible. Once they have grown for a season, they can be lifted and their tubers stored like any other dahlia.

Sow seeds from February to early April. Sprinkle them sparingly on the surface of half trays of seed compost, cover with grit and press down lightly. Stand trays in shallow water until the grit darkens, then lift out, drain and place in a bright, warm place.

You can also buy dahlias as dormant tubers or ready-growing potted plants. You can source dormant tubers from January until May, and the earlier you buy, the wider the choice of varieties that will still be available. Potted plants are usually available to buy from May. They are much more expensive since they've been grown







Make a hole near the edge of a terracotta pot to place your cutting into

# Make more plants from your tubers

**An exciting** and straightforward way to increase your stock of dahlias is to take basal cuttings soon after they come into growth. You can do this from both new tubers and over-wintered tubers.

At Glebe Cottage we overwinter tubers lifted the previous autumn and store them in dryish compost, potting them on in early spring. Plants already in big pots are brought in, stored dry and in spring have some of the old compost removed and then topped up with fresh compost. In both cases they are watered well in spring.

When new shoots are about 10-12cm high, sever them as close to the tuber as possible with a sharp knife. Push the cuttings up to the base of their first leaves around the edge of a clay pot filled with gritty compost. Cover the surface with grit and water well. Stand pots in a warm, bright place. When roots poke out of the hole in the base of the pot, knock out the contents, separate carefully and repot gently into individual 9cm pots.

Although they may not reach the magnitude of grand old plants in a season, if you pot them on promptly – as soon as their roots have filled the pot – and put them out once frosts are over, they should flower in their first year.

### Repeat performance

Dahlias are tender, so in our gardens, which are not just cold but also wet in winter, they are best lifted and stored.

Dig them up promptly after the first frost. Be sure to get right under the tubers so you don't split them.

Shake or brush off the excess soil, cut back the stems almost to the roots, and invert the whole caboodle to allow excess moisture to drain away, before immersing them in their winter plunge of dry compost, chipped bark or shredded paper and storing them in a frost-free place. They can be stored upside down, too, but must be turned the right way up before they start to grow in the spring.

In February or March, pot them up in loam-based compost and gradually bring them into growth by watering, then plant out into the garden only after all risk of frost has passed.

If you're in a warm part of the country and have free-draining soil, a lower maintenance option is to leave dahlias in the ground over winter - though this can result in the plants putting on a less impressive show. Cut stems to the ground after the first frost and then pile up soil above the tubers to prevent them from freezing - this can give the impression that enormous moles have been at work!



After the first frost, lift your tubers and remove excess soil before storing them



on and nurtured, whereas if you buy tubers, it's you who has to do all the nurturing. However, this is a pleasure and

demands little effort, apart from potting up the tubers. Do this somewhere frostfree, in good rich compost, preferably loam-based if they're to stay in their pots for any length of time.

### Good soil and a touch of grit

I prefer to start dahlias in pots for three reasons: firstly, they can be planted out when risk of frost has passed; secondly, they make strong plants that can withstand inevitable slug nibbling when they go out; and lastly, they make robust shoots that are perfect for basal cuttings (see panel p31).

When planting from pots, whether into the ground or into big containers, they should be planted to the same depth as they were in their original pots. Dahlias need good, fertile soil, moist rather than dry. If you decide to plant tubers straight into the ground, enrich the soil with compost and a balanced organic fertiliser if your soil is poor. Dig a hole deep and wide enough to accommodate the tubers with at least 5cm of soil above them. It's a good idea to use plenty of grit in the planting mix and also to sprinkle a thick layer of grit on top of the soil to deter slugs.

If you buy tubers it's you who has to do all the nurturing. However, this is a pleasure 🤎

Water well during the growing season and occasionally feed with a highpotash food such as tomato feed, to

maintain flower quality and production. Stake where necessary and deadhead regularly to keep flowers coming. If you've got single dahlias you may want to keep a few seedheads to try producing your own plants from home-saved seed. If you do, it's probably better to let a few of the first flowers ripen and go brown rather than wait until the end of the season and use the left-over flowers. And that's all that's required to ensure your garden sizzles with colour this summer.  $\square$ 

► Turn over for a glorious gallery of dahlias catalogued by colour

### More from Carol

On TV Tune into the current series of Gardeners' World to watch Carol demonstrate how to grow and propagate other plant groups that will bring a zing to your TWC garden. Fridays, 8pm.

On stage Carol will share her expert advice on the BBC Gardeners' World Live Theatre stage on 17 June. For details and to book see p60.



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# Dahlias by colour

**There's** a dahlia to suit everyone, from towering stems topped by voluptuous decorative blooms to short varieties, perfect for pots, with small pompon or delicate collerette-style flowers. Use our guide to help you find the colour, style, height and flower size that's right for your garden.



'Suitzus Julie' Type Dwarf decorative Flowers Miniature, 5-8cm Height 40cm

34



'Marble Ball'



'Chimborazo' **Type** Collerette **Type** Decorative Flowers Small, 10-15cm Flowers Bicolour, medium, 15-20cm Supplier Gilberts dahlias Supplier National Dahlia Collection



Purples/pin

'Black Narcissus' **Type** Cactus Flowers Medium, 15cm Supplier National Dahlia Collection



'Cornel' **Type** Ball Flowers Small, 10cm **Supplier** Rose Cottage Plants

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### dahlias





'Yankee Doodle Dandy'
Type Collerette, half-hardy annual, from seed Flowers Mix of colours, miniature, up to 7cm H50-60cm
Supplier Suttons



'Nenekazi'
Type Semi-cactus
Flowers Medium, 15cm, with
fimbriated petals H 120cm
Supplier Pheasant Acre Plants



'Mary's Jomanda'
Type Ball
Flowers Miniature, up to 10cm
H 110cm
Supplier Halls of Heddon



**'Confusion' Type** Decorative **Flowers** Small, 10cm **H**75cm **Supplier** Hardy's Cottage
Garden Plants



'Gallery Art Nouveau'
Type Dwarf, decorative
Flowers Bicolour, miniature,
5-10cm H 45cm
Supplier Rose Cottage Plants



**'Magenta Star' Type** Miscellaneous, with very dark foliage **Flowers** Miniature, 5-10cm, single **H** 110cm **Supplier** Sarah Raven



'Ken's Rarity'
Type Waterlily
Flowers Small, 10-15cm
H 100-150cm
Supplier Halls of Heddon



'Carol's Spanish Dancer'
Type Cactus
Flowers Miniature, up to 10cm
H 120cm
Supplier Halls of Heddon



'Doris Day' Type Cactus Flowers Small, 10-15cm **H** 120cm Supplier Halls of Heddon



'Bryn Terfel' **Type** Decorative, late flowering Flowers Giant, 35cm **H** 150cm Supplier National Dahlia Collection



'Christopher Taylor' **Type** Waterlily Flowers Small, 10-15cm **H** 150cm Supplier Halls of Heddon



Type Miscellaneous, single, with dark foliage



'Dandy Improved Mix' **Type** Dwarf collerette, half-hardy annual, from seed Flowers Mix of colours, miniature, 7cm #60cm Supplier Thompson & Morgan



'Rev P Holian' Type Semi-cactus Flowers Giant, over 25cm **H**140cm Supplier National Dahlia Collection



'Fireworks Mixed' **Type** Dwarf, single, half-hardy annual, from seed Flowers Mix of colours, miniature, 5-10cm H40cm Supplier T&M



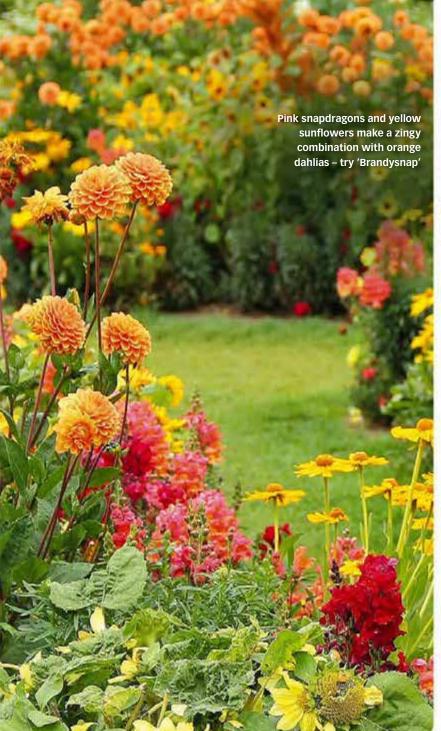
'Moor Place'

Flowers Miniature, 5-6cm

Supplier Pheasant Acre Plants

**Type** Pompon

# dahlias





'Freelancer'
Type Cactus
Flowers Large, 20-25cm
H 110-170cm
Supplier National Dahlia Collection



**'Kenora Sunset' Type** Semi-cactus **Flowers** Bicolour, medium,
15-21cm **H** 125cm **Supplier** Gilberts Dahlias



**'Ian Hislop' Type** Miscellaneous, single **Flowers** Small, 10-13cm **H** 120cm **Supplier** National Dahlia Collection



'David Howard'
Type Decorative
Flowers Miniature, 5-10cm
H 110cm
Supplier Pheasant Acre Plants



**'Julie One' Type** Miscellaneous, double orchid **Flowers** Small, 10cm **H**75cm **Supplier** Gilberts Dahlias



'Embrace'
Type Cactus
Flowers Small, 10-15cm
H 120cm
Supplier Pheasant Acre Plants



'Sylvia'
Type Ball
Flowers Miniature, 10cm
H 100cm
Supplier National Dahlia Collection



'Ryecroft Zoe'
Type Semi-cactus
Flowers Small, 10-15cm
H 120cm
Supplier Halls of Heddon



'Bonaventure'
Type Decorative
Flowers Giant, over 25cm
H 160cm Supplier Halls of Heddon



**Yellow Galator' Type** Cactus **Flowers** Medium, 15-20cm **H** 120cm **Supplier** Gilberts Dahlias



'Primrose Diane'
Type Decorative
Flowers Small, 10-15cm
H 100cm
Supplier Pheasant Acre Plants



**'Topmix Yellow' Type** Single **Flowers** Miniature, 6cm **H** 50cm **Supplier** P de Jager & Sons



'Charlie Two'
Type Decorative
Flowers Medium, 15-20cm
H 120cm
Supplier Ridgeview Nursery



"Trelyn Kiwi"
Type Cactus
Flowers Small, 17cm
H 120cm
Supplier National Dahlia Collection



'Fiona Stewart'
Type Ball
Flowers Small, 10-15cm
H 140cm
Supplier National Dahlia Collection



**'Joe Swift' Type** Miscellaneous, with dark leaves **Flowers** Single, miniature, 5-7cm **H** 150-180cm **Supplier** National Dahlia Collection



'Kenora Challenger'
Type Semi-cactus
Flowers Large, 20-25cm
H 120cm
Supplier Halls of Heddon

# Where to buy

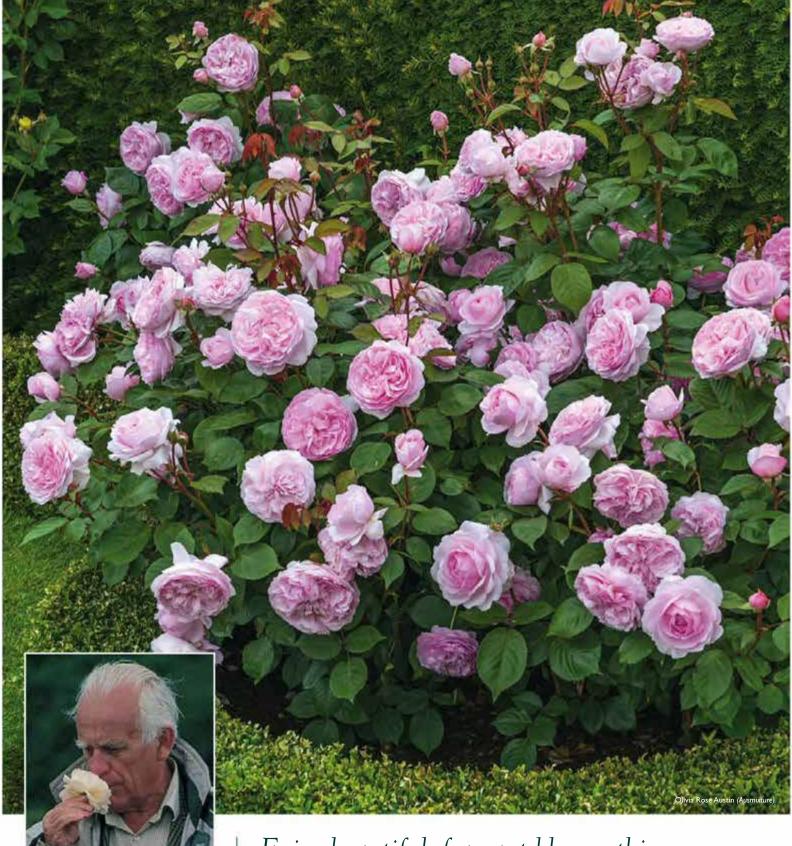
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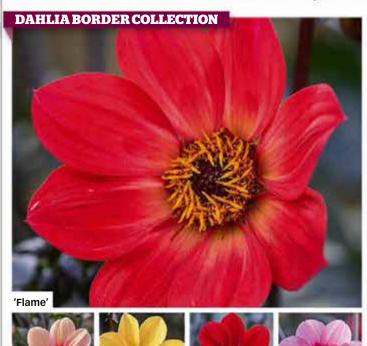
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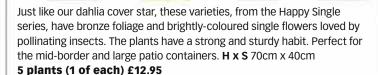
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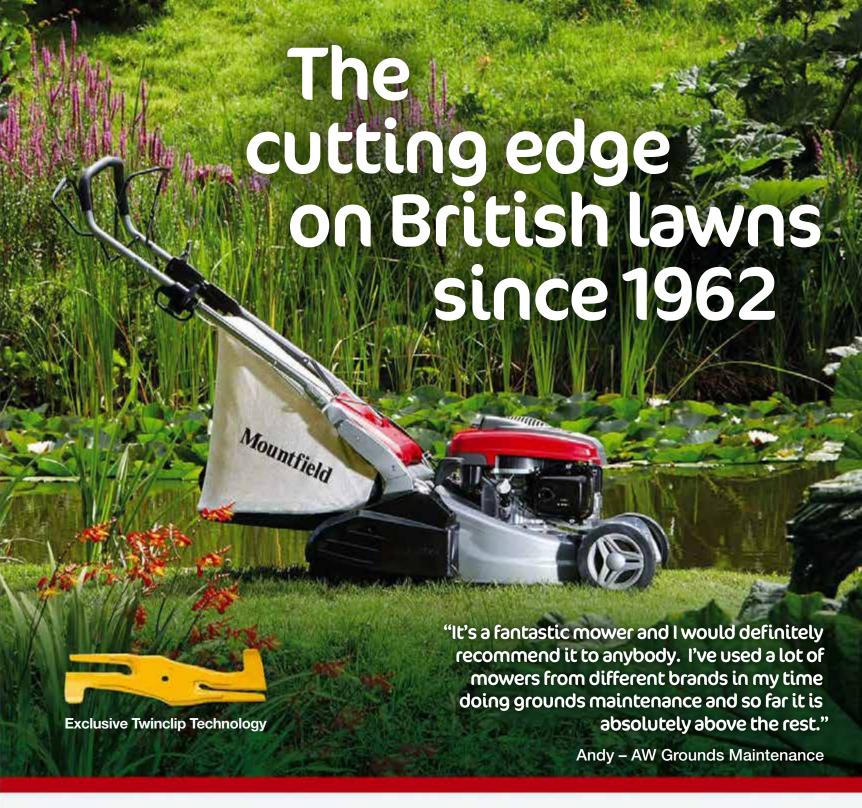
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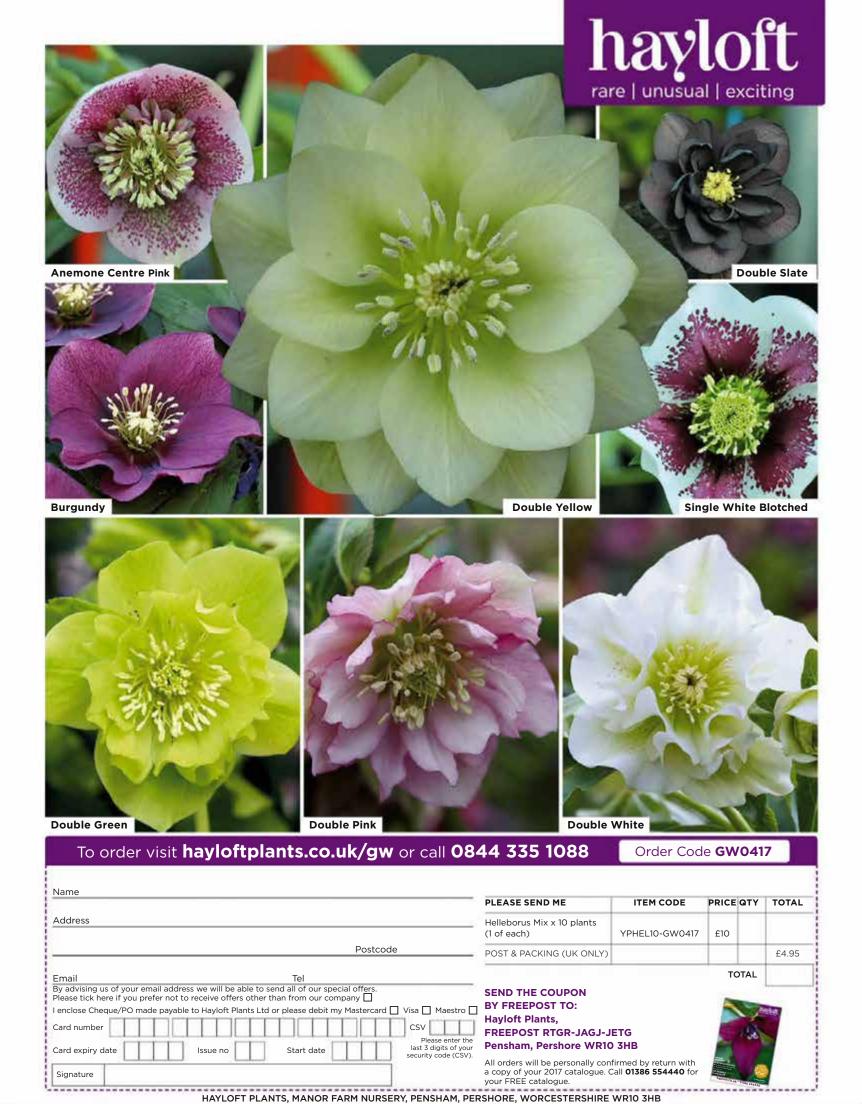


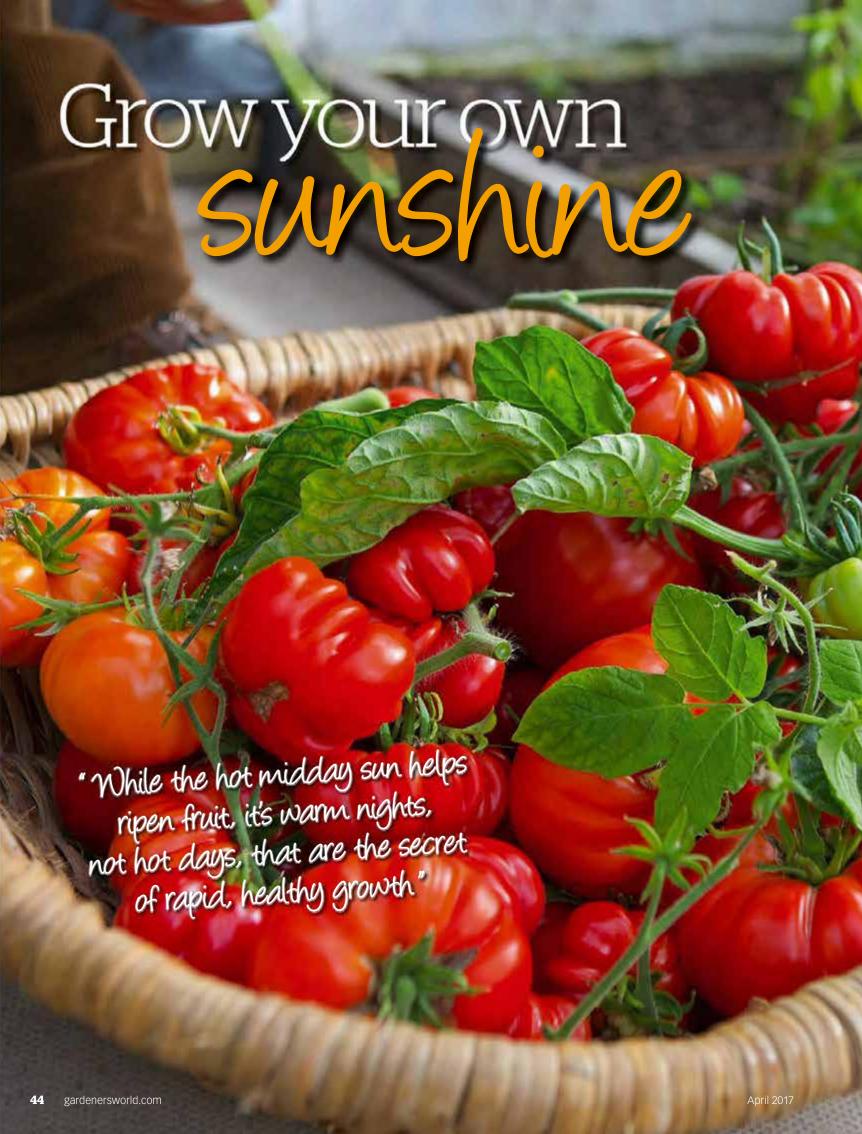
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# Rare and usually expensive

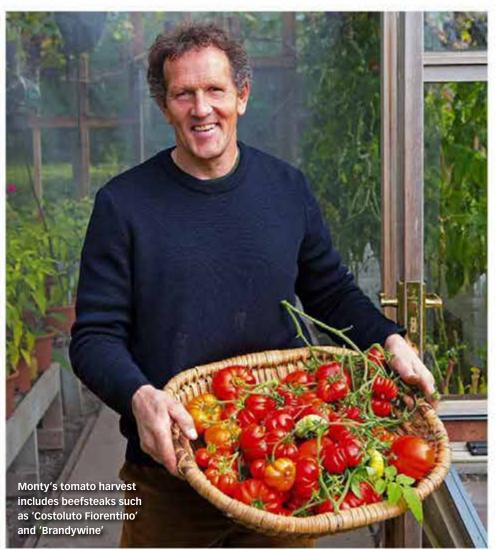
Helleborus have large, cup-shaped blooms which defy nature by surviving the cold and give a dainty appearance. In medieval times they were said to be good for breaking bad spells and curses so were often planted next to the front door. Prefer dappled shade with well-drained soil. Evergreen, deer and rabbit resistant. Height and spread 35cm (14"). Fully hardy perennials. Supplied in May as well-rooted young plants approx. 6" from root base to stem tip.











