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Kitchen Garden

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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW TO FILL YOUR GARDEN WITH DELICIOUS PRODUCE

SWEET EATS

GROW YOUR BEST EVER
STRAWBERRIES AND
RED CURRANTS

DISCOVER

WEIRD BUT WONDERFUL
*17 tasty veg you've
never grown*

9 PAGES
OF TOP SEED
SOWING ADVICE
WITH THIS ISSUE

**MEET THE KING
OF CAULIS**



REVEALED

THE POWER OF FLOWERS!
*Why your plot needs
borage and wild garlic*

plus

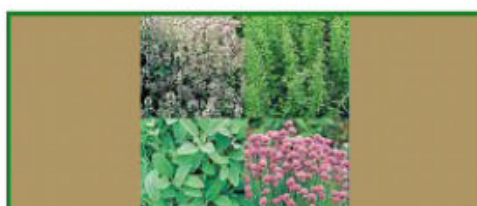
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★ OUR ROUNDUP OF ESSENTIAL SOWING KITS

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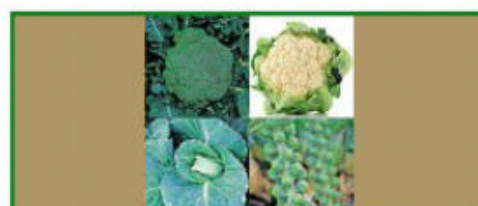
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Featured crops for April



LEEKS P26



OUTDOOR CUCUMBERS P52



STRAWBERRIES P69



WILD GARLIC P88

our feature of the month



Get set for spring. Turn to page 36

EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome

Spring is just around the corner and we can finally get the new season under way. The next few months mark the time when most of us will be sowing the crops that will see us through the summer and beyond. To help you, as well as our usual jobs for the month pages, we have a nine-page special feature covering everything you need to know. In it you'll find barrow loads of great advice to help you to get your soil in tip-top condition for sowing and planting, as well as growing guides for some favourite crops from salads to kale and carrots.

Of course, we have a lot more for you besides – turn to page 60 to learn about some quirky yet delicious crops which are well worth considering, such as perilla and Malabar spinach, and for those of you who prefer to stick with something a little more familiar, turn to page 52 for news of the latest award-winning outdoor cucumber varieties.

Strawberries are among our most popular summer fruits, yet expensive to buy and often disappointing from the shops. Growing your own is the answer and we have some essential top tips for you whether you are growing on an allotment, a window box or a hanging basket. On page 72 you have the opportunity to take advantage of some great offers on strawberry plants and when you order from our regular offers pages (p100-101) you'll be able to claim three rhubarb 'Timperley Early' crowns, worth £15.95, absolutely free!



Steve
Steve Ott, editor

Contact me at: sott@mortons.co.uk | 01507 529396

Find us at www.kitchengarden.co.uk

Contact subscriptions: 01507 529529

**CHECK OUT OUR GREAT GIVEAWAYS
AT WWW.KITCHENGARDEN.CO.UK**

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EXPERT ADVICE TO HELP YOU GROW GREAT FRUIT AND VEGETABLES



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★ ON THE COVER



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FOR OUR CONTACT DETAILS
TURN TO PAGE 15

A stack of three Kitchen Garden magazines. The top one features a man holding a plant and the headline 'COMEBACK CROPS'. The middle one has 'SHOOTING STARS' and the bottom one has 'TO W'.

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ON PAGE 24

Just ask!

HAVING TROUBLE FINDING
A COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE?

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reserve you a copy each month



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When can I get my next hit of *Kitchen Garden*?

Scan this, and we'll tell you!

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100 GREAT READER OFFERS – SAVE UP TO £40 ★

Claim your free* rhubarb crowns worth £15.95 when you order any of our bargain collections

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JOBS FOR THE MONTH

TASKS FOR YOUR VEGETABLE PATCH
IN APRIL BY JOYCE RUSSELL



Pictures: Ben Russell

10 MINUTE JOBS

PUT UP FRAMES

Put up a frame for climbing beans and in mild areas you can plant seeds at the base. This is usually around the middle of April. If late frosts are still possible, then sow seed in pots and plant out when the weather allows.

SOW BRASSICAS

Sow kales and sprouting broccoli this month. Both of these have a long growing season. Kale started now will crop through autumn, winter and into spring. Sprouting broccoli will be ready to harvest next year.

HARDEN OFF PLANTS

It only takes a few minutes to put small plants outdoors for the day and to take them back under cover in the evening. Do this for a few days and plants will suffer less shock when left out at night-time too, and then when planted out in the garden.

WEEDING

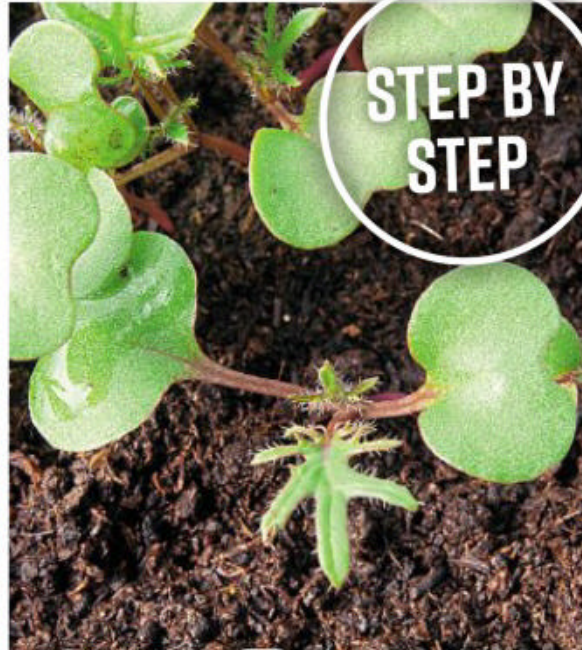
Do 10 minutes of weeding every day and you can avoid the depressing sight of weeds taking over. Weed with a hoe in dry weather or by hand whenever you want to. Little and often is always a better weeding technique than facing an overgrown garden.