Home-grown tomatoes provide the true taste of summer. **Monty** reveals his guide to growing them, from sowing seeds to dealing with pests and diseases

Who doesn't love a fresh

tomato... with that warm,

sweet flavour so redolent

of sun and good living?

he tomato is the most popular vegetable grown by British gardeners. Yes, I know that it isn't a vegetable – it's a fruit – but let us set botanical pedantry aside. Aubergines, chillies, courgettes and cucumbers all cross the fruit/vegetable divide, but tomatoes are set foursquare in the vegetable plot.

And rightly are they popular – who doesn't love a fresh tomato, still warm from the sun? Fruit with skins so thin that the juice and flesh are barely

contained and which, with that first grazing of your teeth, bursts into your mouth with that warm, sweet, musty flavour so redolent of sun and good living? You just can't buy that in this country, but wander through any market in the Mediterranean in summer and there will be around 20 varieties of

tomato for sale, all at a perfect point of ripeness and all grown under a baking southern sun, so their taste has a complexity and fullness that the northern grower can barely aspire to. But we do. And we try.

Yet, apparently, over 40 per cent of *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine* readers grow their tomatoes outside. For all I know, you

would all switch to a greenhouse or a polytunnel if you had one – or perhaps you all live in the balmy south and have sun-baked south-facing walls

cocooned in a little Mediterranean microclimate. But certainly here on the border with Wales, growing tomatoes outside has become a fruitless exercise. Well, that's not exactly true. They fruit all right, but the fruits ripen grudgingly, the skins are thick and – worst of all – they never have that



intensity of taste that only heat can give them. So I regard growing them outside in this garden a waste of space and effort and, other than an experiment in 2015, haven't done so for years. I raise the seedlings in a heated greenhouse and grow them in an unheated one. But it's not just a question of daytime heat; while the hot midday sun helps ripen fruit, it's warm nights, not hot days, that are the secret of rapid, healthy growth. So, lesson number one: grow your tomatoes, indoors or out, in as sunny and hot a spot as you can give them.

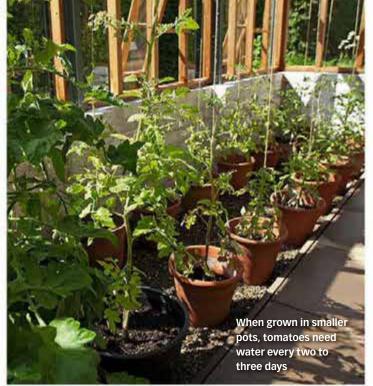
Tomatoes always react badly to fluctuating temperatures, and fruits sometimes split, then develop a grey, wispy mould caused by big, irregular variations in temperature between day and night. So keep the greenhouse wide open all day and close it before the evening cools down. Cold nights will also cause leaves to curl up lengthways and look as though they are about to die – older leaves are more affected.

One way of reducing this risk is to plant them out a little later than you otherwise might, because the real danger is from cool nights in May and June. By midsummer, the nights warm up (or perhaps cool down less) and by September the main focus is not on growing healthy plants, but on ripening as much fruit as possible. The final factor in healthy, strong plants is the level of light, especially early on, while the plant is still growing strongly. A gloomy June or July is bad news, regardless of the temperature whereas a gloomy but warm August can make for good tomatoes.

#### From seeds to sturdy plants

I like to sow the seed in two, or even three batches in February, March and April, scattering them thinly on the surface of peat-free compost and then very lightly covering them, either with a layer of more compost, or of vermiculite. Water them well and put them in a warm spot to germinate. A windowsill above a radiator is ideal if you don't have a greenhouse.

6 gardenersworld.com April 2017





How to pot up seedlings



Once seeds have germinated and produced two pairs of leaves, ease each seedling from the tray, carefully holding by a leaf.



2 The tomato plant will have developed a small root system, making it ready to take up nutrients from fresh, peat-free compost.



Bury the seedling in the compost to almost the base of the first pair of leaves, and grow on until 10-15cm tall, then repot.

When they develop their first pair of 'true' leaves – leaves, however small, that are recognisably of a tomato rather than the first to sprout from the seed – you know that they have good roots, and should be pricked out into better compost and individual pots or plugs. Grow them on in a warm, bright place and when they are about 10-15cm tall, pot them on again into 8cm pots.

This may sound like a lot of work, but it's important that the young, growing plant is not checked and the roots have room to grow. The young plants are ready to go out to their final growing position when around 25-30cm tall, by which time they often have developed their first flowering truss. When

The balance between feeding the plant and restricting its food, so it puts energy into fruit, is critical D

planting, bury them right up to the first leaf. This will hold them steady and encourage new roots to grow from the buried stem.

Cordons will get tall and heavy, so they need good solid support – or if grown inside, strong twine tied to the stem – just beneath the soil, and fixed to a wire – or the roof of the greenhouse – with the growing plant gradually twisting round it.

Big, fat books have been written about the best way to grow the plants and the best medium to grow them in. I have tried wide spacing, close spacing, big pots, small pots, terracotta and plastic pots, soil, growing bags and ring culture. In the end, I don't think it matters terribly. I've had excellent results from a cheap growing bag and very average ones from raised beds in a greenhouse filled with ideal Herefordshire loam and masses of textbook compost. But two things are critical: the balance between feeding the plant enough to grow strong and well, and restricting its food so it puts its energy into the fruit, not the leaves; and the watering regime. Tomatoes are tough plants



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frequently asked questions on tomatoes



# How do you prevent tomato blight now we don't have **Bordeaux mix?**

Jennifer Elsden, Gwynedd

After a lack of heat, the biggest problem for outdoor tomatoes is the risk of blight. This manifests itself as pale-brown blotches on leaves that will quickly spread into a circle of softly collapsing and browning leaves. The fungus can then get to the fruit, making them inedible. The best means of avoiding it is to grow your tomatoes under cover and not over water them, as the blight is spread when it's damp and needs humid conditions to develop.

If you have to grow them outside, choose blight-resistant varieties such as 'Crimson Crush' or 'Mountain Magic', and give the plants maximum ventilation by spacing them as widely as you can. At the first sign of blight, remove all affected leaves and fruit, and strip away all remaining foliage to expose the green fruit to maximum light and air. By August, tomato fruits will develop perfectly well with no leaves at all, so this isn't a disaster although it does look pretty dramatic. If the plant isn't rescuable, remove it and burn it.



# What is the cure for blossom end rot on tomatoes grown in the greenhouse?

**Gerry Froggatt, Kent** 

Blossom end rot is caused by inadequate or more often erratic – water supply that, in turn, stops the plant from taking in enough calcium so that the cells collapse. Water regularly and, if your soil is naturally very acidic, grow only small-fruited varieties that tend to be less susceptible.



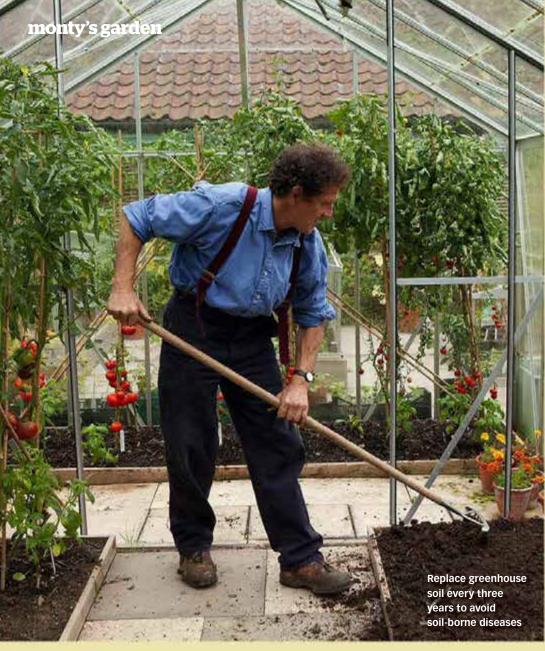
and too much kindness tends to do more harm than a little benign neglect; there is a greater danger in over-feeding and overwatering than in giving too little of either. If tomatoes are grown in a bed or large pot, a good soak of the roots once a week is usually sufficient – except in the hottest weather – while in a growing bag or smaller pot, watering every two or three days is enough.

Feeding should be minimal and comes in two stages. I remember visiting a garden in Guernsey where they were very proud of picking fresh tomatoes on Christmas Day every year. They would untie the cordon in September and lay it along the ground for 2m before training it to climb another



support. The plant was nurtured to reach 4m tall, or more, and had correspondingly more trusses of fruit. This took some feeding. But that was in a large, heated greenhouse in the distant sub-tropical climes of the Channel Islands. For most of us, indoors or out, the growing season will end in October, whether we like it or not.

The goal is to develop a strong plant that is then pushed right to the limit so that all its energies go into fruit production rather than the plant getting bigger. If you are growing them in soil, they will need no extra feed at all until they start to form flower trusses and then a weak seaweed solution once a week is plenty. If you are growing them in a



I grow tomatoes, peppers and chillies in beds in a small greenhouse, replenishing it every year, yet the results never seem that nourishing. How do I keep the soil in my greenhouse healthy?

Ann Bridgland, West Sussex

after year - regardless of how diligently you top it up with compost - there will be a build-up of soil-borne viruses. To avoid this, you need to practise crop rotation. But this is impractical unless you have a very large greenhouse, so instead of changing the crop, the answer is to change the soil. Every three years, dig out the top 25cm of your beds and replace with diseasefree garden soil such as from a loam stack.

If you grow tomatoes in the same soil year



# I always end up with a glut of tomatoes. Which varieties would you recommend for different uses?

Gill Halton, Gwynedd

For sauces, try 'Principe Borghese' and 'San Marzano'; for roasting, 'Gardener's Delight', 'Brandywine' and 'Costoluto Fiorentino'. For blight resistance, go for 'Crimson Crush' and 'Fandango'; and to eat with a splash of good oil, I recommend 'Cuore di Bue' and 'Pantano of Roma'.



# Why are all my tomatoes splitting before ripening?

Probably due to temperature fluctuations or because you are watering them too much or too erratically. Regular watering is the key.

container of any kind, then a generalpurpose tomato feed once a week is good or, if you have the resources, homemade comfrey feed works wonders.

#### **Pests and diseases**

As well as blight (see O&A panel), tomatoes are prone to a handsome array of viruses and moulds some of which, such as tomato leaf mould, are pretty disastrous. But an unhappy-looking tomato plant can still produce delicious fruit and it's the fruits that should be the focus of your attention. As far as pests go, whitefly is the most

common problem. The adult lays its eggs on the underside of leaves and, after a larval stage, the new adult emerges and feeds on the leaves, sucking sap, spreading viruses and exuding honeydew on which a fungus grows.

The flies overwinter on perennial plants, so try not to keep plants such as fuchsias overwintering in a greenhouse that is to grow tomatoes the following summer. I grow basil with my tomatoes as a deterrent (the flies are put off by the strong scent of the basil), and also because basil and tomatoes thrive in the same regime.  $\Box$ 

## **Catch up with Monty**

## On screen and stage

Watch Monty growing tomatoes and more at Longmeadow this month in Gardeners' World every Friday at 8pm (off air 28 April). And see him at Gardeners' World Live on Friday 16 and Sunday 18 June, in the main theatre

and the magazine's Potting Shed stage: see page 60 for details and ticket discount code.



**NEXT MONTH** Monty on how to boost the flavour of your home-grown herbs

April 2017

MARSHA ARNOLD; JASON INGRAM



# Find everything you need to get your summer lawn started.

A little care now means you can enjoy the serenity of a lush green lawn this summer. Our top tips are to aerate the soil to let nutrients in, keep your grass healthy and weed-free with an all-in-one treatment. And, if April doesn't bring showers after all, set the sprinkler to work.



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	TCF58639 TCF58640	Tomato 'Gigantomo' x 5 Tomato 'Gigantomo' x 10	£6.99 £9.99	£6.29 £8.99		
Postcode	TCB17053 TCB17054	Tomato 'Sweet Aperitif' x 5 Tomato 'Sweet Aperitif' x 10	£6.99 £9.99	£6.29 £8.99		
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# Joe's designer know-how

# Focal points

Make a style statement with statues, views and specimen plants. **Joe Swift** explains how

**Focal points** such as sculptures, water features, seating areas and accent planting are a key element of garden design – they draw the eye into certain areas to form compositions and sometimes add drama. And by choosing things that are personal, they help to stamp your mark on a space.

Once spotted, a focal point will tempt you to look closer and pull you through the garden to explore. Focal points can also help define separate areas within the garden, giving them each their own identity, but also help focus the mind on the associated planting whether it's to complement, embellish, or act as a simple backdrop to show them off.

The choice of focal point will all depend on what you like, what you may have spotted and think will work in your space. Of course, budget is also a big consideration but in my experience, simplicity often works best and a lovely old pot placed in just the right spot can work a treat. Or perhaps you can go one better and make something totally unique for you and your garden?

## FINELY SCULPTURED

**This is a classic setup** with a sculpture placed at the end of a straight path. The bricks draw the eye towards the end and the combination of tall hedging and simple white cosmos flanking the path balances the composition nicely.

**COST** Statues like this start at around £75 – try primrose.co.uk **JOE'S TIP** Lay bricks lengthways towards the focal point to speed the eye to it.

April 2017

















# OFFER AN **OLIVE BRANCH** This path curves to the left but the pergola is built straight so draws the eye directly through, which creates the perfect frame for a focal point. This generous pot and olive work well with the size and proportions of the pergola. **COST** Allow around £300 for a large pot and mature olive tree. JOE'S TIP Play around with the pot's position before planting - it'll be too heavy to move once the tree is in.

# Focal points - the dos and don'ts

- Do give a focal point space so it can be clearly seen. You can soften the edges but don't hide it altogether.
- Do consider the height of a focal point. If viewed when walking it should be at or just below eye level. Set it on a simple plinth rather than just placing on the ground.
- ✓ Do play around with the precise position and walk around the garden to see how it looks from different angles.
- Do think about meeting points, such as where paths intersect, as potentially good spots.
- ✓ **Do move or prune** some plants accordingly. Long diagonal views across the garden can work, which may mean snipping a low hanging branch or moving a tall perennial blocking the view.

- ✓ Do think about how it will weather. Most will look stark brand new but weather quickly. They can usually be pressure-washed occasionally to clean up.
- X Don't overdo focal points. I've seen gardens with so many you don't know which way to look and it ends up feeling cluttered.
- ✗ Don't install anything that can be knocked or pulled over anywhere near a path, or if there are children around.
- X Don't place them on soft, uneven surfaces. Think about how they may look within a planting area and you can always move a plant or two and put a paving stone down as a solid base.
- X Don't mix too many styles or materials – the overall look may get confused.

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

\_\_\_\_

NEXT MONTH Joe shares his designer know-how to help you create the perfect front garden

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PHOTOS:

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Magazine Climbers Offer, PO BOX 2020, Pershore, WR10 9BP Title Initial Surname Address Postcode Tel (for queries) Mobile Fmail I enclose a cheque for £ made payable to Hayloft Plants. with my name and address on the back Or charge my Visa Mastercard Maestro Card number Start date \_\_\_/\_ Expiry date \_\_\_/\_ Card security code \_\_\_\_\_ Signature

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Roger, 2016 Show visitor

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# Small spaces

Real Gardens

Even in the tiniest of spaces, it's still possible to create an impact, which is exactly what the Small Space finalists of our 2016 Garden of the Year competition achieved. Here's how...

Gardens are getting smaller, and whatever the size of your patch, it's always tempting to think wistfully about what you'd be able to do, if only you had a larger plot. But lack of space needn't be a source of frustration. Small gardens are often warmer and more sheltered than larger spaces and can become extensions of the house. By thinking creatively, it's often possible to squeeze in far more than you might think.

Last year, we ran a competition to find Britain's best gardens and this month we show you round the gardens of our three finalists in the Small Space category. The garden owners, Steve Moodey, Geoff Stonebanks and Juan Carlos Cure, share some of their top tips for gardening in a modest plot and we pick out their best bits to help you recreate them at home and make the most of your space. Visit finalist Geoff Stonebanks' Sussex garden when it opens for the National Gardens Scheme from June to September. Go to www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk for more information.

# **Make ripples**

Water in a small garden adds movement, light and reflections, and can attract wildlife and birds in to the space. You may not be able to fit in a traditional pond, but water features come in all shapes and sizes, from trickle fountains to ponds created in pots and containers.

Look for wide, shallow pots and seal drainage holes with silicone, or recycle an old tin bath or barrel lined with plastic and fill with rainwater. For a wildlife-friendly feature, ensure there is a way for creatures to climb out.

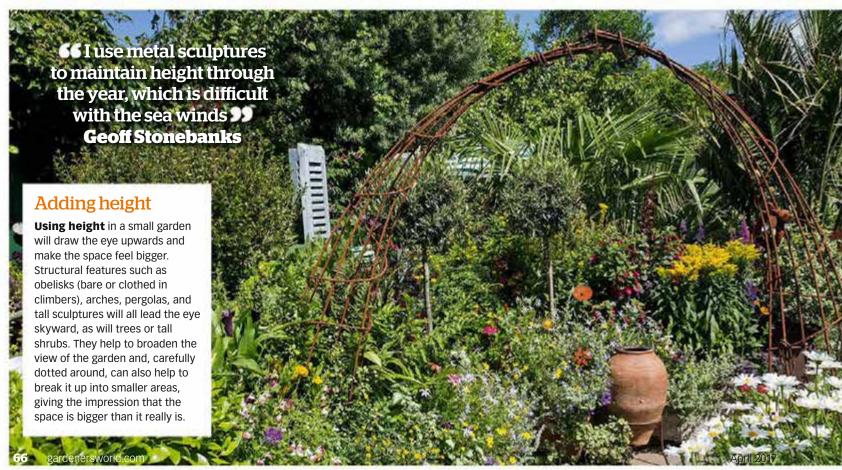
I wanted to create a space that had impact when viewed from inside J

Juan Carlos Cure





















To see more of all the shorlisted 2016 Gardens of the Year, go to bit.ly/gw-goty

70 gardenersworld.com April 2017

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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 that's full of interesting ideas and beautiful planting? Then why not enter our 2017 Garden of the Year Competition to win £10,000-worth of Cobra gardening equipment – plus the chance to have your garden photographed professionally, to appear in Gardeners' World Magazine.

You can enter your garden into one of three categories: Wildlife-friendly Garden, Small Space or Challenging Plot. We'll share the results in the November 2017 issue. Readers will have their say, too, with a vote in the People's Choice award – and all voters will be entered into a prize draw to win great Cobra kit! For inspiration, 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



NEW CATEGORY

## **CHALLENGING PLOT**

Does your garden have a story behind it? When people visit, do you feel compelled to tell them about the obstacles you've overcome or what it was like before? If so, then we want to know about it. Send us photos of your garden now, and don't forget to include pics of your garden before you transformed it. For this category, we're looking for gardens of any size – from pocket-sized patches to expansive spaces – that have been created against the odds. These challenges could include:

- An overshadowed plot, where you're restricted to plants that will thrive in shade
- A garden with soil that's full of rocks or rubble, or heavy and prone to waterlogging
- A sloping site that requires clever use of steps and retaining walls
- A location that is battered by sea air or on a windswept hill
- A garden you have transformed from an overgrown mess or a neglected wasteland, or that is besieged by weeds from neighbouring plots

### Wildlife-friendly 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:

- Habitats to give shelter and food
- Nectar-rich flowers
- A pond
- Feeders and nesting boxes



### Small space

- Open to gardens smaller than a tennis court, or 250m², but big on interest, with features such as:
- A layout that makes the space appear larger
- Planting that provides variety and interest over a long season
- Clever use of the available area



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

# of the Year 2017?

Deadline for entries 2 May 2017

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





# Is your dry garden an oasis?

### 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 summer for a photoshoot of the garden to appear in *Gardeners' World Magazine*.

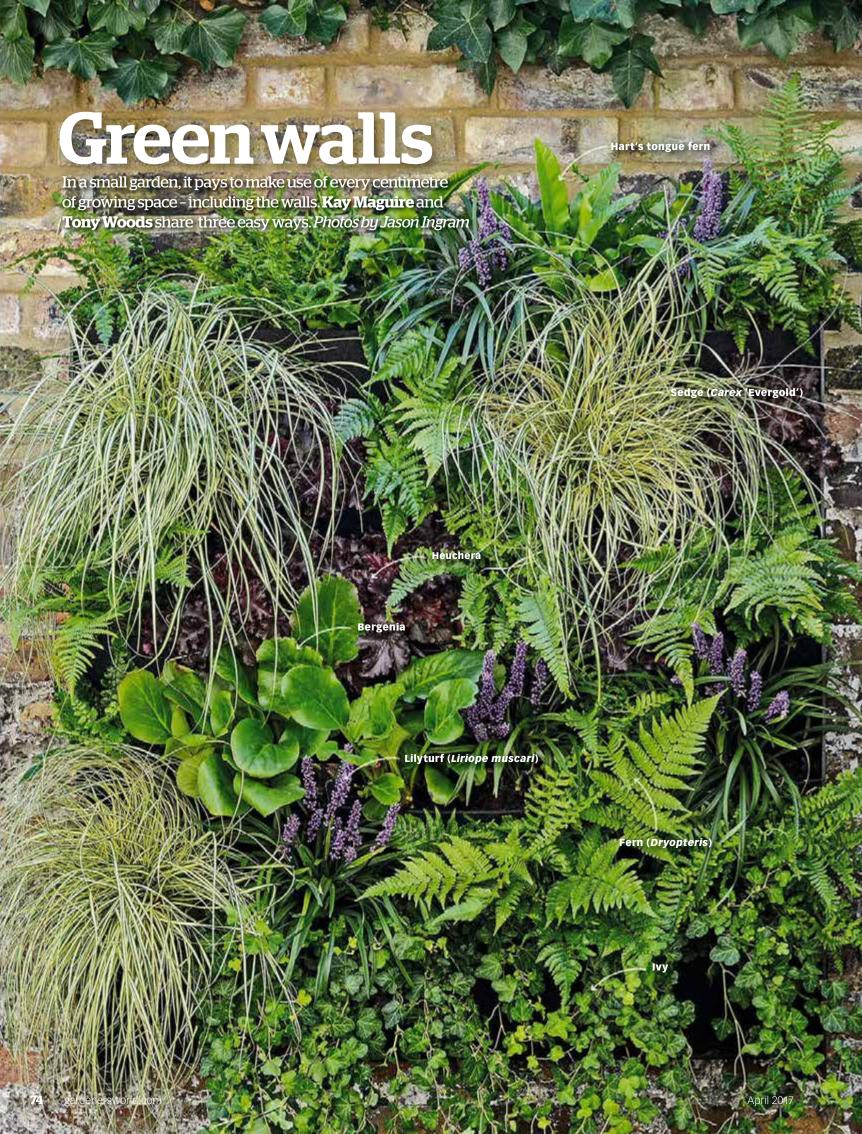
### The prizes:

- 3 category winners will each win £1,500 (RRP) of Cobra garden equipment
- 2 runners-up in each of the 3 category shortlists will each win £500 (RRP) of Cobra garden equipment
- The Judges' Choice and People's Choice winners will each win a further £500 (RRP) of Cobra garden equipment
- Voters in the People's Choice award win 1 of 5 lawnmowers worth £324.99 (RRP)



73

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



### Instant green wall

**Transform the walls** around you with a simple, purpose-built green wall kit. When filled with lush ferns, colourful heucheras and bright sedges, it's just the thing to lift a shady spot.

Always look for planters that provide large, deep pockets – the more growing room plants have, the less often you need to feed and water them. Some kits also

include an irrigation device to further reduce the time spent watering.

Opt for a soil-based potting compost for long-term living walls, and a multipurpose one for seasonal displays, and use a lightweight drainage material.

This planter is on a shady wall. If sun does shine on your plot, add fuchsias and hardy geraniums for a splash of extra colour.





Fix your planter securely to the wall. Add a 5-6cm layer of drainage material (such as lightweight expanded clay aggregate) at the bottom of each pocket. Use your fingers to make sure the layer is spread evenly.



Top up each pocket with a layer of potting compost, filling it only about two-thirds full so there is enough room for the plants. Remove the plants from their pots and start to arrange them in the planter.



Place the plants in drifts and blocks, using the more textural foliage plants, such as ferns, in narrow swathes and arranging the broader-leaved plants in bold blocks. Top up with potting compost.



Water in your plants well and continue to keep them well watered. Multi-purpose compost contains enough nutrients for six weeks, after this give plants a regular boost with a general-purpose liquid feed.

The planter we used is the Easiwall-Pro, available from treebox.co.uk





Fill with a mix of three parts potting compost to one part grit

### Planted guttering

**Guttering is a cheap**, easy and effective way to clothe a bare wall or fence. It can be grouped in rows or dotted across a wall, and looks great planted with anything from salad leaves to alpines, a mix of bright seasonal bedding or even flowering perennials, such as Mexican fleabane (above).

Choose a large size of guttering (standard house guttering is about 112mm wide) so that the plants have enough soil. Use multipurpose potting compost, rather than a heavier, soil-based one, and mix with vermiculite or perlite to aid drainage. You should also drill holes in the base of the guttering so water can drain out easily.



# Succulent picture frame

**Planted picture frames** are easy to make, and can be scattered across a wall in groups, or used alone as an eye-catching statement.

Succulents such as houseleeks, sedums and huernias are perfect – they are easy to grow, and tolerant of low moisture and poor or minimal soil. For drainage, use a mix of equal amounts of perlite (or vermiculite) and potting compost. Allow the mix to dry out between waterings. In hot, dry weather, take down the frame once a week, lay it flat and water well.



For more ideas see Big Ideas, Small Spaces by Kay Maguire and Tony Woods (Mitchell Beazley, £16.99, octopusbooks. co.uk). Step by step



Use timber battens to make a planting box to fit your picture frame. Staple plastic-coated mesh across the front of the planting box. Staple a sheet of plastic from an old compost bag and then a piece of hardboard to the back of the box.



Mix together equal amounts of compost and perlite (or vermiculite), and feed it carefully through the mesh until the frame is full. Don't firm it down yet, as you need to leave room for the plants. Then attach the picture frame to the planting box.



Plant through the mesh, cutting small gaps with pliers, but snip only as much as you need. Firm the compost around the succulents with the end of a pencil, and top up with more compost so that the plants' roots are fully covered.



After planting, water well, then leave your frame horizontal for a few days, while the plants settle in and establish. Attach vine eyes to the frame – either one in the centre to hook over a nail or on each side connected by wire – and hang on your wall.

April 2017

© BIG IDEAS, SMALL SPACES BY KAY MAGUIRE AND TONY WOODS. PHOTOS BY JASON INGRAM (MITCHELL BEAZLEY, £16.99)

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# Windowsill veg

Want to grow fresh veg but barely have room to swing a carrot? **Helen Riches** shows how to pack a big harvest into a tiny space. *Photos by Sarah Cuttle* 



**Put your windowsills** to work! Within snipping distance of the kitchen table, you can have fresh veg and salad leaves that look just as mouthwatering as they taste. Surprisingly small spaces can be put to use. The key is to start now and take advantage of the ideal growing conditions that April brings.

Don't worry if you haven't been busy sowing seeds – sowing later avoids fluctuating temperatures, damping off, leggy growth and ravaging slugs. You can also cheat the calendar by buying yourself some healthy, guilt-free, pre-grown plug plants.

Multi-purpose compost is perfect for most veg, but boost it with slow-release fertiliser granules. Group plants together that enjoy the same conditions or make good companions, for example, certain flowers exude chemicals that repel pests (marigolds) or attract pollinators (nasturtiums) and will add a welcome splash of colour as they grow.

Planting edible crops just outside your door or window makes for easy pickings from a small space

April 2017

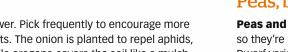






Long-term container residents such as chilli plants need plenty of food to fruit, so add a slow-release fertiliser to the compost at planting, and give weekly potassium-rich feeds when they start to flower. Pick frequently to encourage more fruits. The onion is planted to repel aphids, while oregano covers the soil like a mulch. Mint is also good for repelling pests.

Time to harvest 3-5 months from plugs





Peas and beans grow up and carrots down, so they're not competing for the same space. Dwarf varieties are best for growing in pots. The container should be big enough to anchor twiggy pea sticks in deep compost to support



### Kohl rabi & beetroot

80

Use an inexpensive watering can to create a fun container. Pierce the base for drainage and add stones for ballast. This combo is about giving a home to any leftover veg plants or thinnings. We used beetroot, kohl rabi and

salad leaves, with trailing nasturtium to attract pollinating insects and draw pests away from the brassicas (kohl rabi). Keep well watered. Time to harvest Beetroot and kohl rabi, 35 days; lettuce, 30 days - all from plugs



### Tomatoes & chives

This rustic woven-willow planter contains tomato plants that should fruit prolifically if kept evenly watered and fed with tomato fertiliser once the flowers appear. The chives will repel aphids and can be added to tomato salads, and

gardenersworld.com April 2017



the growing veg. Harvest frequently to encourage more pods. Water regularly, especially when pods are swelling. **Time to harvest** Beans, 30 days; carrots, 80 days; peas, 60 days – all from plugs



the marigolds will help prevent whitefly. If there isn't enough room for companion plants, then pop them in pots close by. **Time to harvest** Both tomatoes and chives, 120 days from plugs



### Carrots & spring onions

**Carrots don't mind** jostling among other veg, but they need depth, so a round variety is essential for container gardening. Grow spring onions with them as they make a handy filler crop and will help deter carrot fly, as will

chrysanthemums. Carrots are not as sensitive to drought as many veg, so should be happy until they mature in this unconventional home. **Time to harvest** Carrots and spring onions, 45 days from plugs



### Lettuce & radish

**In just** a few weeks from planting plugs, this lime-green baby lettuce will mature – just enough time to grow a filler crop of pink and purple radishes at the edges. Harvest the lettuce's outer leaves to encourage more leaf

growth. Purple salad leaves are a great fastgrowing, cut-and-come-again crop so keep sowing batches of seedlings to fill gaps. **Time to harvest** Lettuce, 30 days from plugs; radish 25-50 days from seed

81

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## Windowsill success

Make the most of every space to ensure you have plenty of fresh pickings close to hand

### **1** EXTENDING YOUR SILL

House walls and patios store heat from the sun, which means they are often the warmest part of the garden. Round up an old garden table, bench or junk shop kitchen chair and extend the growing space beyond the window ledge. The extra warmth means you can experiment and keep sowing to keep your outdoor larder well stocked all summer.

### **2** CONTAINER CHOICE

The bigger, the better, but almost any receptacle can be used if it fits on the windowsill, has drainage holes and is secured safely. Salad leaves can tolerate just 15cm of compost, but most veg needs more, especially heavy crops like tomatoes and peppers. Anchor containers with stones in the base. Plastic pots are good for retaining moisture.

### **3 PLANT CARE**

As soon as plug plants are delivered, give them a good soak and get them in the earth, even if just temporarily. Keep pots irrigated daily, especially in hot weather, as they dry out quickly. Top up the compost as the season progresses and when adding new plants. Veg pests are easily spotted on a windowsill, so can be quickly nipped in the bud.

### **4** HARVESTING

Tomatoes need picking when ripe or they quickly go over, chillies should be harvested frequently to keep the plant producing fruit (and get hotter the longer they are left on the plant) and lettuces will bolt when they get too old or dry. Pick peas from the base of the plant up and spring-onion leaves from the outside in. Use small scissors to cut just what you need.

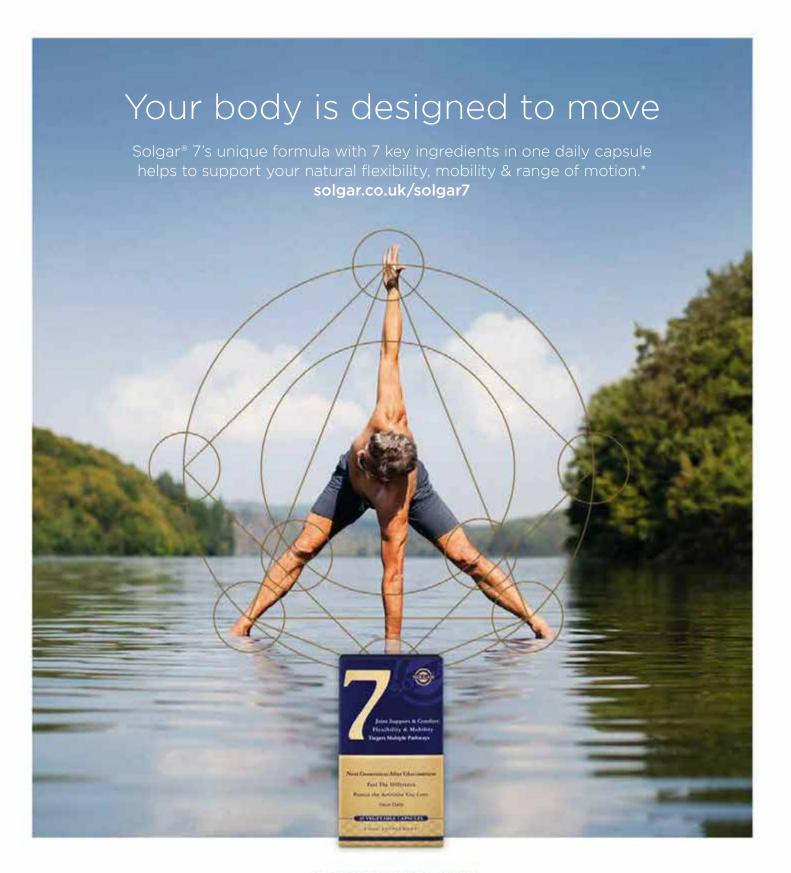








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# Success with... organic pest control

Slugs, snails and other pests love to devour your prized blooms and produce, but there are ways to control them without reaching for chemicals, says **Alan Titchmarsh** 

an we just establish at the outset that garden pests are never going to go away, and whatever method you choose of ridding yourself of them it will only be a temporary measure? Good. Because so many folk seem to think that there must be a permanent cure for everything somewhere. There isn't.

So, having reconciled ourselves to the fact that all pest control is but a short-term solution (if slug pellets were a final solution they wouldn't have to keep selling them, would they?), it makes sense for any gardener to find the most environmentally friendly way of controlling pests – a way that respects nature, even if we are trying to bend her to our will. Our gardens are, or should be, a microcosm of the natural world and most of us cherish them for that reason, so it makes sense to interfere with that complex cycle of interdependency as little as possible.

I get as fed up as the next gardener when my plants are eaten or disfigured, but I'm still determined that my plants should not look pristine simply because I have created a sterile environment where only they can survive. Such a scenario would give me no satisfaction at all.

Another practical reason why we should all start turning away from chemicals is that changes to regulations have resulted in fewer chemicals being available to the home gardener, and it may only be a matter of time before most are banned altogether. Garden chemicals manufacturers have already responded by launching more 'natural' solutions to pests. So we should find alternative, responsible, measures of having a thriving garden before it becomes

I've been organic for 30 years now and, if anything, have fewer pest epidemics than I ever had before 20

a necessity. In short, we don't really have a choice. But make that choice now, and you can cultivate your plants with a clear conscience and, hopefully, keep them in pretty good nick as well.

Good cultivation is the key – plants that are growing in good soil, in good light, and are not allowed to go short of food and water will always grow more healthily than those that are deprived of these

necessities, so try to create conditions in which pests are less likely to thrive – dark, damp, stagnant environments offer sustenance to a range of bugs and beasts, from woodlice to slugs and snails. Removing leaf litter from the bottom of hedges will get rid of the places where they like to shelter, though I am aware that by removing it you are also taking away a food source for birds.

You see, pest control is a conundrum for all of us. The solution is balance. There will still be plenty of food for birds, beasts and other invertebrates if you become an organic gardener, so that factor can help redress the balance.

Does organic gardening really work in terms of controlling pests? Yes, it does. I've been organic for the best part of 30 years now and, if anything, I have fewer pest epidemics than I ever had before. But you'll need patience: a garden that has been run on chemical lines will be imbalanced in terms of reduced populations of natural predators. You'll have to give them a few years to build up, but you'll notice a difference. And, as well as having cleaner plants, you'll also be doing your bit to work with nature.



### **Slugs and snails**

**The problem** Plants with succulent leaves (such as hostas), seedlings and young plants with soft and sappy foliage are eaten away, and often only the midrib of the leaf is left intact hostas can be turned to lace.

The culprits A wide range of slugs, from the larger brown field slugs that feed above ground to small black keeled slugs that attack potatoes and other roots. On chalky ground, snails are the more common culprits and can demolish plants overnight. Of summer bedding, they are particularly fond of tobacco plants.

**The solutions** The most obvious (and most tedious) is hand picking

those pests that attack above ground. Slugs and snails hate bright sunshine and hot, dry weather, so the best time to find them is at night with a torch. If you only have a few plants - in pots, perhaps – this is an effective means of control. Take the pests somewhere else if you prefer not to kill them, but remember they have a homing instinct, so take them for a car ride.

Copper collars placed around hostas as their buds push through the surface of the soil in spring are effective, as is copper tape around the rim of pots. Half grapefruits, crushed grit and eggshells spread around plants are rarely a deterrent. Beer traps (empty

yoghurt pots sunk into the ground and filled with beer) will catch some slugs and snails, but not all. Biological control in the form of slug-attacking nematodes can be watered on to kill subterranean slugs, but the earth needs to have reached a suitable temperature in spring. Encouraging wildlife makes a difference - remember that frogs and toads will help with slug control (small ones), as will hedgehogs, and song thrushes feed on snails.

In severe cases, look to plants that are resistant to attack, such as those with hairy leaves or tough, leathery foliage. Organic slug pellets based on ferric phosphate are available.

Hand pick slugs and kill or move them far away

gardenersworld.com April 2017

### **Sap-sucking insects**

The problem Plants are weakened, foliage is distorted and bleached, and covered in a sticky honeydew on which thick, black sooty mould thrives. Virus diseases are spread by the mouth parts of pests, which often cluster around the growing point of the plants. The culprits Aphids (greenfly and blackfly), whitefly (those small white creatures that look like miniature Concorde aircraft on the undersides of the leaves) and red spider mites (pinprick-sized mites of yellow, green or red) are all to blame, as are mealy bugs, which surround themselves with white wool on greenhouse plants, and scale insects, the pests that look like miniature limpets or legless tortoises.

The solutions Red spider mites can be discouraged by keeping a moist atmosphere in the greenhouse (they prefer warm, dry conditions) and all greenhouse pests can be kept in check by buying predatory insects, which vary depending on the pest (a chalcid wasp for whitefly, a predatory mite for red spider). Use sticky plastic traps to catch whitefly. Dab scale insects and mealy bugs with a tiny paintbrush dipped in methylated spirits or whisky. For greenfly and blackfly, use your fingers to rub them off. or spray them with very mild soapy water, or - on sturdy plants such as roses - squirt them with a powerful jet from a hose. Birds, wasps and ladybirds will do their bit, too.

### **Root-eating larvae**

**The problem** Plants that looked healthy suddenly wilt and collapse or gradually dwindle in terms of vigour. On inspection, the roots will have been eaten away.

The culprits Carrot fly will bore into carrot roots (it doesn't always cause the plants to die, but makes the maggoty roots less appetising) and cabbage root fly will eat away the roots of cabbages, which leads to collapse and death. Pot plants such as cyclamen and some plants in the garden are martyrs to vine weevil larvae, which eat the roots and lead to plants collapsing and dying.

The solutions Position small felt collars around young brassicas when planting to prevent root flies from laying eggs on the soil close to the stems. Sow carrots thinly to avoid needing to thin the seedlings, which releases an aroma that attracts the flies. Sow spring onions alongside them since carrot flies are deterred by the aroma of alliums. Cover carrot rows with crop protection netting. For vine weevil, check plants' roots at potting time and remove the curly maggots by hand. Water plants with biological control nematodes to keep them healthy. Pick off adult weevils, which feed on leaf edges at night.







### **Bugs and beetles**

The problem Leaves and flowers are eaten by insects with large mouth parts that chew rather than suck sap. The culprits Lily beetles (red adults and grubs covered in black frass) attack leaves and flowers of lilies, earwigs (with pincer-like tails) eat dahlia flowers, and assorted other beetles devour a range of plants, including rosemary, mint and viburnum.

**The solutions** Often very difficult, since these pests are tough-coated blighters and quick movers. Trap earwigs

in flowerpots that have been inverted on canes among dahlias and stuffed with straw. Lily beetles can be nipped between finger and thumb (if you are quick enough) and their larvae squirted off with a powerful jet from a hose.

Other beetles are more difficult to control, but growing plants that are well fed and not allowed to go short of light and water can make all the difference to their ability to shrug off attacks. Vigilance is helpful in spotting attacks before they get out of hand.



**The problem** Plants are eaten above or below ground and damage is often rapid and severe, resulting, in some cases, in the complete disappearance of the crop. **The culturits** Mice, squirrels, raphits

**The culprits** Mice, squirrels, rabbits, deer, moles and pigeons.

**The solutions** These hefty brutes can wipe out a crop overnight. Mice can be trapped (humanely if you're a wildlife lover), but traps need to be re-set continuously. Squirrels are almost impossible to control: if they dig up bulbs, lay wire netting above the bulbs and just below soil level, and use squirrel-proof bird feeders. Rabbits can be excluded with rabbit-proof fencing – wire netting stretched vertically into the earth 45cm below the bottom of garden fences.

Deer-proof fencing needs to be at least 2.5m high. Moles can be discouraged with powdered mothballs pushed into their molehills, but if your garden is next to farmland they'll always return and a molecatcher or mole traps may be the only answer. Use plastic pigeon-proof netting to keep birds off crops such as strawberries.

**WATCH ALAN** share his expert advice in our exclusive videos at gardenersworld.com/alan-titchmarsh

### **Bio-controls explained**

Biological control is the use of natural enemies to control pests - either predators or nematodes that infect the pest with a fatal disease. Mainly used in greenhouses, but some, including those for slugs and vine weevils, can be used outdoors.

**Where to buy** harrodhorticultural.com, greengardener.co.uk, organiccatalogue.com



PHOTOS: SARAH CUTT





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### Choosing a pressure washer

You can expect to pay from £40 to £400, but you don't have to buy the most expensive product – it all depends on what you'll use it for. Look at models in a shop or at a garden show before buying. Examine how the fittings connect, for example, the trigger on the spray gun does a lot of work, so needs to be robust and comfortable to hold. Also make sure that a heavy machine has wheels for easy transportation and can be stored neatly.

If you're concerned about noise, look for one with an induction motor as these are quieter than those with universal motors. Some of the models need assembling before they can be used. Your hose will need a universal click-on water-stop connector. The following specific pointers are focused on what you'll be cleaning.

- For decking and block paving: A low power and flow rate cleans well without damaging the surface, so you can get away with using a smaller machine.
   You must use only a gentle nozzle with a powerful machine to avoid damage.
- For large paved areas: A powerful machine with a high flow rate and a long hose reach will make the job much quicker. The Bar rating indicates the amount of water pressure you will get.
- For awkward areas: Some machines come with a multitude of accessories while for others you buy them separately. We found that a patio-cleaning hood, which prevents splashes coming up from the patio as you clean, is worth having but you don't need to spend more on extra accessories unless you need to clean something more complicated, such as a car or boat. Other accessories include nozzles for patios, metal furniture and under cars; brushes for cars and windows; long-drain blasting hoses; detergent bottles that deliver diluted detergent through a specialised nozzle or an integrated system on the machine.

Over the page, you'll see our detailed reviews. Our **BEST BUYS** are:

- Budget B&Q 1400W 100 Bar
- All rounder MacAllister 1800W
- Paving Kärcher K4 Full Control Home Kit
- Decking Nilfisk Compact 130-1.6 X-TRA

correction in our February issue, as part of the 'On test: ride-on mowers' article, the Simplicity Regent SLT250 was incorrectly described as having no mulch or collection option. The suppliers of the Simplicity Regent SLT250 have since confirmed that the mulcher and triple bag collector are available as optional extras with this item. However, they were not supplied for the testing process.

April 201

### pressure washers on test





### SCORE: 15/20

### **B&Q1400W100Bar £44.00**

Power 1400W Max pressure 100 Bar Water flow 330l/hr Hose reach 5m Weight 5.6kg

Our best budget buy. Compact machine. Fast and easy assembly, with great instructions. The hose inlet connection dripped and the nozzle took some force to fit, but once it was working it cleaned well. Good on decking.

### Pros & cons

- ✓ Very good value
- ✓ Great instructions
- ✓ Lightweight
- ✓ Easy storage
- X Not very robust
- X Trigger lock stiff

Washer preparation
★★★★
Handling

Cleaning quality ★★★☆ Value for money

Suppliers: diy.com



### SCORE: 13/20

### Briggs and Stratton Sprint 2300E £219.00

**Power** 2500W **Max pressure** 160 Bar **Water flow** 480l/hr **Hose reach** 6m

Weight 12.8kg

This machine is low and wide. Assembly was fiddly. Feels robust and easy to wheel around, good tool storage and integral detergent tank. The trigger lock on the spray gun was stiff. Cleaning quality is adequate for most jobs.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Good tool storage
- ✓ RCD on the plug
- ✓ Easy to move around
- X Takes space to store
- ✗ Gun trigger lock stiff

Washer preparation

Handling

Cleaning quality
★★★☆
Value for money

Suppliers: powerproducts.eu



### SCORE: 13/20

### **Draper PW 2200 £151.00**

Power 2200W Max pressure 165 Bar Water flow 330l/hr Hose reach 5m Weight 10.5kg

Some assembly needed to prepare this washer, including the spray heads for the patio washer attachment. Photographs in the instructions helped. The washer is sturdy and has plenty of accessories. Good for decking and small patio areas.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Lots of accessories
- ✓ Neat storage
- ✓ Integral detergent bottle
- ✗ Stiff fittings
- X Slow cleaning

Washer preparation

★★★☆☆ Handling Cleaning quality

Value for money

Suppliers: drapertools.com



### MacAllister 1800W

Power 1800W Max pressure 130 Bar Water flow 440l/hr Hose reach 6m Weight 10kg

Our best all-round buy. Large, robust machine handled well and easy to wheel around. Click-fit lance and extendable wand are very useful. Patio cleaner supplied and overall cleaning quality good. Assembly instructions required patience.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Great all-round performance
- ✓ Telescopic lance
- ✓ Integral detergent bottle
- X Assembly was fiddly
- ✗ Takes up storage space

Washer preparation ★★☆☆☆ Handling Cleaning quality
★★★☆
Value for money
★★★☆

Suppliers: diy.com



### SCORE: 14/20

### Makita HW 101 £76.80 plus brush kit £52.80

Power 1300W Max pressure 100 Bar Water flow 360l/hr Hose reach 3m Weight 6.5kg

This basic model comes with a wand, a nozzle and a detergent bottle. Clear assembly instructions, but the wand clips didn't fit easily and fell off during handling. Impressive cleaning for a small machine, but slow to clean paving.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Light and small
- ✓ Easy to store
- Patio tool extra cost
- ✗ Slow cleaning
- X Short hose reach

Washer preparation
★★★☆☆
Handling

Cleaning quality
★★★☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆

Suppliers: amazon.co.uk, machinemart.co.uk





### SCORE: 16/20

### Nilfisk Compact 130 1-6 PAD X-TRA £234.99

Power 1700W Max pressure 130 Bar Water flow 440l/hr Hose reach 6m Weight 19.3kg

Our best buy for decking. Easily assembled, parts felt robust. Spray gun, wand and accessories click-fitted in and out with ease. The integral hose reel was wound tight and awkward to extend.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Cleaning very fast, especially good on decking
- Easy-fit accessories
- ✓ Tools store on the machine
- Very heavy
- Stiff feed on hose reel
- X A bit of liquid leakage around the brushes

Washer preparation
★★★★☆
Handling

Cleaning quality

\*\*\*\*

Value for money

**Suppliers:** argos.co.uk, machinemart.co.uk



SCORE: 12/20

### Greenworks G4 Garden £140.00

Power 1700W Max pressure 130 Bar Water flow 420I/hr Hose reach 6m Weight 9.3kg

Assembly was fiddly but diagrams with text in the instructions were helpful. It is a light machine and comes with plenty of accessories. The hose connections and spray gun connectors needed some strength to fit. Fine for light cleaning.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Useful hose storage
- ✓ Lots of accessories
- ✓ Lightweight
- ✗ Stiff fittings
- ✗ Gun trigger not robust

 Washer preparation
 ★★★☆

 ★★★☆
 ★★★☆

 Handling
 Value for money

 ★★★☆
 ★★★☆

Suppliers: qvc.co.uk, tesco.com



### SCORE: 14/20

### Hozelock Pico Power £149.99 plus patio kit £30.00

**Power** 1700W **Max pressure** 140 Bar **Water flow** 438l/hr **Hose reach** 6m

Weight 8.8kg

Small machine, easily assembled, neat tool storage and very thin 6mm hose. Light, so easier to carry than to wheel. Some strength needed to change nozzles. Good for small areas and garden furniture, but slow on larger surfaces.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Lightweight
- ✓ Easily stored
- × Pricey for its performance
- X Stiff fittings
- X Cleaning slow

Washer preparation
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★

\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*

Cleaning quality
★★★★☆

Value for money
★★★☆

Suppliers: hozelock.com, argos.co.uk





### SCORE: 17/20

### Kärcher K4 Full Control Home Kit

Power 1800W Max pressure 130 Bar Water flow 420I/hr Hose reach 6m Weight 11.4kg

Our best buy for paving. Feels robust and comes with a good range of accessories. One of the three wand fittings can be stored on board. Great for heavier patio cleaning.

### Pros & cons

- ✓ Great cleaning power, especially on paving
- ✓ Easy assembly
- ✓ Integral detergent feed
- ✗ Heavy
- X Needs plenty of storage space

Washer preparation

★★★☆

Handling

★★★☆

Walue for money

★★★☆

Suppliers: homebase.co.uk, karcher.com



### SCORE: 14/20

### Qualcast Q1W-SP07-1800 £89.99

**Power** 1800W **Max pressure** 150 Bar **Water flow** 420l/hr **Hose reach** 5m **Weight** 14kg

Easy assembly and good instructions but the gun storage clip didn't push right down as it should. Nozzles are already fitted to the wands but locking them onto the gun was fiddly and required force. Motor is quiet. Cleaning was slow, but it did the job.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Quiet motor
- ✓ Easy to assemble
- ✓ Lots of accessories
- ✗ Stiff fittings
- X Slow cleaning

 Washer preparation
 ★★★★☆

 ★★★★☆
 Cleaning quality

 ★★★☆
 Value for money

 ★★★☆
 ★★★★☆

**Suppliers:** argos.co.uk, homebase.co.uk



### SCORE: 14/20

### **STIHL RE 88** £145.00 plus cleaning kit £55.00

Power 1700 W Max pressure 100 Bar Water flow 520l/hr Hose reach 6m Weight 8.9kg

Some assembly needed and the patio cleaner nozzles required more tools to get them located into the heads. Lightweight machine and very easy to operate. Fittings are easy to change. A robust machine that cleans paving well.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Lightweight
- ✓ Easy-click fittings
- ✓ Good cleaning
- No hose storage
- **x** Expensive accessories

Suppliers: buxtons.net, honeybros.com, stihl.co.uk



### SCORE: 13/20

### Vax VPW 4C PowerWash 3£199.00

Power 2500W Max pressure 180 Bar Water flow 510l/hr Hose reach 10m Weight 6.9kg

Easy assembly with good instructions. Comes with plenty of accessories. Light to wheel around. The wand fitting was very stiff. The jet nozzle was best for cleaning hard surfaces, but the cleaning wasn't as impressive as expected for such a powerful machine.

### Pros&cons

- ✓ Quiet
- ✓ Long hose reach
- ✓ Lots of accessories
- Cleaning average
- ✗ Stiff wand fitting

Washer preparation	Cleaning quality
Handling	Value for money
★★★☆	★★★☆☆

 $\textbf{Suppliers:} \ argos.co.uk, vax.co.uk$ 





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

- Sowing veg seed outdoors Tackling leaf curl Planting an evergreen hedge
  - Taking pelargonium cuttings■ Checking carnivorous plants

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



PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM





April 2017 gardenersworld.com



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### Lawnmowers that really are as good as they look

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APRIL is the kindest month, healing all the hurts of winter, and feeding every hope and dream of the long spring and summer to come. The month opens with a prickle of green in the hedgerows and ends full blown, steaming into May on a fanfare of new growth.

It is also the month of daffodils and, most gloriously, of tulips, which rise to their crescendo at Longmeadow in the last week of the month. Drumstick and native primulas can be potted to augment the display.

But although the garden is filling with early clematis, bulbs and spring perennials, and blossom is sitting like a glorious floral cloud in the orchard, it is really the growth of green that makes April unlike any other month.

At the beginning, the garden is still dominated by bare brown branches and empty brown soil, but in just four weeks. it is flushed with green of the most vibrant, life-infused kind, and all other colours are set and measured against it.

### MONTY'S MONTH APRIL



# Carnivorous plants

REMARKABLY UNDEMANDING and surprisingly hardy, carnivorous plants need to be checked in spring. I grow *Sarracenia flava* and 'Vogel', as well as a few *Drosera capensis*, and confess that I haven't repotted them in the past three years. But I do cut off all dead or dying growth to encourage new shoots to appear from the base, which they do with increasing vigour as the month unfolds.

I keep sarracenias in the greenhouse to act as flycatchers along with the droseras, which come from South Africa and need to be above 5°C, but the sarracenia are hardy enough to freeze solid and survive. They need a dormant period of about six weeks, when they should be cool and drier to trigger good new growth, and then in April can be given more water and some heat.

From now, I stand the plants in a shallow dish of rainwater, which is topped up every day so they never dry out. If you want to repot them, now is the time to do it. I fill the pot with a mix of peat-free ericaceous compost and grit to lower the nutrients. New plants can be made as new growth appears, by dividing the rhizomes and potting them up.



HOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD



Place pelargoniums on the greenhouse bench for a summer display

### Take pelargonium cuttings

PELARGONIUMS TAKE very easily from cuttings, right up to late summer. But as they put on new growth in spring, it is a good idea to cut them back to shape and use this material for cuttings to make fresh plants.

Strip off the lower leaves and make a clean cut below a node with a sharp knife. They are prone to rotting if they become too humid, so don't put the cuttings in a polythene bag

(or mist propagator if you have one); instead, immediately insert up to four cuttings into a pot of very gritty, free-draining compost. Water them in, then put them somewhere warm (ideally on a heated mat), keeping the cuttings dry and the compost moist.

Some, such as the Angel Group, take very easily. You will know when they have taken when you see new growth.



Remove a healthy shoot by cutting immediately above a leaf

### **CHECKLIST**

- **Hoe** between border plants to keep on top of freshly germinated weed seedlings
- **Harden** off young vegetable plants by placing them outside during the day in a sheltered spot
- **Divide** hostas to reinvigorate them and start new clumps from the offsets

**WATCH** Monty at gardenersworld. com/propagation for more on making new plants



Give your herbs plenty of space so they can get as much light as possible

### Plant herbs outside now

MEDITERRANEAN HERBS, such as rosemary and oregano, are hardy enough to be planted outside now. To thrive, they need free-draining soil - I have raised beds filled with gritty loam. Those that are clumpforming, including oregano and chives, can be divided now, to invigorate and make more plants for plenty of pickings this summer. Cuttings taken from new growth will develop quickly this month, too.

Space plants out well as the clumps will be large by the end of the season – plus, Mediterranean herbs need plenty of light on all sides to grow well.

**VISIT** gardenersworld. com/herbs for more advice and tips on how to grow Mediterranean herbs



mower









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Remove up to half of the shoots from densely crowded clumps

# Thin out bushy perennials

SOME clump-forming perennials, such as sedums, can produce so many shoots that when flowers develop, the outer shoots are forced to the ground and the rest flop down on elongated stems.

You can prevent this from happening, by thinning out some of the young shoots to give the rest more space. Snap them out or cut them off at the base with secateurs. Take off up to half the shoots, evenly throughout the clump. The result will be stout upright flowering stems.

# Water your pots

CONTAINER DISPLAYS of bulbs can be left to their own devices through the winter, but once shoots start to emerge and flower buds form, you need to keep them well watered. The same goes for pot displays of seasonal bedding. Don't just assume that April

showers will do the watering for you – when it rains, the leaf canopy acts like an umbrella, so very little of the water actually gets into the pot and reaches the roots.

You can use a liquid or slowrelease or fertiliser to give the plants an extra boost.



April showers aren't enough - you need to water pot displays regularly



Sow sweet peas in pots and borders for blooms from July

# Start a new batch of sweet peas

AUTUMN-SOWN sweet peas start flowering in early summer, but the plants can start to fade after a couple of months. To ensure non-stop blooms all summer, sow a second batch of seeds now, directly into their flowering positions, to take over from the autumn-sown plants.

Sweet peas need supports, ideally canes and pea netting or tall twiggy pea sticks. Put these in place now, in pots or borders, then sow the seeds at the base of the supports and water well. Protect the seedlings from birds by covering with netting.

### **STEP BY STEP** Divide pulmonarias

PULMONARIAS are valuable ground-cover plants with pretty spring flowers and speckled foliage. To get more plants with the exact leaf markings of the parent, lift and divide clumps now. This will also reinvigorate the original clump. The new plants will be ready to plant out by midsummer.

- Use a knife to cut off small sections of the clump, each with several roots and leaves.
   Trim large old leaves in half
- and cut back any unruly roots.

  Pot them up into multi-purpose compost, water in well, and grow on in a cold frame or sheltered spot in the garden.







### **✓** CHECKLIST

- Apply fertiliser to pots and borders, if you haven't already
- Spray roses to control future attacks of blackspot disease
- Remove frostdamaged shoots from flowering shrubs
- Plant new flowering shrubs to provide easy border colour
- Bring in pots of lily of the valley and hyacinths to enjoy their scent indoors
- Keep sowing hardy annuals for colourful displays this summer



Bury lily bulbs at three times their depth and about 15cm apart

### Plant summerflowering bulbs

BULBS THAT originate in sunnier, drier climes may not survive a wet or hard winter in the ground, so are better planted now. These include many alliums, gladioli, oriental lilies, irises and freesias. Check the packet for the specific conditions they need most like free-draining soil and plenty of sun. Planting depths will vary too.

Add a layer of grit to the soil surface after planting to mark where the bulbs are and to help protect the emerging shoots from slug and snail damage.



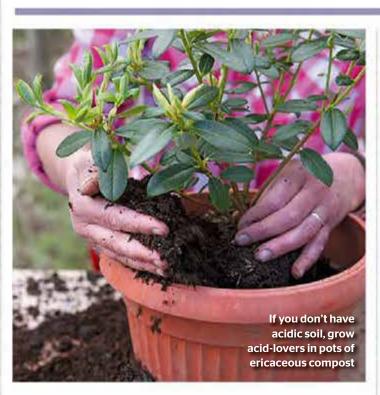
# Look after your plug plants

AT THIS TIME of year, plug plants are growing vigorously, so keep the momentum going by potting them on regularly into larger pots. Use nutritious multi-purpose compost and water regularly. Pinch out the leading shoots to encourage bushiness or train them up canes, depending on their habit. Apply liquid feed as the flower buds form.

Unless the plants are hardy, you'll need to harden them off before planting outside. Introduce them to lower temperatures gradually, so their soft growth doesn't get damaged by the cold.

### MONEY-SAVER TIP: TRANSPLANT SELF-SOWN SEEDLINGS

Over-wintered hardy annuals will be visible now, as will newly germinated seedlings that have sprouted as the soil has warmed up. Now is the right time to transplant and space out these tough and free additions to your garden.



### Plant acid-lovers in containers

SOME PLANTS, including heathers, rhododendrons and azaleas, only grow well in acidic conditions. These are known as ericaceous plants, and if your soil has chalk or lime in it, these late spring stars won't thrive in your borders.

However, you can still grow them if you plant them in containers

using compost that is specifically formulated for ericaceous plants, with loam added for long-term stability. Simply position the plant centrally in the pot and fill any gaps around the rootball with additional compost. Water using rainwater rather than tap water, and feed regularly with ericaceous fertiliser.



CHECK WHETHER your daffodils have gone over, in which case they can be deadheaded with scissors or finger and thumb. Leave the foliage behind to die down naturally. Both actions will strengthen the plants for a better display next year.

visit gardeners world.com/what-to-do-now for more timely tasks to keep your garden and plants in great shape.

WORDS BY: EMMA CRAWFORTH; ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTI



# Super-scented **sweet peas**

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# **STEP BY STEP**Sow indoors

SOWN indoors in the warmth, rudbeckia seeds will grow away quickly, germinating about 14-21 days after sowing. When they have more than two leaves, prick them out, each into its own small pot (see page 115). Place the pots in a draught-free, well-lit spot, keeping the compost damp but not wet. Harden off and plant out when the risk of frost has passed.



Prepare a tray or pots of seedsowing compost, tapped to consolidate it and left in a tray of water to make it damp. Sprinkle the seeds evenly on the surface.



Cover the seeds lightly with 5mm of compost or vermiculite. You can use the holes in the base of a flowerpot to shake an even layer over the seeds.



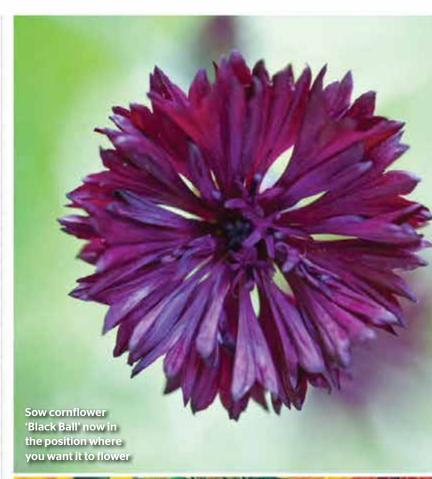
Place a plastic lid or bag over the seed tray to keep in moisture. Put the tray on a heated propagator or windowsill for warmth. Remove the bag or lid daily for ventilation.

# Grow cornflower/rudbekia

YOU CAN START sowing your cornflower and rudbeckia seeds now. They're unfussy flowers, happy in the ground or large pots. Both need a sunny spot to grow at their best. Ordinary soil is fine and no extra fertiliser is needed, but keep them watered well. The cornflowers are hardy annuals, suitable for sowing in spring and autumn. The rudbeckias need a little more heat to germinate. We will keep you supplied with growing tips over the next few months.



PREPARE to fight slugs and snails. These pests love to devour seedlings, especially at night when the soil is damp. Methods include pellets, nematodes, traps and barriers. Work out which ones you'll use and get them ready now so you can put them in place straight after sowing.





CRAWFORTH. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; NEIL HEPWOF

# seeds





# QUICKsolution

**PROTECT OUTDOOR** seedlings from animals such as birds, rabbits and cats by making a barrier to stop them reaching the soil. Birds and rabbits may nibble on tender green shoots, while cats are prone to treating a new seedbed as a litter box. Use a structure like the one below to throw netting over or simply place bushy twigs on top of the soil. Keep a vigilant eye out for any soil disturbance so you can take precautions.



### Top tips for growing flowers

- □ Plan the position you want your flowers to grow in when sowing direct. The rudbeckias (90cm x 45cm) will be larger then the cornflowers (75cm x 25cm), so need more space.
- **Partner** these bright flowers with strongly coloured foliage or flowers. They will look great together or with lime-green or purple foliage. Try them with dahlias or sunflowers for a zingy scheme.
- Water using a watering can or seep hose. A seep hose is pinned down on the ground between the seedlings. Water

- pumped through it drips out gently through holes.
- □ **Direct** water to the base of your plants rather than to the leaves. This will deter fungal diseases such as mildew from attacking their foliage.
- □ **Push** some short bushy twigs into the ground between your seedlings to provide hidden support for the plants.
- **Deadhead** individual flowers as soon as they start to fade.

  This will prevent the plants wasting energy producing seed and encourage them to make more flowers.



# **STEP BY STEP**Sow outdoors

IF YOU'RE growing your flowers for cutting, sowing them in neat rows will make the job easier. For displaying in a bed, scatter them or sow in patches of rows. If sowing in patches, face the rows in different directions for each patch to achieve a random effect. Rows will help you identify weeds easily as your seedlings grow. Keep watered if the weather's dry.



Prepare the soil carefully, breaking up any clods, removing all weeds, and making sure it's firm and level. Only rake lightly.



Create shallow, straight drills 25cm apart for cornflowers and 45cm apart for rudbeckias. Trickle water into the drills.



Sow the seed along the drills, giving each seed plenty of space. Cover with a fine layer of soil and thin the seedlings as they grow.

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# **STEP BY STEP**Pot on young tomato plants

CHECK the base of tomato seedlings' pots to see if roots are coming out of the drainage holes. If so, it's time to pot them on. A bigger pot, fresh compost and more space will boost growth. Tomato plants readily send out new roots from their stems, so pot them deeper than they were, to stimulate extra roots. These will help the plant to take up more nutrients and water, resulting in a better crop.



Fill a pot with potting compost and make a deep hole in the centre.

Press the young plant out of its old pot and lower it gently into the hole.



Firm the tomato plant into its new pot. Add a label giving the variety name and date, as it's easy to get small plants mixed up at this stage



Give the repotted plants a thorough soaking to settle them in. Ideally use water from a can that has been standing at room temperature.



Use sharp secateurs to reduce new growth and any untidy stems

### Keep rosemary in good shape

THIS EVERGREEN aromatic herb has a tendency to grow into an untidy shrub if left to its own devices, so it's best to keep it lightly pruned from the start. To do this, simply shorten last year's growth by two-thirds and cut back shoots that are ruining the shape of the plant. Pruning encourages the

formation of fresh new growth that is great for use in cooking, as well as stimulating flowering shoots that will attract bees and other pollinating insects.

Plants growing in a sheltered spot with free-draining soil can cope with harder pruning or can even be trimmed to form a hedge.



### Mend holes in fruit cages

KEEP YOUR plastic fruit cage netting for longer by sewing up any holes. It's a good idea to allow birds to forage for grubs in the cage over winter, but now, as the fruit plants start into growth, you must keep birds out. Check all the netting carefully, as holes can be tricky to spot. Mend any you find using a large needle or net hook and nylon fishing line. Draw the torn faces together and tie them off carefully.



Build a sturdy structure of tall poles for runner beans to climb

# Put up bean and pea supports

THE BEST way to support pea plants is with a row of branched hazel sticks or netting held up with canes, which their tendrils can readily cling to.

Runner beans, with their vigorous twining habit, need straighter, sturdier supports, such as hazel poles or tall canes. These have to take a lot of weight, so push them in deeply and tie in horizontal poles as braces to keep the structure stable.



Look out for tell-tale blistered, distorted leaves in spring

# Tackle leaf curl disease

EXAMINE peach, nectarine and almond trees now for red blistered foliage caused by the fungal disease peach leaf curl. If not controlled, this will lead to a slow decline in the tree's overall health.

With no fungicides available, evasive action is key. Pick up any fallen leaves to prevent reinfection and cover wall-trained trees with plastic sheeting from autumn to May, to keep fungal spores away. Leave this loose at the sides to let pollinators access the blossom.

# Harvest chard leaves

CHARD, or leaf beet, is hardy enough to supply you with leaves over winter and also put on new growth in spring, providing a final flourish of foliage to harvest during the traditional 'hungry gap', before the summer vegetable supply starts.

When harvesting chard, pick from the outer-most leaves

towards the centre, to keep the central shoot growing. Shredded leaves can be cooked like spinach, while the leaf stalks can be braised or added to stews.



### TIME-SAVER TIP: TOP-DRESS FRUIT IN CONTAINERS

You don't need to repot container-grown fruit every year, but you must keep it fed and condition the soil. Scrape off the top layer, add fertiliser pellets, water and plenty of organic mulch.



### **SAWFLY**

This pest attacks currants and gooseberries. You'll see the small, voracious, S-shaped grubs hanging from the leaf edges. Cut off the colonies and destroy them promptly.



### **✓ CHECKLIST**

- **Finish** planting all new fruit bushes
- Remove the flowers from new strawberry plants, so they fruit well next year
- Sow beetroot,
  Brussels sprouts,
  cabbages, carrots,
  chard, leeks, lettuces,
  peas, radishes and
  spinach outdoors
- Plant out onion sets, potatoes, leeks and artichokes
- Earth up potatoes
- Hand-pollinate
  wall-trained fruit if
  insects aren't flying



Scatter seeds on damp compost and cover thinly with vermiculite

# Sow annual herbs indoors

ENJOY PLENTIFUL pickings of tender annual herbs this summer by growing them from seed now. Sow basil, dill, flat-leaf parsley and coriander thinly in pots or seed trays and place in a heated propagator to germinate. Grow them on, and once the risk of frost is over the young plants can be transplanted into the garden.

WORDS: EMMA CRAWFORTH; ROSIE YEOMAN PHOTOS: SARAH CLITTLE: LASON INGRAM









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#### **HOUSEPLANTS** APRIL



Use an old spoon and tweezers to carry out a pain-free move

#### Repot cacti

ALTHOUGH CACTI can be tricky to handle, once in a new pot they can stay there for several years. Fill the new pot to 1cm below the rim with a free-draining mix of John Innes No.2 compost and grit, then make a hole in the centre. Using tweezers and an old spoon, scoop the cactus, along with its mass of shallow roots, out of the old pot and sit it in the hole, at the same level as previously. Cover the compost with a thick layer of grit, then water well to settle the roots.

VISIT gardenersworld. com/houseplant for lots more advice on how to grow specific houseplants.

#### Mist humidity-lovers

AS TEMPERATURES warm up, start misting any plants that like high humidity. Keep a supply of water at room temperature in a mister and spray the leaves regularly - daily isn't too often. Rainwater is best if your tap water leaves limescale marks on the foliage.

Keeping the humidity high will also deter red spider mites from settling in, and plants sprayed regularly will need less watering overall. However, never mist succulents, cacti and any plants with hairy leaves, as these tend to rot in humid conditions.



Spray the leaves of humidity-lovers daily, using room-temperature water

#### **✓** CHECKLIST

- Feed cacti and other succulents weekly in spring and summer using a balanced liquid fertiliser
- **Divide** clumpforming succulents, replanting each bit that has its own growing point
- **Look** out for dark fungal leaf spots and remove the whole leaf
- **Divide** and repot side crowns of ferns

#### **DUST SPIKY PLANTS**

Houseplants can easily get covered in dust, just like any other home ornament. This matters, because plants need light to penetrate their leaves so they can make food. Clean intricate leaves and spiky plants using a dry paintbrush.

#### **STEP BY STEP** Take begonia leaf cuttings

THIS IS AN EASY way to propagate Begonia rex and other rosetteleaved begonia houseplants. Keep the pots of cuttings in a propagator or polythene bag, and air them regularly to deter rot. New plantlets should appear after three weeks. Grow them on in a bright location and cut away the original leaf once the new plant is growing well.

- 1 Fill 7cm pots with cuttings compost and firm the surface.
- **2** Cut off a healthy young leaf with a strong stalk, and trim the stalk to 5cm long.
- 3 Use a dibber to insert the stalk right up to where the leaf starts. Firm in and water well.







#### **GREENHOUSE** APRIL



CARRY out a pest check. Many, such as whitefly, hide underneath leaves. Waft a sticky yellow trap over the top of plants as you disturb them to catch small flying pests. Spotting and tackling the start of an infestation now will pay dividends.

## Sow pansy seeds for winter beds

SAVE MONEY on winter bedding by starting some pansies from seeds now. Fill a modular tray with multi-purpose compost. Firm it gently and water using a fine rose. Sow the tiny seeds onto the surface of each cell.

Cover with a light layer of sieved compost or vermiculite and germinate in a propagator at 18°C. Thin out the seedlings selecting one per cell.

Grow the pansies in their modules until they are ready for planting out in their final positions in late summer



Grow pansy seeds in modules until planting out in late summer



#### **Check greenhouse ventillation**

ON SUNNY DAYS the greenhouse can heat up so much that the difference between day and night temperatures can affect plant growth. Lowering the day temperatures with ventilation will help keep levels consistent.

Open vents on the sides and in

the roof a little so that air is drawn through the greenhouse. This airflow reduces fungal disease but will increase the plants' demand for water. Don't forget to close the vents again in the afternoon to protect plants from the low night temperatures.



**WATCH** Find out more about growing greenhouse plants at gardenersworld.com/plant-finder/tender/



#### Get your watering right

PLANTS IN the greenhouse need different amounts of water. A new seedling in a pot will need less water than one that has more leaves and lots of roots.

In general, the faster a plant is growing, and the more total leaf surface it has, the more water it

needs. Plants in flower slow down and need a little less. There are exceptions – for example, plants with hairy leaves or thick succulent leaves need less and are good at storing water. Group similar plants together in the greenhouse to make watering more straight forward.

#### STEP BY STEP Sow ipomoea

THE TENDER ANNUAL climber ipomoea, or morning glory, is easy to grow and produces its colourful trumpet flowers all summer long. This is the ideal time to sow it, as the seedlings grow fast and will be at the perfect stage for planting outside after the last frost.

Give the young plants canes to grow up while still in their pots. Then plant out into a sunny border and let them scramble up supports.



Fill a seed tray or pot with multipurpose compost and firm the surface gently. Stand it in a tray of tepid water for half an hour to thoroughly dampen the compost.



The seeds are large enough to sow individually, so space them 4cm apart, pressing them into the compost. Cover them with a thin layer of compost or vermiculite.



Ipomoea seeds need warmth to germinate, so ideally place in a heated propagator set at 20°C or above. Then ensure the seedlings get as much light as possible.

#### Transplant tomatoes

TOMATO PLANTS from the earliest sowings should be well rooted in their pots by now and ready to transplant into the greenhouse, for crops well ahead of outdoor plants. If night-time temperatures drop below 13°C, the leaves will curl a bit but should soon recover. Plant them into large pots or grow bags, or into greenhouse border soil. Water them well and start feeding as soon as you see the first flowers.



Plant tomatoes into rich soil or compost and add sturdy supports

#### **✓** CHECKLIST

- Sow celariac, celery, French and runner beans, sweetcorn and melons
- Take conifer cuttings to grow specimen trees or hedges
- Protect young plants and cuttings from full sun with shading
- check the compost of plants that are not thriving for vine weevil grubs
- Sow tomatoes to be grown outdoors in warmer weather

VISIT gardenersworld. com/greenhouse for more topical hints, tips and jobs to do under glass



#### Chrysanth cuttings

CHRYSANTHEMUMS make great cut flowers and add valuable late summer colour to borders. To make more plants, take basal cuttings from the early shoots that emerge now. Use a knife to cut them away just below soil level and place in a plastic bag to keep them fresh.

Fill a small pot with multi-purpose compost and firm down. Prepare the cuttings by trimming the base and removing the lower leaves. Use a dibber to insert the cuttings around the edge of the pot. Water in and cover with a polythene bag or place in a propagator to root.



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#### **BACK TO BASICS** APRIL.



#### **Pricking out**

FLOWER AND VEGETABLE seedlings need to be pricked out once they have their first true leaves. This will give them enough space to grow healthily, and will also allow them to benefit from the extra feed in the new compost. It is possible to avoid pricking out by sowing seeds singly into modular trays, but these take up much more space in propagators or on windowsills. If your germinating seedlings are close together and have become leggy, pricking them out allows you to lower them further into the compost, which will help them to grow into sturdier plants.

You should aim to put 12 seedlings into a half-sized seed tray. Use a dibber to mark out the spacing, with three plants across the width and four down the length of the tray. Large seedlings are better pricked out and grown on in a deeper pot.

Place the seed tray in a warm, well-lit spot, keep the compost damp, and check plants regularly for aphids. As the seedlings grow, pinch out the tips of vigorous or leggy plants to make them bushier.



**GO TO gardenersworld.com/how-to** to watch lots of practical video guides, including pricking out and potting on

#### **STEP BYSTEP** How to prick out seedlings



Gently lift one seedling at a time using a dibber to lever out as many of the roots as possible. Always hold seedlings by a leaf, not by the stem, as this is easily crushed, which would kill the seedling.



Transfer the seedling to the new seed tray, which should be ready and waiting alongside. Filled with multi-purpose or bedding compost, its surface should be level and gently firmed.



Make a hole with the dibber and lower the seedling into it, almost to the base of the leaves. Firm it in carefully, ensuring the seedling is upright, well spaced from its neighbours and in a straight row.



Soak the newly planted seedlings using tepid water from a watering can with a fine rose. Label the tray with the plant's name and place it on a greenhouse bench or a bright windowsill to grow on.



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#### **ALAN'S JOB OF THE MONTH** APRIL



#### Sowing outdoors

SOWING VEGETABLES outside couldn't be easier. You don't need much space to grow smaller crops, and because the seeds are in the ground, aftercare is far less critical than when they're in pots. Prepare the soil by weeding and digging in well-rotted garden compost or manure. A week before sowing, rake in a sprinkling of blood, fish and bone.

Water the bottom of the drill before rather than after sowing to avoid disturbing the seeds. Try to sow at the spacing recommended on the packet, so you don't need to thin out the seedlings later. If you sow in clear rows, you can easily distinguish the crop from any weeds, and can then quickly hoe the weeds away between the rows.

Once the seedlings appear, take care to never let them dry out, as they'll quickly wilt and die. Spring rain will help, but you'll need to water in dry spells.

#### Alan's top direct-sow veg

- □ **Beetroot** Hugely underrated, but enjoying renewed popularity
- □ **Broad beans** Easy to germinate, producing a large, early crop
- □ **Carrots** Sow sparsely to avoid thinning, which can attract carrot fly
- □ **Lettuces** To ensure continuity, sow a short row every 10 days
- □ **Radishes** The fastest of all crops tender if kept growing rapidly □ **Swiss chard** A long cropping season of edible leaves and stalks

#### **STEP BY STEP** How to sow veg seeds outdoors



Make sure the soil is weed free, firm and level. Use a fork to break up any clods, then rake lightly. Don't over-rake, otherwise the surface may turn hard after rain.



Make a straight, shallow drill about 1cm deep. Either pull the corner of a Dutch hoe along a taut string or make an indent in the soil by pressing down a bamboo cane.



If the seeds are large enough to be handled individually, sow them a couple of centimetres apart. If not, take a pinch of seeds and sprinkle as thinly as possible along the row.



Protect from cold and bad weather with a cloche or layer of fleece.
Remove when the seedlings are growing strongly, and thin to the spacing advised on the packet.

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Ensure trellis is upright and will take the weight of your plants

# Put up trellis for climbers

USE TRELLIS to screen areas in the garden and to support a wide range of climbing plants. Panels of trellis must be secured with rust-resistant brackets and screws. Use a spirit level when mounting battens on a wall, or a hinged post level to set posts perfectly upright before the trellis is attached to them.

Make sure that your trellis can take the weight of the plants that will be climbing through it. All hardy climbers can be planted out now at the base of the trellis and tied in to encourage them to cover the frame.

#### Plant an evergreen hedge

SPRING IS THE TIME to start off evergreen hedges, as the roots will grow quickly and the plants will have all summer to establish. Prepare a clean hedgeline and add organic matter and some bonemeal fertiliser. Choose bushy, compact plants and space them much closer together than border plants. Smallleaved box can be as little as 30cm apart whereas large-leaved cherry laurel could have 75cm between each plant. Firm plants in and stake if they are large. Keep well watered throughout the first year. If box blight is an issue, Yew, Euonymus japonicus 'Microphyllus' and Ilex crenata make good alternatives.



For a good evergreen box hedge choose compact and bushy plants and plant them close together

# Beechgrove CHECKLIST

- Harden off plants, gradually at first, bringing back indoors on cold nights
- Shade greenhouse seedlings even on cold days when the sun is strong
- Deadhead faded daffodils, leaving the stem, and feed with liquid seaweed
- Keep the lawn mower set slightly higher for the first few cuts

#### **VIEW FROM BEECHGROVE**

# Start sowing courgettes





#### **BEECHGROVE GARDEN**

Watch the show on Sunday mornings (times vary), BBC2, and on Thursdays at 7.30pm, BBC2 Scotland.

COURGETTES TEND to germinate pleasingly quickly and are sown 2 cm deep, individually, into 9cm pots. After watering, it's into the propagator at 18-20°C until the seed leaves appear, when the plants are moved to develop in the more open environment of the heated greenhouse.

Courgettes resent root disturbance, so use pots rather than cell trays to avoid transplant shock when planting out in June. Courgette seeds are often sown edge side down to assist germination and avoid decay.

On the programme this month, Jim will be sowing larger seeds to see if orientation and position makes a difference to their germination.



Sow courgettes in individual pots to avoid transplant shock

BEECHGROVE WORDS: MAIRI RATTRAY. OTHER WORDS: EMMA CRAWFORTH; ROSIE YEOMANS

#### **STEP BYSTEP** How to position new pond plants

POND PLANTS such as waterlilies grow under the water and adapt their leaves and stem structure based on depth and light. A new plant plunged straight to the bottom will rot. Lower it down gradually as the plant grows. This can take weeks before the basket rests on the bottom. Pots turned upside down make good platforms that won't damage the pond liner.

- 1 Position an upturned pot on the bottom of the pond-different pot sizes will create different depth platforms.
- 2 Lower the basket onto the pot. Make sure it is stable.
- 3 The pot must be level and the basket rim just under the water surface to start with.







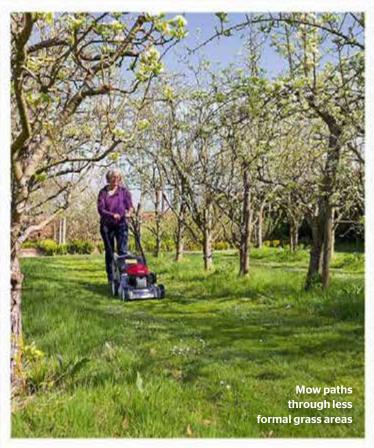
#### Prune hardy evergreens

IT IS ONLY SAFE to prune evergreens once the risk of the harshest winter cold is over as fresh new growth will be totally exposed. Spring rains also give the plant a period of stress-free growing. Not all evergreens need pruning, and wait if they are about to flower.

Use shears on shrubs like winter flowering heathers, lavender, rosemary and sage to keep them producing plenty of new flowering wood. Larger shrubs can be shaped and tidied up with secateurs and loppers.



Use secateurs to shape and tidy evergreen shrubs such as bay



#### Mow at least once a fortnight

IT MAY NOT BE the first mowing of the year but now that grass growth is accelerating in longer days it is best to mow your lawn areas every couple of weeks.

 $Keep \, the \, mower \, blade \, at \, a$ medium height to avoid stressing the grass this early in the season. Be diligent with the weed control. At this time of year the grass has a

chance to thicken up fast and out compete the lawn weeds formal lawns will need weeds dug out or treated.

Leave less formal grassed areas, particularly where you have bulbs and flowers, long until the plants have died back. Mow paths through these areas for a neat look and better access.

#### **✓ CHECKLIST**

- Feed shrubs with a balanced fertiliser
- **Apply** grass feed in warm areas
- **Sow** grass seed for a new lawn or to patch an old lawn
- **Clean** the pond by removing protective nets, dead leaves and any duckweed



#### Next month

- □ **Alan** plants a spectacular summer container
- □ **Monty** thins out his early vegetable seedlings
- **Make** more cactus plants from cuttings
- □ **PLUS** find out how to make compost faster

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE



# **PARTY PENSTEMON**





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Penstemon will become the insomniac party animals of your garden. Summer arrives and they're flowering, summer ends and they are still at it, autumn turns up and they are still flowering relentlessly. Oblivious of drought or rain, resists slugs and other pests, thrives in most soil conditions in sun or part shade and propagates so painlessly. Easy to grow too. Height 60-90cm (24-36"). Spread 45-60cm (18-24"). Hardy perennials. Delivered in May as well-rooted young plants approx. 6" from root base to stem tip.

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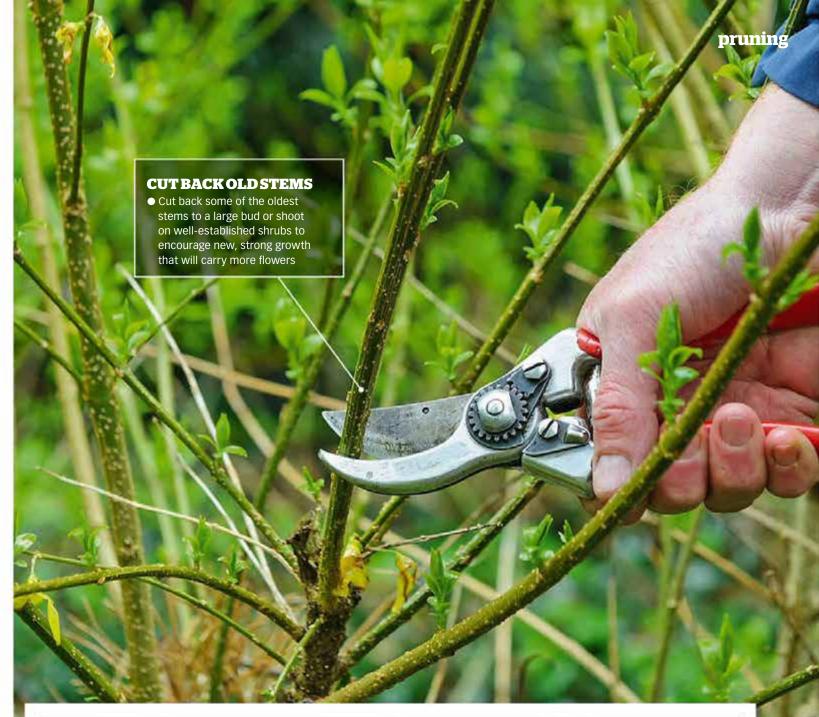
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# Your PRUNING MONTH

Once woody plants commit themselves to growth, there's no stopping them. But rather than allowing them to run amok, says **David Hurrion**, prune your shrubs carefully to redirect their energy into making flowers

**April is** the ideal month to channel all the vigour of spring into the right place - the production of flowers.

First on the pruning list should be your summer-flowering species - hydrangeas, potentillas and hibiscus - which can quickly become overgrown masses of twiggy, bare branches at the base. Also chop back softer-stemmed fuchsias, penstemons and salvias, all of which - if left unattended - are liable to flop under the weight of their summer growth and blooms. You can also get away

with cutting back any remaining buddleja, lavatera or roses, the pay-off for such late attention being a two-to three-week delay in flowers that far outweighs the floppy consequences of leaving them unpruned.

And don't forget to prune your winter- and spring-flowered shrubs as soon as the last blooms fade. Remove the oldest of the flowering stems to stop shrubs becoming too large and ensure that they bloom well next year.

Coming up next month: How to prune shrubs that are half-hardy



Mophead hydrangeas give a better display after a careful prune

# Pruning for the best flowers

**Woody** shrubs need yearly pruning to remove portions of the oldest branches and stems. Left unpruned they'll become a tangle of unproductive growth with fewer, small flowers held high on the tips.

While vigorous summerflowering growers, such as buddleia, lavatera and some clematis, will have been already cut back almost to ground level, there are a number of other species that benefit from more considered



Identify which are the older stems that need prunning out

pruning this month. This involves identifying the youngest stems – generally those less than three years old – and leaving these to carry the blooms in the coming year.

Of these, only the thickest and most vigorous will give the largest flowers; thin, twiggy growth at the base of the shrub is less likely to bloom and is best removed now so that all the plant's sap is channelled more profitably.

With the old wood and weakest stems removed, you can focus on the shape of the shrub, opening up the centre of the bush by removing any congested stems that will jostle together and stop them developing to their full potential. This will also allow air to circulate through the plant as it grows, reducing the risk of disease in summer.

And lastly, with the most vigorous, best placed stems remaining, 'tip' back those that still have last year's dead flowers on by cutting off the top fifth of their height to just above a bud or node.

#### **OTHERS TO PRUNE NOW**

- Caryopteris
- Ceanothus (deciduous forms)
- Clerodendron bungei
- Hibiscus
- Kerria

- Leycesteria
- Olearia
- Perovskia
- Phlomis
- Potentilla







66 Thin, twiggy growth at the base of the shrub is less likely to bloom and is best removed now to increase productivity >>>





#### 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.



Mophead hydrangeas

Calendar	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
FLOWERS												
PRUNING												

April 2017 gardenersworld.com

# Unsung heroes

Wasps often get a bad press, but these efficient predators play a valuable yet usually unappreciated role in our gardens

#### **FACTFILE**

#### **Common wasp**

Vespula vulgaris

**DID YOU KNOW** One in seven *Gardeners' World* Magazine readers can't identify a common wasp, with nearly 10 per cent of you mistaking them for honey bees\*. Interesting when wasps have such a bad reputation, and particularly as they're one of the best pest controllers in the garden. Living in large social groups, the sterile female workers gather caterpillars, aphids and other pests to feed their siblings. Nests are annual - only daughter queens hibernate, before setting up a new colony the following year. Large, with an obvious 'waist' between the thorax and abdomen, this distinctive insect has bright yellow and black bands along the body, two pairs of wings and long, robust antennae. On its face is a black mark in the shape of an anchor. The wasp's sting is located at the tip of its abdomen. The nest is made using chewed wood mixed with saliva. The queen and workers scrape off small pieces of wood with their powerful jaws, making a sound that is audible to the human ear.

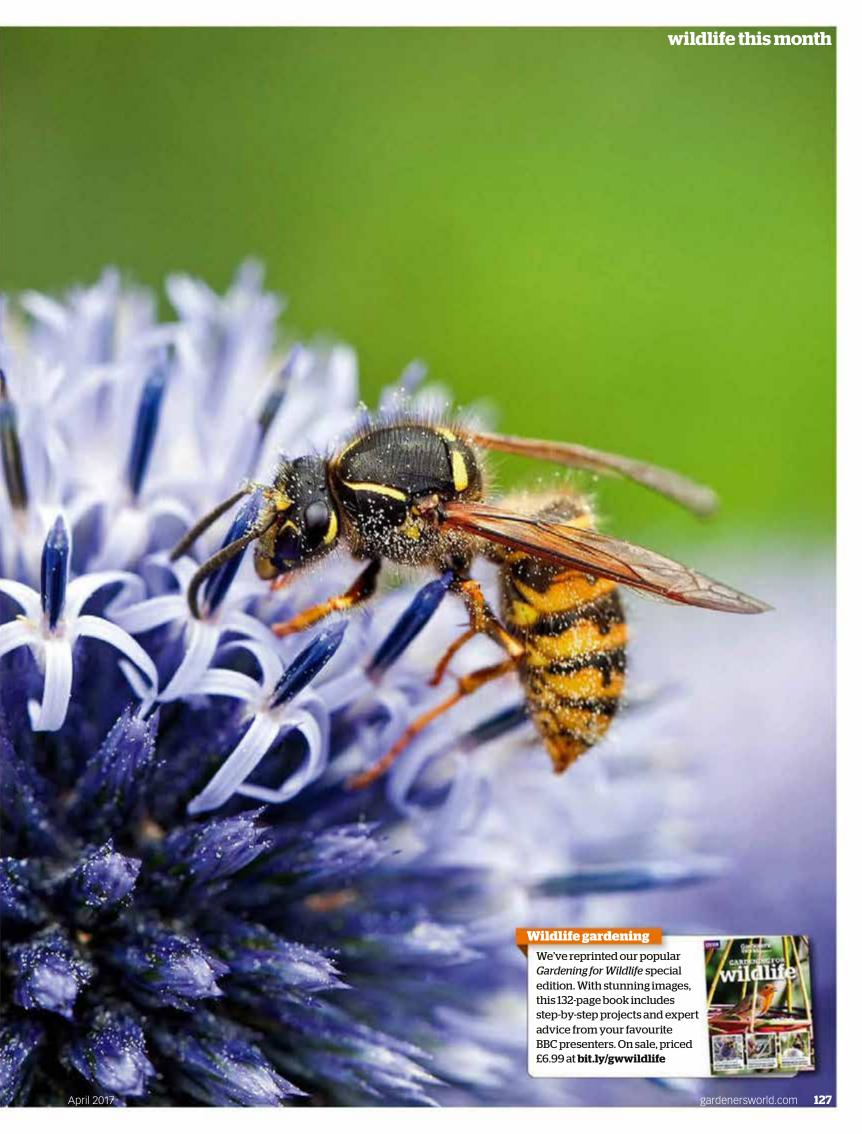
**DIET** In spring, the queen emerges from hibernation and feeds on insects and nectar, before starting a nest and laying eggs. The workers gather caterpillars, aphids and other pests to feed the grubs in the nest. In return, the grubs secrete a sugary solution, which the worker wasps eat. In late summer, the queen stops laying eggs, so there are fewer grubs to give worker wasps their sugary reward, forcing them to turn to fruit and sweet treats such as fizzy drinks and jam sandwiches.

**LIFECYCLE** The mated queen emerges from hibernation in spring and founds a new colony. She lays a few eggs, which hatch to become the first workers. The workers take over collecting food and building the nest, while the queen focuses on laying. In summer, new daughter queens mate with males from other nests, and enter hibernation. The existing queen stops laying and by autumn the original nest, workers, males and gueen die. Only the mated daughter queens hibernate, to start the cycle again in spring.

**HABITAT** Urban, suburban and rural areas, including gardens and parks, woodland and arable land.

AT RISK? No, wasps are common and widespread.







#### How to ...

#### Make a bog garden in a pot

In the absence of a pond, a bog garden can provide a habitat for egg-laying dragonflies and other invertebrates, plus damp shelter for frogs, toads and newts. And it doesn't have to take up much space – simply follow our steps to create a container bog garden.

#### **YOU WILL NEED**

- Container, such as an old tin baby's bath
- Pond liner
- Peat-free, multi-purpose compost
- Moisture-loving plants (we used astilbe, variegated eupatorium and rodgersia)
- Slate chippings or gravel (optional)



 $1 \begin{tabular}{ll} \textbf{Drill holes} in the base of the container, then add the liner so it overlaps the sides. Part-fill with compost. \\ \end{tabular}$ 



 $\label{eq:arrange} 2^{\text{Arrange}} \text{ the plants to your liking, then fill in around them with more compost. Firm in and water well.}$ 



**Trim back** the edges of the liner so it's no longer visible. Add a layer of stones to reduce evaporation.





pests as these are too heavy and will close the feeding port.



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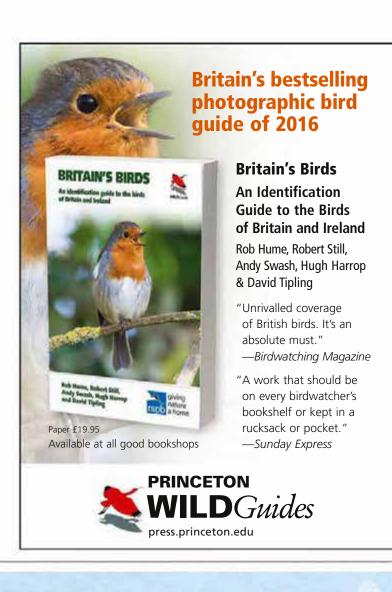
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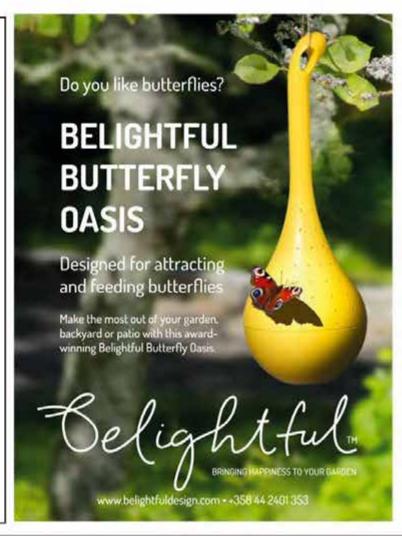
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# GROW&EAT

This month we're eagerly sowing masses of veg seeds and enjoying the perennial delights of asparagus and forced rhubarb

#### **Rocket**

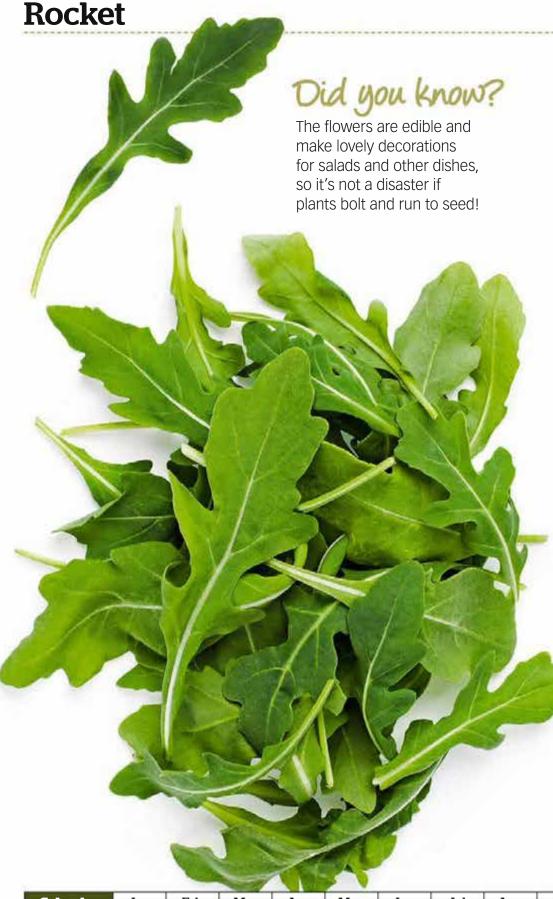
Fast and easy to grow, rocket has a distinctive peppery flavour. Regular sowings can ensure a near year-round supply.

#### **3 WAYS TO TRY**

- Stir into a creamy goat's cheese risotto
- Blend with garlic, pine nuts and parmesan to make a peppery pesto
- Stuff into a steak baguette

**DISCOVER MORE** ways to use your rocket harvest at **olivemagazine.com** 

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#### **Nutrition**

The leaves have good levels of vitamin C and folic acid as well as calcium and potassium, and are an excellent source of vitamins A, B and K. Usually eaten raw, so no goodness is reduced by cooking.

#### How to grow

Rocket is best sown directly in good, fertile soil as it dislikes root disturbance. Thin seedlings if necessary to avoid overcrowding. Spring and autumn-sown crops tend to be most successful. Provide shade in summer to avoid bolting. Keep soil moist but don't overwater or it can 'dilute' the taste. Flea beetle may eat tiny holes in the leaves but covering with fleece or fine mesh keeps the pest at bay.

#### Harvest

Best grown as a 'cut-and-come-again' crop by picking a few leaves from each plant, over a long period.

Harvest when large enough to use – as soon as six weeks after sowing with the quickest-growing varieties.

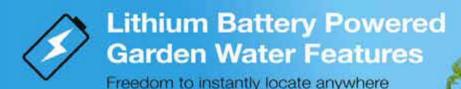
#### How to store

Ideally eaten soon after harvest, but leaves keep in the fridge for several days in a sealed container. Older leaves can be blanched and frozen.

#### Our choices

Wild rocket: Deeply serrated leaves, strong taste. Perennial in mild areas. Salad rocket: Quick-growing and shorter-lived. 'Dragon's Tongue': Purplish-veined leaves, vigorous and good bolt-resistance. 'Wasabi': Hot, spicy flavour, quick-growing and vigorous.

Calendar	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
SOW													
HARVEST													
SPACING	Sow 🕹 10	Sow ↓ 1cm deep Final spacing ↔ 15cm apart 2 45cm between rows											



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Follow our guide and grow your own Christmas dinner - from planting now, to harvesting ho-ho-homegrown veg on the big day!

**There are only 38 weeks** to go until Christmas! Yes, it's true – for a home-grown Christmas dinner, it pays to get your sprouts on early.

It's a proud moment when you dish up a Christmas feast of fragrant home-grown potatoes, plump sprouts, and sweet carrots and parsnips, pulled fresh from the plot. So this year, why not take our Veg

Pledge challenge to grow as much of your Christmas dinner as possible. Timing slow-growing winter veg to peak on the 25th December takes patience, but you'll have the very best for the year's most important meal – plus plenty to pick all winter, too. Follow our guide and we'll lead you every step of the way from now to a deliciously home-grown Christmas Day.

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**'Brora'** Extremely hardy and resistant to mildew **'Helenor'** Evenly shaped, round roots and good, rich flavour

'Gladiator' Good choice for heavier soils with big,

# Your Christmas countdown

#### **April**

- Prepare the soil now Weed thoroughly, then cover with clear polythene. This warms the ground for sowing and remaining weed seeds will germinate, so you can hoe them off before sowing.
- **Sow parsnips** Parsnip seed is slow to get going, and germination can be patchy. Use fresh seed and sow generously into shallow drills in free-draining soil in a sunny spot. Seedlings can take a month to emerge so mix in a few radish seeds. These pop up in days, 'marking' the row and you get a salad crop.



#### May

- Thin carrots and parsnips Pull up weaker and smaller seedlings to leave the largest, with 5cm between carrots and 10-15cm for parsnips (wider spacings mean thicker roots). Where seedlings emerge in clumps, nip off unwanted ones at ground level to avoid disturbing those you're keeping.
- Sow swedes Swede hates being transplanted so sow where it's to grow. Sprinkle seed along shallow drills and cover lightly with compost.



38 weeks till Christmas





- Sow maincrop carrots Sprinkle seed sparingly into shallow drills in light, stone-free, watered soil. Lightly cover with more soil, then place fleece over so carrot fly can't reach emerging seedlings.
- Sow leeks Start leeks in seed trays under cover. Sprinkle seed sparingly onto dampened seed compost and cover with compost.
   Place in a plastic bag until seedlings emerge, then remove the bag and keep seedlings damp while they're growing on.
- Take sage cuttings Trim sprigs to 10cm, just below a leaf bud. Sink cuttings in a pot of gritty compost. Water and keep compost just damp. They should root in six weeks on a warm windowsill.



- Sow brassicas Sow Brussels sprouts, cabbages and kale into 5cm modules now for midwinter pickings. Place on a windowsill or in a cool greenhouse to germinate.
- Defend seedlings from slugs Newly-emerged seedlings are slug caviar, so patrol at dusk and sink yoghurt pots into the ground nearby laced with beer to lure them to a boozy end.
- Pot on sage cuttings As new growth appears, pot on.
- Check newly-sown drills daily Keep new drills damp.
- Carefully pull out weeds Emerging seedlings need all the help they can get so remove weeds as you spot them.



#### June

- Plant out leeks Once leek seedlings are chopstick thickness, transplant into holes 15cm deep and 15-25cm apart. Water into the hole and don't backfill.
- Plant sage Harden off young sage plants before planting out in your sunniest, most free-draining spot. Sage is quite happy in containers, too.



#### July

- Scatter fertiliser Lightly fork in blood, fish and bone or granular fertiliser, then water in.
- Make cabbage root fly collars
   Cut out a 15cm circle of cardboard and snip a slot into the centre. Slip it around brassica seedling stems, on the ground, to protect from cabbage root fly larvae.



#### **August**

o Plant potatoes in sacks Starting now should guarantee a good crop by Christmas Day, though to be sure, plant another batch next month, too. Place two potatoes on 15cm compost in each sack and add another 15cm compost. Water well and keep in a sunny, sheltered spot.



如 21





- Plant out brassicas Harden off cabbages, kale and Brussels sprouts over about 10 days, then plant out.
   Leave 45cm between cabbages and 60cm between sprouts and kale.
   Plant deep and firm in really well.
- Fend off flea beetles Cover emerging swede seedlings with fleece to stop flea beetles peppering their leaves with holes.



- Cover brassicas with fine mesh Protect brassicas from cabbage white caterpillars with a mesh cover.
- Avoid canker Pull soil over parsnip shoulders to protect them from canker.
- Keep watering Carrots, parsnips and swedes can split if allowed to dry out.
- Inspect for mealy cabbage aphid Check cabbages and kale for aphids and spray with insectidal soap.



- Inspect brassica leaves for caterpillar eggs Even if you've netted cabbages, butterflies might get in. Check under leaves for clusters of tiny yellow eggs and wipe them off.
- Earth up carrots Maincrop carrots can develop green shoulders if exposed to the sun, so earth up over the crowns.
- Ask a friend If you're going away ensure you have watering taken care of.

#### September

- Earth up potato shoots As potatoes grow, keep earthing them up with compost, leaving only the topmost leaves showing to encourage a heavier crop. Mix fertiliser with the compost.
- Sow 'button' carrots If your carrots haven't thrived, fastmaturing round carrots give you a second chance. Sow direct into greenhouse borders or grow bags.
- Blanch leeks For long, elegant white shanks slip a collar over each leek, and pull dry earth up around the stems as they grow.

# Make léek collars to create elegant white shanks

#### November

- Cut sprout tops off when the stalk holds plenty of buttons, cut the top off to stop upward growth and mature the sprouts.
- **Lift leeks** A hard frost prevents harvesting so lift leeks, dig a shallow trench and pack them into it. Cover shanks in loose soil.
- Mulch swede and parsnip Protect swede and parsnips from freezing by mulching with a thick layer of straw or bracken.
- **Keep red cabbage dry** Late-maturing red cabbage is prone to splitting in a sudden downpour, so protect with polythene.



**16** 

(12

7

Keep parsnips

3





 Stake Brussels sprouts and kale The biggest brassicas get very top-heavy, so drive in a sturdy stake alongside each plant and tie the stems in securely with soft twine.

- Lift and store carrots You can leave maincrop carrots in the ground in all but the coldest areas of the country, but slugs can sometimes take a nibble, so storing part of your harvest ensures blemish-free Christmas carrots. Select only perfect specimens, twist off foliage and pack in crates of damp sand.
- Bring potato sacks inside A sunny porch or frost-free greenhouse is the perfect location to keep spuds growing well.
- Two weeks to go Dig up your parsnips and keep them in the fridge, as they become sweeter after a spell of cold.
- Two days to go Sink a garden fork alongside carrots and swedes and wiggle it to loosen the soil, then ease out the root.
   Cut cabbages whole, leaving stalks in the ground to resprout.
- One day to go Pick Brussels sprouts by cutting the whole stem, or select sprouts that are about 5cm across and snip them off. Tip out your sack of potatoes and select the biggest.
- Christmas morning Pick sage and kale, leaf by leaf.
- Enjoy your best ever home-grown Christmas dinner!

Now over to you to share your #Veg Pledge! Email, tweet or join us on Facebook to tell us what you're going to grow for Christmas. See page 3 for our social media addresses



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# April growing guide

There are lots of edible crops you can start this month, both indoors and outside

OW Key crops for	April	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Aubergines OUR CHOICE 'Ophelia produces lots of tiny aftertaste. It will also	fruits with no bitter				elect the s spacing								
Brussels sprouts our choice 'Clodius sprouts on plants that to cold weather and	'. Firm and tasty at stand up well				around th								
Cauliflowers OUR CHOICE 'Clapton plants are resistant t produce a dense whi	o clubroot and				delicious pacing								
Leeks OUR CHOICE 'Apollo'. upright, the plants ca together and are resi	an be grown close				n sowing plant 15cr								
Onions OUR CHOICE 'Setton'. flavour, good skin qu The uniform bulbs als	ality and high yield.				spring, mail								
Parsnips our choice 'Albion'. produces long, swee roots with good resis	t, superbly flavoured				sow d not to ge pacing								
Peas OUR CHOICE 'Sugar A variety produces an a sweet pods from ear	abundance of	Tip Tob	oost yiel 4cm deej	sow ds, water	when in fl	ower and 5cm ap	HARVEST as pods s art ec	well. Wat	ering befo	orethisjus nt <b>Avg.yi</b>	st encour <b>eld:</b> 3kg p	ages more er 3m rov	e leave
Potatoes OUR CHOICE 'Sarpo A resistant variety with pink tubers and crea	n uniform-shaped				l the plan al spacing								
Pumpkins & squa our choice 'Uchiki k teardrop-shaped frui flesh and a superb ch	Kuri'. Medium-sized, its with firm, orange				sow g the shoo spacing								
Strawberries our choice 'Elegand cropper with enormo good tolerance to po	ous, tasty fruits and				om sprin								ırow

#### offer

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#### New for 2017

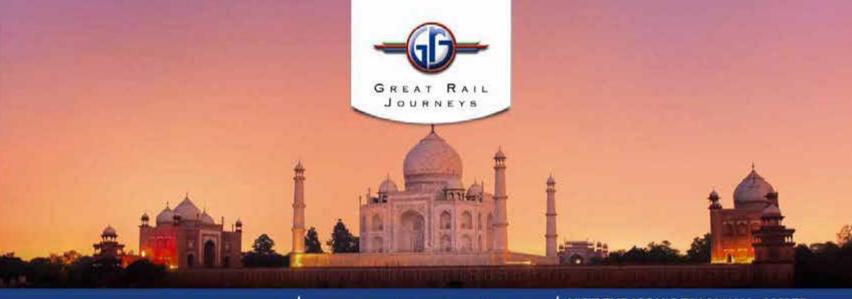
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gardenersworld.com April 2017



9 NIGHTS' HOTEL ACCOMMODATION AND 21 MEALS TOURS OF OLD AND NEW DELHI, JAIPUR, AGRA FORT AND PATAN VISIT THE ICONIC TAJ MAHAL, AMBER FORT AND ENJOY 2 GAME DRIVES IN RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

#### INDIA'S GOLDEN TRIANGLE & TIGER SAFARI

This Indian adventure takes us to some of the country's most exciting sights. On our journey we discover thriving cities, spectacular palaces and forts, and perhaps even a wild tiger. Our tour culminates with a night in a 200-year-old palace.



Days 1-3. Discovering Delhi. We leave London Heathrow on our overnight flight to Delhi, arriving on Day 2 for two nights at the 4-Star Maidens Hotel. We explore on Day 3, beginning our tour with a rickshaw ride. We visit Jama Masjid, before riding through the narrow streets of Old Delhi's lively bazaar. In New Delhi we visit Humayun's Tomb and Qutab Minar - India's tallest stone tower.

Days 4-5. Agra & Fatehpur Sikri. This morning we board the Shatabdi Express to Agra. On amval we visit Agra Fort, before travelling by coach to the Taj Mahal, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, for a sunset visit. On Day 5 we travel by coach to Fatehpur Sikri. Built in the 16th century as the country's new capital, the city was abandoned after only 14 years and has been preserved in almost the exact state it was in 400 years ago. We continue to Bharatpur for lunch, later catching the train to Sawai Madhopur for two nights at Taj Sawai Madhopur Lodge.

Day 6. Ranthambore National Park. Today we head into the Ranthambore National Park for a morning game drive. The park's most popular resident is the tiger, and Ranthambore is one of the only places in India where this incredible animal can still be found in the wild. To increase

ONE OF A RANGE OF AWARD WINNING HOLIDAYS TO INDIA. CALL FOR A FREE BROCHURE.



our chances of a sighting, we embark on a second game drive this afternoon.

Days 7-8. Jaipur. Today we travel by coach to Jaipur, or the 'Pink City'. On arrival, we check into our hotel for the next three nights, then the rest of your day is free. We enjoy a sightseeing tour on Day 8 which includes the grand City Palace, the 18th century Astronomical Observatory and the spectacular Palace of the Winds.

Days 9-10. The Amber Fort & Patan. Today we transfer by coach to the Amber Fort, where you are free to stroll through the sprawling complex of courtyards and halls. The views of the great walls and fortifications on the surrounding mountains are stunning. We travel by coach to the town of Patan on Day 10, transferring on arrival by camel cart to the Patan Mahal Palace Hotel. This afternoon we enjoy a walking tour, a wonderful opportunity to see life in a rural Indian town. There is the opportunity to continue to Badal Mahal, an 800-year old palace, ahead of a farewell gala dinner in the grounds of our palace

Day 11. Return home. This morning we transfer by coach to Delhi International Airport. Here we connect with our flight back to London.



#### WHY YOU SHOULD DISCOVER INDIA BY RAIL

Experience the vibrant colour and magnificent cities of India from the carriages of one of the most comprehensive rail networks in the world. This spectacular country's long love affair with rail travel has produced a number of exceptional rail

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- 2 game drives in Ranthambore National Park
- O Excursion to Fatehpur Sikri
- O Guided tours of Patan and Badal Mahal
- O Visit to the Amber Fort
- Tipping for all services including local guides

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# Taking on a Tablet is Easy

ablets like Apple's iPad and Samsung's range of Android tablets have become more and more popular over the last few years. They used to sound like something out of Star Trek - portable devices that you just touch to operate... and that you can even talk to!

But now they're everywhere - and with good reason. They're by far the easiest way to access the internet, send and read emails, keep in touch with far flung friends and relatives... even making video phone calls (free).

Of course you could do all that on a "traditional" PC or laptop, but a tablet is far more portable - take it to the cafe or out to the park... or curl up on the sofa with it.

Plus tablets are easier to use than traditional PCs. Instead of fiddling about with a keyboard and mouse you can simply touch the screen to tell it what to do.

It's not all quite that simple, though.

You see, most people find tablets easier to use, that's only once they've been shown how. There are "gestures" and tricks that make using a tablet easy - but you'd never guess them and you can't work them out - you need to be shown.

There are lots of features and useful bits hidden away on the tablet, as well - unless you know they're there, you've little chance of stumbling

there might be easier ways to do it that you'd never know about unless someone told you... and ideally showed you, nice and simply.



fear about using devices

Of course, if the devices came with a proper manual, it'd be fine. But usually you're lucky to get a page or two telling you how to plug it in!

That's where a popular guide published in the Lake District comes in. It doesn't assume you're an expert or a techie. It takes things from the start and explains them step by step.

Published by The Helpful Book Company, author Tim Wakeling has helped thousands get to grips with their tablet, PC or laptop since setting up the company 10 years ago. He's learnt how to explain things in plain English for the less technical, with plenty of illustrations to show what the screen will look like and where you

More than 50,000 people have used one of Wakeling's easy to read books to help master their computer and the firm has gained a great reputation with its customers - many recommending the books to their friends and family. (You won't find them in the bookshops, though.)

There are separate books for the Apple iPad and for Android based tablets such as a Kindle Fire, Hudl, Samsung Galaxy Tab, Sony Xperia, the Nexus range or anything else running Android.

The information pack available helps explain how to tell which version a customer has. The books are only available direct from the publisher.

INFORMATION: For details call The Helpful Book Company on 01229 777606 and ask for a free information pack.

#### Calling all iPad or Android Tablet owners

If you ever find your tablet frustrating, aren't quite sure how to do things or just think you might not be getting all your should from it, read on...

ablets are becoming hugely already know how to use the popular. And no wonder they're lighter and easier to carry around than a PC. You can sit in a comfy armchair and browse the web or even video call your family around the world. They're easier to use than PCs in lots of ways, too.

But there's a catch. In fact, two

#### Catch number 1:

They're different from PCs. So if you already know how to use a PC, you have to start again.

Catch number 2 (the big one!): There are lots of important features that are "hidden". There's no button for them, saying "click here". And you simply can't work it out. You need to know to slide the screen from the left, or drag the thingyme-bob to the right.

Someone needs to tell you these things – it's just not possible to work it out as you wouldn't even know they're there!

#### If I ran the world...

If I ran the world, these devices would come with a proper manual. But when they do come with a manual, it's on the device, so you can only get at it if you

thing! And when you do get at it, it's usually written assuming you already know how to use it which makes it a bit pointless. That's why I've written these books: iPads One Step at a Time and Android Tablets One Step at a Time (ideal for all Android tablets).

Plain English - that's not all... They explain how to use the device, in plain simple language, with pictures of the screen showing exactly where to tap or slide your fingers. No jargon!

#### Only Half the Story...

That's only half the story, but I don't have room to explain what I mean by that here. So I've put together full information on the books - who they're for, what they cover and so on. What's more, the books also come with a small free gift - no room to explain that here, either!

#### "Better than WHSmith's Best"?

As soon as these books came out, I started getting comments like... "Thank you for producing such a superb book – it is really helping me. I had bought one (a book) in

WH Smiths a short while ago and worry, we won't pass your couldn't get on with it at all!" -I.S.

and "I am delighted with the new book on tablets, so many things I didn't understand before, being of the 'retired brigade' it's a great *help.*" – Doreen Wadsworth

Don't buy now, do this instead Anyway, don't buy now. Instead, you can find out the full details about what's covered, who they're ideal for and what you might be missing out on, then decide. Just ask for a free information pack.

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#### Your questions answered





# Preventing the death of seedlings

Hygiene is king when propagating. That's why we advocate sterilised pots, trays and tools, fresh compost, clean water and the regular tidying and removal of damaged, diseased and dead plant material. Seedlings and cuttings are too young to fend off infections and will succumb quickly.

Damping off is the broad term for the death of seedlings. This disease describes infection by various organisms. You might see a sudden collapse in a seed tray, sometimes with the seedlings showing dark patches at the base of their stems, like those on the right. Roots rot away and grey mould may be obvious.

To avoid this you need to act like a strict nurse, keeping your propagating area clean and tidy, and looking out for symptoms. If just a few seedlings die, you should dispose of the whole tray, taking the compost and plants to a compost heap and disinfecting the tray before its next use.

Emma Crawforth, Gardening Editor

#### **This month**

144 **NEW Garden Doctor** Nick Bailey on tackling weeds

146 **Gardeners' Question Time** The BBC Radio 4 experts answer this month's pick of readers' queries



THE CHARACTER STORY

**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** 

#### NEW SERIES

## **GARDEN DOCTOR**

# Persistent weeds

**Nick Bailey** examines this tricky problem and offers his advice on the cure



**Weeds!** We've all got them and these 'plants-in-the-wrong-place' have an uncanny habit of being able to populate just about any bit of the garden. They look unsightly, steal nutrients and light from garden plants and often carry transmittable diseases. Keeping weeds in check is the bane of most gardeners' lives, but eradicating them can be simple with the right know-how.

#### How to beat them

Annual weeds complete their life cycle in one year – they germinate, flower, set seed and die. They can easily be removed by hoeing and leaving them on the soil surface – especially effective in hot weather. Or in paved or open areas, a hand-operated gas-powered flame gun works well. Annuals are easier to manage than their bully-boy brethren – perennial weeds. These long-term pests maintain a root stock underground and re-emerge each year to wreak further havoc. No part of the garden is out of bounds.

The methods for clearing annual weeds can be applied to perennials but will only weaken them - their determined root system will soon generate new shoots and leaves. They need an approach that will eradicate their roots. Pulling or digging out can work for some but those with tap roots, such as dock and thistle, tend to snap below ground, leaving root fragments. Smothering them with black plastic sheeting for a year or more can work, or try out-competing them. Planting sturdy specimens of Geranium oxanianum, for example, works to smother ground elder. Underground plastic barriers stop

'running' plants such as nettles from spreading further. But, for the most effective removal, chemicals are usually required.

Selective weedkillers such as Verdone Extra and Westland Resolva Lawn Weedkiller work by killing perennial weeds in lawns without affecting the grass. On paved areas or among veg or ornamental planting, glyphosate weedkillers such as Roundup are highly effective, so long as they do not come into contact with your plants. The weed absorbs the chemical and draws it down the roots, killing it. Bindweed, nettles, couch grass and brambles can take several treatments, along with your best effort to physically remove the whole plant. To prevent weeds returning for up to six months try a pre-emergent herbicide. These work by forming an invisible layer on the soil or gravel surface that prevents any new plant germinating for up to six months. Bayer Path and Drive weedkiller and Weedol Pathclear do just this.

#### **Innovations**

'Natural' wildlife-friendly weedkillers based on plant acids and oils have recently entered the market. They strip the weed of the protective layer on its leaf surface, causing the foliage to die off, which is effective for annuals. Try Weedblast from Ecofective or Doff Superfast Weedkiller. Another innovation in the last decade is the advent of a system for removing the worst villain of the lot – Japanese knot weed. Used by professionals, it involves injecting the stems of the plant with a translocated herbicide (see panel). This works but can take more than one treatment.

Did you know? The soil below the average bramble contains in excess of 10,000 seeds

In this new column Nick shares his expert knowledge for a thriving garden. **NEXT MONTH:** Nick turns his thoughts to overgrown ponds



grow in a plot that

gets morning sun?

A BOB SAYS The wall you mention behind your plot will not only shade crops but also keep off rain, and as raised beds dry out quickly it will be important to water everything really well. Shade means that while sunloving crops such as onions, garlic, tomatoes, peppers, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, courgettes, squashes, and French and runner beans may struggle, they won't necessarily fail - they'll just give smaller yields. Potatoes may get leggy but will crop, so plant earlies for new potatoes.

Brassicas, especially tougher ones such as kale, cabbage, sprouts and sprouting broccoli, should do well. Salad vegetables such as loose-leaf lettuce and leafy annual herbs such as chervil, dill and rocket should thrive, as will spring onions, beetroot, turnips, broad beans, peas (especially sugar snap or mangetout). Watercress could do very well if kept soaked and can be grown by planting pieces from the supermarket.



Brassicas such as kale will do well

#### **Gardeners' Question Time** Our experts tackle your gardening problems, including small grapes, declining corkscrew

### • What will do well in a conifershaded bed with clay soil?

Shanti and Phil, by email

#### A MATT SAYS The

combination of clay, conifers and shade means the soil is going to be dry. To increase your options, create raised beds using nontreated railway sleepers, which you can then fill with well-rotted organic matter or ericaceous compost, and install a seep-hose irrigation system. As you prefer evergreens, try Bergenia 'Bressingham White' with purewhite flowers in spring and Liriope muscari, which boasts vertical spikes of small, deep-lavender flowers in autumn. Also try Nandina domestica 'Fire Power' with red berries and leaves that are tinted red in spring, and Fatsia japonica. If the soil's acid, Rhododendron 'Koichiro Wada' is a must, with silvery new shoots that turn a glossy green, followed by pink buds bursting into pure-white flowers.



Shady clay border sounds troublesome, with clay soil potentially being dried out by conifers. You say you have a small magnolia that's doing well, so to continue the theme of a shady, woodland-style border, you could plant a Camellia x williamsii hybrid (as long as the soil is acidic to

Daphne 'Aureomarginata' provides interest throughout the year

neutral, so do a pH test first). Coming down in size, the deliciously fragrant Daphne odora 'Aureomarginata' is worth a go for early, pink blooms. Plant deciduous Clerodendrum bungei and let it sucker - its stems will pop up here and there, rising to 1.8m and topped with heads

of fragrant, exotic-looking pink

flowers in summer.

in shady soil with good watering

#### Anne Swithinbank

A keen fruit, vegetable and houseplant grower, Anne was formerly the glasshouse supervisor at RHS Garden Wisley.



Bob Flowerdew

Bob is an organic gardener and a regular panellist on BBC Radio 4's *Gardeners' Question Time*.



Matt Biggs

Matt trained at Kew and has been gardening professionally for more than 30 years.



Keep areas around plants free of hiding places for hungry pests

## Q What happened to my daffodils?

Sandra Harris, by email

A BOB SAYS From the size and shape of the holes, you appear to have two or three pests eating the flowers, probably slugs and snails, possibly birds, perhaps vine weevils or maybe even woodlice. Check them at night, and have a clear up, particularly under the pots and ornaments in the background of your photo.

## Q How should I dispose of roque Spanish bluebells?

Carole, by email

MATT SAYS Fork the Spanish Bluebells from the soil carefully and methodically, going over the area repeatedly until every one has been lifted. Pull them carefully from the ground because the stems snap easily. You can use glyphosate weedkiller by applying it to the leaves after crushing them. Dispose of the plants in the local council composting bin where the heat

from the heaps will kill them. Don't compost the plants or dump them in the countryside and don't replant with the native bluebell until you are sure the ground is completely clear.

The true bluebell can be bought from reputable suppliers of cultivated stock; under no circumstances should they be wild collected. They are available in spring 'in the green' or as dry bulbs for autumn planting at least 10cm below the surface.



## Q How can I stop this weed?

Angela Cooke, Glamorgan

ANNE SAYS This looks like South American Oxalis debilis, a weed I know well. Known as pink shamrock, it probably originated as a garden escapee and is difficult to eradicate due to its persistent fleshy root and numerous bulbils, which tumble easily into the soil. Weeding tends to turn into propagation.

I was once hired to rid a border of this weed and having dug out as

much as I could, proceeded to hoe weekly with a good sharp blade. In the second year, I whizzed through the border every two weeks and in the third year, every three. By the fourth year, there was hardly any oxalis to be seen, but you have to remain vigilant as there are always small scraps waiting to proliferate.

You have three options: ignore it (the roots are relatively shallow, so can be pulled out easily), smother it with old carpet for about three years or hoe like a dervish.



A comfrey feed will encourage fruit set and flowers

## Q What kind of food do nettles and comfrey make?

Tina Church, by email

A BOB SAYS Stinging nettles give a general-purpose liquid feed thought to also improve disease resistance. Comfrey gives a high-potash feed mainly for potatoes, tomatoes, roses, fruit trees and bushes, especially gooseberries. I find borage makes a better general-purpose liquid feed than either, and more quickly. Make the best feed by combining all three.

## Q Can I use soot and wood ash on the garden?

Jo White, by email

ANNE SAYS Wood ash makes soil more alkaline and adds potash, so is good around fruit bushes. Soot (not from coal or anthracite as they may contain harmful residues) has been used to darken soil and help it warm up faster in spring, and contains nutrients for plants. Spread it thinly in a compost heap but don't use it directly on the soil.



## **Changing Gardens for Good**

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tested and rated to ensure when professionally installed it can withstand wind gusts of up to 130mph. This year when the weather is doing its worst – I certainly won't need to worry about my fence. The Colourfence system offers a lacting solution to

system offers a lasting solution to fencing woes. It's easy to see why many regard it as the premier fencing solution on the market. Immune to the rot and resistant to the weather that so quickly effects wooden fences, Colourfence has none of the drawbacks of wood – plenty of additional benefits and what's more it's better value too! High quality AND great value – it's a game changing product with an absolutely first rate

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Willows are easy to care for, but corkscrews need extra attention

#### Why does my potted corkscrew willow lose leaves and suffer dieback?

Angela, Bedfordshire

ANNE SAYS Corkscrew willows (Salix babylonica 'Tortuosa') make dramatic winter outlines when the twisted stems are revealed. They are great for flower arranging and providing supports for spring bulbs in pots.

Although willows like water, you should avoid planting a small rootball into a large container, where it will be swamped by wet compost, stopping oxygen reaching the roots. Conversely, I

hope the roots were not allowed to dry out or overheat, which can happen when they are pot-bound.

Whether or not the plant was well kept, the culprit could be willow sawfly larvae. These look like caterpillars, eat hungrily in large numbers and can defoliate their host plant.

Keep a regular look out for them from spring onwards. If you see the larvae, put a sheet under the tree and knock it sharply so they fall onto the ground when you disturb them, then dispose of them.



Use mesh with holes that small birds can get through

## • How can we

A BOB SAYS Magpies are bigger than most of the insectivorous birds we gardeners wish to encourage. To keep them away, surround your table with wide-mesh, galvanised chicken netting or similar wire net, which the smaller birds will be able to pass through but the magpies will not.

#### keep magpies off our bird table?

Valerie Griffin, Dorset

#### Why didn't the buds on my large double daffs open?

Brian Kay, Hampshire

ANNE SAYS This is known as bud blast. Too much nitrogen can be to blame, so only feed bulbs with a high-potash fertiliser. Plant the bulbs deeply enough not to suffer from droughts on light soils, and consider lifting and repositioning them.



Plant daffodil bulbs in holes 10-15cm deep to avoid bud blast

#### • How can I grow tree seedlings under my acer?

Marilyn Frost, Devon

A MATT SAYS Water the pot so the compost is moist, then gently ease out the seedlings with a hand fork, doing as little damage to the root as possible. Tease the seedlings apart, sprinkle mycorrhizal fungi on the roots to stimulate root growth, then transplant into individual pots that are slightly larger than the spread of the roots and filled with peatfree ericaceous compost.

Pot them at the same level as they were before, then firm the compost, leaving a gap between the surface of the soil and the rim of each pot for easy watering. Label the seedlings clearly and put them in a sheltered, shady spot. Keep the compost moist and check the pots regularly through the growing season. If roots appear through the hole in the bottom, repot into a container one size larger. Keep doing this until a good root system is established.





#### How should I repot my 10-yearold acer tree?

Janice, by email

A BOB SAYS These ornamental maples can be difficult, requiring shelter from scorching sun and fierce winds, and need rich, moist, but never waterlogged, soil. After a decade it will now be pot-bound, so I cannot suggest you simply plant it out in the ground as it will probably not have enough vigour to establish. So, remove it from the pot, shaking off as much of the old compost as possible, and prune off any dead roots.

Repot it into a slightly larger container, preferably terracotta as its weight will help to keep the plant upright. Use a good-quality potting compost (not a cheap or multi-purpose one), preferably a 50:50 mix of a soil-based one such as John Innes with an ericaceous one (or with leaf mould, if you have any).



Try pruning harder to get larger grape fruits

#### My grapes are pea-sized - how do I get bigger ones?

Patricia Fergusson, by email

A BOB SAYS It could be that the variety is one intended for wine-making not dessert. Harder, more ruthless pruning should help, so leave fewer branches and then only one bunch per branch with about a metre of foliage to each. You could also thin the number of berries per bunch, as recommended in old books.

#### What can I use to write on labels that will last?

Maureen Tostevin, by email

A MATT SAYS Botanic gardens use engraved labels, while others, such as Plant Heritage, use handheld labellers that type out the name onto tape. Some gardeners use white paint on stones, permanent marker on wooden labels or etch into copper. It's also worth keeping a paper planting plan or book so you have a written record of what you have planted in the garden, too.

#### Which perennials can I grow from seed to make attractive carpet bedding?

Jacqui Dace, by email

ANNE SAYS Carpet bedding became popular during the Victorian era. The plants used were usually tender and most were novelty introductions, such as Alternanthera ficoidea amoena, a tender perennial evergreen reaching only 5cm high, the dark-red Iresine lindenii (which needs clipping), Aptenia cordifolia and echeverias.

Some of these can be grown from seed, usually in autumn, kept frost-free during winter, grown on in spring and planted for summer display. You could also try golden feverfew, ajuga and acaena for its metalliclooking foliage.



Leave pine needles where they fall to act as a weed-suppressing mulch

#### What can we do with pine cones and needles?

Vincent and Madeleine Naylor, North Yorkshire

A MATT SAYS You could compost them. Although pine needles have a pH of 3-4, they become slightly acidic to neutral after composting. They are slow to rot and the pH suppresses microbial activity in the compost, but they're good for opening up the heap. If adding fresh, chop them up before mixing them in.

Limit them to 10 percent of the heap or stack separately to rot after about three years. Keep the heap moist. If growing plants that like acidic soil, use them as a mulch. The needles can be left to rot down naturally or raked from the border after 12 months, then added to the compost heap once the rotting process has started.

#### 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.

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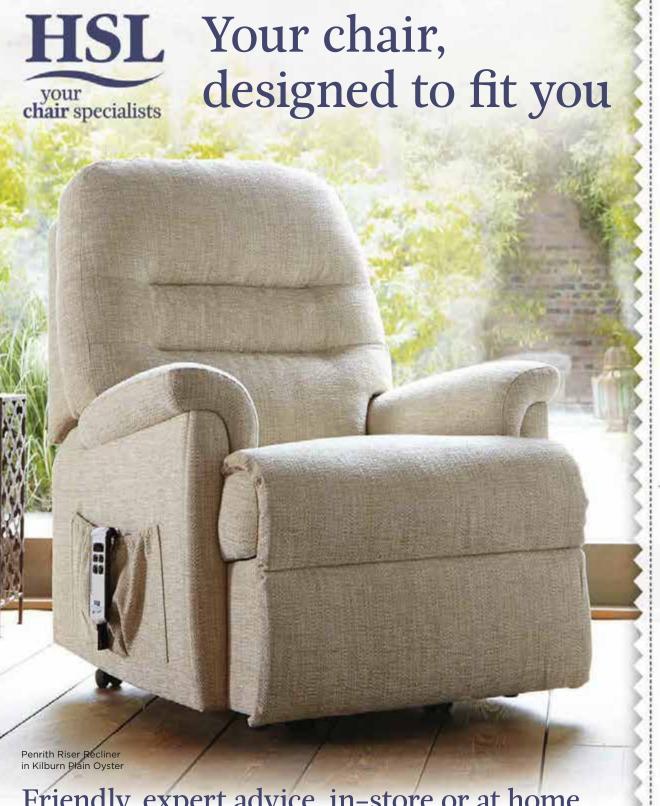
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#### The trouble with wildlife ...

We welcome wildlife into our garden, but the rabbits, squirrels, badgers and foxes dig up the lawns, the deer eat the shrubs and roses, the pigeons eat the vegetables and the bird food, and the field mice

help themselves to the seedlings. As for this handsome fellow I do wish he would do something useful like eat slugs or moss. Who would be a gardener?

Mrs E Leach, by email



When we bought our house four years ago the garden was desperately overgrown and neglected, but full of mature shrubs and perennials. We spent two years clearing and pruning,

added a pond, a veg garden and a patio. It has been an immensely rewarding experience and we're proud of what we've achieved.

Michelle Mitchinson, Wigtownshire



#### It's an irruption

I took this photo of a waxwing feeding on cotoneaster berries in February.

The waxwing is a winter visitor from Scandinavia and in some vears they arrive in larger numbers, called irruptions. This happens when the population on their breeding grounds gets too big for them to survive on the available food.

Christine Cassidy, Londonderry

#### Can of worms 1 - Rodents O

I read with interest your reader's query regarding how to keep rats out of a compost bin (GQT, January issue). I had the same problem until I invested in a wormery for green waste. Since then I've had no sign of rats, so I assume that it was the peelings that were the attraction.

The wormery chugs away with very little help and I add kitchen peelings, tea bags, paper, cardboard, and egg shells.

The bubble wrap is to keep the worms warm in the cold weather so they keep working.

Helen Knight, by email



#### **Rare visitors**

Here's my wicked looking

goldfinch. These lovely birds sometimes visit my garden feeders, but the starlings are such bullies. I hope you like him.

Anita Hobbs, by email

We say How lucky to have these endangered starlings visiting you



APRIL SOLUTIONS - see page 154 for puzzle

1 Bulbs 2 Asparagus 3 Senecio 4 Casts 5 Scilla 6 Pippin 11 Laurels 12 Weeding

17 Wishes 20 Sterile 21 Fleece 22 Sage 1 Brassicas 7 Coir 8 Lupinus 9 Tulips 10 Spruces 11 Lawns 13 Magnolia 15 Urens



Hedgehog Logo Design Competition. Beth's entry has earned her class at Haydn Primary School a hedgehog workshop, where they'll learn how to make a hedgehog habitat for the school.

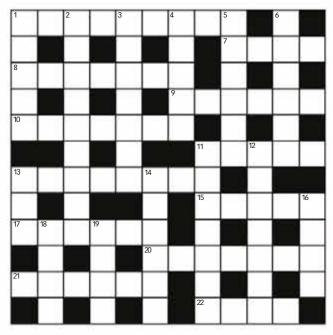
Mrs S Ritchie (proud nanna). **Nottingham** 



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Put down your trowel, pick up a pen and exercise those brain muscles instead...



#### **ACROSS**

- 1 Plot staples that may need protection from cabbage root fly (9)
- 7 Fibre from coconut husks, used in potting compost (4)
- 8 This genus of cottage plants includes the colourful 'Band of Nobles' series (7)
- 9 Sprinkle fertiliser around these showy spring bulbs (6)
- 10 Common name for trees of the picea genus (7)
- 11 Now is a good time to sow new (5)
- 13 An icon of spring with showy, scented cup- or star-shaped blooms (8)
- 15 Latin name meaning stinging, as in Urtica \_\_ (5)
- 17 'Warm \_ ' is a hybrid tea rose with peachy coral petals (6)
- 20 Refers to a flower that cannot produce seeds (7)
- **21** Drape \_\_ over fruit trees on frosty nights to protect fragile blossom (6)
- 22 Herb with grey-green leaves used in cooking (4)

#### DOWN

- 1 Pick off dead flowerheads from spring \_\_ (5)
- 2 Plant new beds of this delicacy, eaten for its tender young shoots (9)
- 3 Huge genus of plants including ragworts and groundsel (7)
- 4 Worm \_ can be a nuisance on 11 across (5)
- 5 \_\_ siberica 'Spring Beauty' is aptly named (6)
- 6 Popular dessert apple, 'Cox's Orange \_\_' (6)
- 11 Ideal evergreen hedging plants with dark-green, glossy leaves (7)
- 12 Keep doing this to root out bindweed, couch grass and other invaders (7)
- **13** \_ the lawn if the grass is growing too long (3)
- 14 Vinca minor is better known as \_\_ periwinkle (6)
- 16 The structure that develops from an ovule after it has been fertilised (4)
- 18 '\_ of Jura' is an easy-togrow maincrop potato (4)
- 19 Type of cutting that is pulled away with a piece of stem (4)

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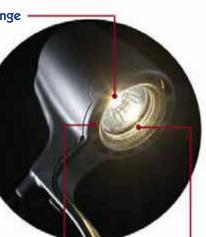
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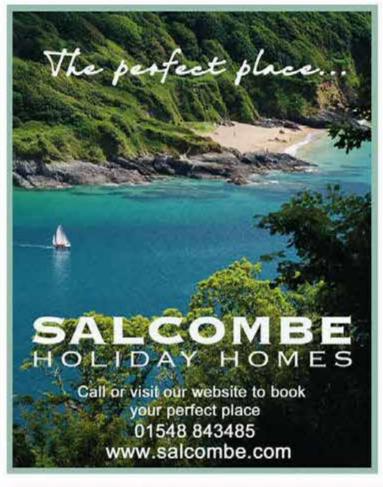
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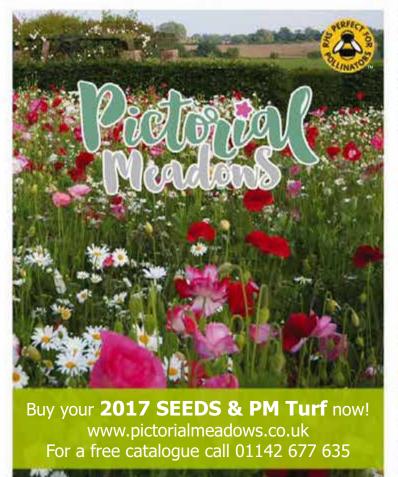


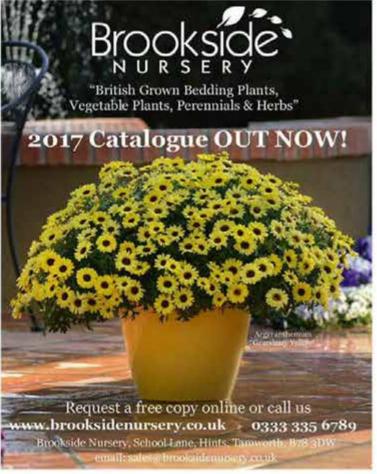
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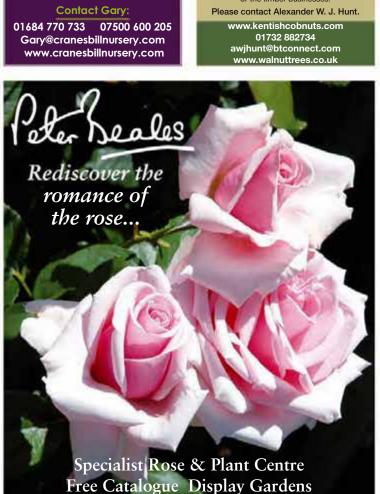
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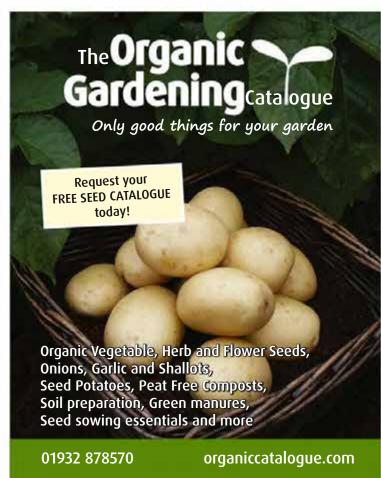
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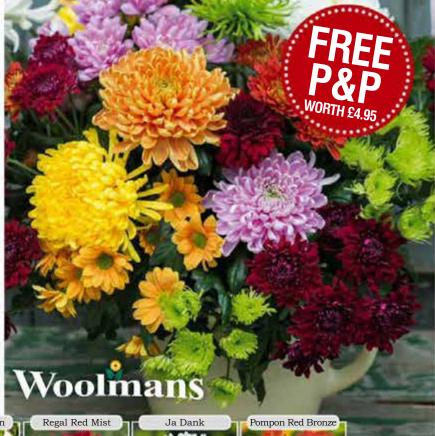
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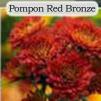


















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## Advice from your gardening experts



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**Alan** on why plug plants save £££s and still give big results

April 2017 gardenersworld.com

## Titchmarsh

Ever fancied keeping chickens in your garden? **Alan** reveals why this may not be quite as idyllic as it sounds

y dreams ofbecoming Lord Emsworth from PG Wodehouse's Blandings Castle novels have been on hold for some time now. Lord Emsworth, you may recall, had a voluptuous sow by the name of Empress of Blandings, who had won the silver medal in the Fat Pigs class at the Shropshire Agricultural Show three years running. His Lordship enjoyed nothing more than leaning over the railing of the Empress's sty and offering her a tasty boiled potato, sighing contentedly as the porcine amazon put it away as part of the 5,700 calories she needed to consume every day in order to maintain her impressive physique.

But my livestock ambitions are confined, as yet, to chickens, which I have kept for 30 years or more. They're not the same chickens I began with back in the 1980s, but one or two of them – diminutive Lavender Pekins with feathered feet – have been around for a good eight years at least. They don't lay any more, but I don't have the heart to dispatch them. Like Lord Emsworth, I'm a bit soft about my livestock. I do not, as he did, spend every waking hour reading Whiffle

I have tried to love my chickens over the years, but they're not endearing characters

On the Care of the Pig (or even 'Waffle On the Care of the Chicken'), but the other hens give me delicious orange-yolked eggs for my weekend breakfasts, even if their characters make them less endearing than a contented sow.

Chickens are, almost without exception, nasty pieces of work. Life has taught them that unless they arrive at the feeder first, their companions will have polished off breakfast, lunch and dinner. As a result, the 'pecking order' comes into play, and this one will see off that one with a flutter of wings and a warning squawk.

I have tried to love my chickens over the years, but they're not endearing characters and so my appreciation is for their produce rather than their company.

Every now and then this magazine will contain a delightful picture of picturesque poultry roaming a garden, their plumage beautifully set off by a border full of flowers through which they roam, under the premise of helping with pest control - eating slugs and grubs that would otherwise eat our plants. Do not be fooled. Let chickens roam at will in your garden and you risk having no garden at all, for they will scratch up small plants, leave soil scattered over paths and lawns, and generally wreak havoc

> unless you have stately acres to absorb their foraging.

However, I have become used to their ways, and we keep them corralled in a small area dotted with

plum trees
(to call
it an
orchard
is akin to
calling a
windowbox
a family
estate). I
manage to
keep the grass
growing by



dividing the plot in half and having a chicken-proof gate between the two sections, so that one can recover while the other is being foraged. They also have access to the compost heaps. They live a charmed life, and between January and October, five chickens produce as many eggs as we and our children can eat.

But over the last year or two we have encountered a problem. The duck house on our pond is hugely successful at rearing mallards and, in particular, moorhens. Now, moorhens are nervous birds and run a mile if you approach, but they have discovered the chicken feeders and within half an hour of my filling up the small containers with the corn and sunflower seeds and kibbled maize, they'll have emptied them. I feed my garden birds every day, but the moorhens are taking liberties by robbing my poultry of their breakfast.

I resolved to take steps to prevent their predations. On the internet, I discovered a clever piece of kit that would allow the chickens access to the contents of a stainless-steel trough when they stood on a step at the front. Their weight would cause the lid to lift and they would be able to tuck in – the lid closing again when they stepped away.

Gleefully, I rigged up the feeder and filled it with corn. But the chickens steadfastly refused to take any interest. The moorhens, however, have mastered the art and clear it daily. There is no justice. I really must get a pig.

Hay.

ITO: SARAH CUTTLE. ILLUSTRATION: ADAM LAR





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