THREE WAYS TO SOW

STEP 1: SOW DIRECT

Carrots, parsnips, spinach and salad leaves do best if sown directly into drills where they will grow. Make sure soil is loose and fine and make a shallow drill before sowing. A scattering of fine compost in the base holds moisture and aids germination if soil is dry or stony.



STEP 2: SOW IN TRAYS

Brassicas, chard, lettuce, parsley and leeks do very well if started in trays or tubs. The seed can go around 2.5cm (1in) apart because seedlings will be pricked out and potted on before roots compete for space. Seedlings can move on into a seedbed or into a deeper tub of compost.



STEP 3: SOW IN POTS

Broad beans, pumpkins, courgettes and sweetcorn all have large seeds. These do well if sown in individual pots and covered by 2-3cm (¾-1in) of compost. Label each pot and keep at around 15C (59F). All germinate and grow fast so you soon have large plants to go out in the garden.

SPROUTING KALE

Overwintered kale plants will start to produce flowering shoots in April and by the end of the month you can have a mass of bright yellow flowers. Don't waste a good resource! Kale shoots are delicious to eat while the shoots are small and before flowers open. Harvest them often and steam gently in the water that clings to them after rinsing. You will have a hard job to keep up with the production of shoots and new ones get smaller and smaller the more you pick. At some point you will have to stop the race and let plants flower – they attract lots of beneficial insects to the garden.



ON THE VEG PATCH

LOOK AFTER STRAWBERRIES

Early flowering and fruiting varieties are susceptible to frost – flowers blacken at the heart and won't set fruit – so watch the forecast and cover rows as needed. Lumpy shaped fruits are a sign of incomplete pollination. This may be due to lack of pollinating insects in a cold spring. Use a paint brush to move pollen from one plant to another if the first fruits look to suffer from this problem.

Each plant should have some small green fruits by the end of April. Use a high-potash feed every 7-10 days and keep plants evenly watered while fruit is swelling.



SOW NOW

Broccoli, kale, cabbages, cauliflowers, swedes, turnips, carrots, parsnips, courgettes, cucumbers, peas, French beans, runner beans, salad leaves, spinach, beetroot, Swiss chard, pumpkins, Florence fennel, sweetcorn.



PLANT NOW

Maincrop potatoes. Cabbages, beans, peas etc., raised or bought as small plants in pots. Fruit trees or bushes raised in containers.



HARVEST

Mangetout and early peas, rhubarb, purple sprouting broccoli, cauliflower, spring cabbage, kale, lettuce, salad leaves, spinach, Swiss chard.

DO IT NOW



■ APPLE BLOSSOM

Make sure you have the right number of trees to pollinate one another. Buy a tree that's flowering and stand the pot close to your planted ones until you get time to plant, if that's what it takes to ensure a good set of fruit.

■ POTATOES

Get any remaining potatoes in the ground in the first half of April. This gives plenty of time to grow roots of a decent size for storing.

■ BIOLOGICAL CONTROLS

Read up about these and, if you want to use them, be sure to purchase a few days in advance. You need to apply slug controls to the carrot bed before sowing and the middle of April is a good time to sow maincrop carrots.

■ CLEAR OVERGROWN AREAS

Overgrown parts of the garden can be useful habitats for wildlife, but if yours is a complete mess, then it's best to do some cutting and selective clearing so it doesn't become a tangle of seeding weeds.

■ PLANT GROWBAGS

Tomatoes can do well against a sheltered house wall and even a small yard can yield a good crop. Put two plants per growbag at the end of the month and be prepared to cover the plants if there is too much of a chill.

CARE FOR GARLIC

Autumn-planted varieties should be growing strongly this month and they will be much bigger than any spring-planted ones. The garlic bed doesn't need a great deal of attention, but there are a few things that will help you to get a good crop of tasty bulbs.

■ Keep the bed weeded so there isn't competition for nutrients. Some low-growing weeds aren't a huge problem, but anything that puts down a significant root system will take up nutrients from the soil. Garlic is relatively shallow rooting, so it gets its feed from the top 10cm (4in) or so of soil. Take care not to damage plants when weeding.

■ Use a liquid feed on the soil if plants are small and growing poorly. Liquid feeds are taken up much faster than solid ones.

■ Keep the bed watered in dry weather. Garlic will produce small bulbs with tiny cloves if plants are deprived of water. A damp soil is better than a waterlogged one – the latter is more likely to encourage rot.



TACKLE A PLANT PROBLEM

Pea and bean weevils eat notches into the edges of leaves. Notched edges don't set back large plants with large leaves, since plenty of leaf is undamaged, but emerging seedlings can be stunted or fail altogether. Cover rows before seedlings emerge to physically exclude the pest, and water well to encourage growth – weevils are less prolific in wet conditions. There is no need to use a pesticide.



BROAD BEAN POD SET

If flowers have pollinated successfully, there will be a small pod inside each one. If pollination is poor, then lower flowers will fall without forming a pod. Gently ease off a dead flower or two to check that there are tiny pods. If there don't seem to be any, then shake the plants gently to encourage pollen to fall inside the flowers; put a flowering plant nearby to attract pollinating insects; or use a barely damp paintbrush to transfer pollen by hand.

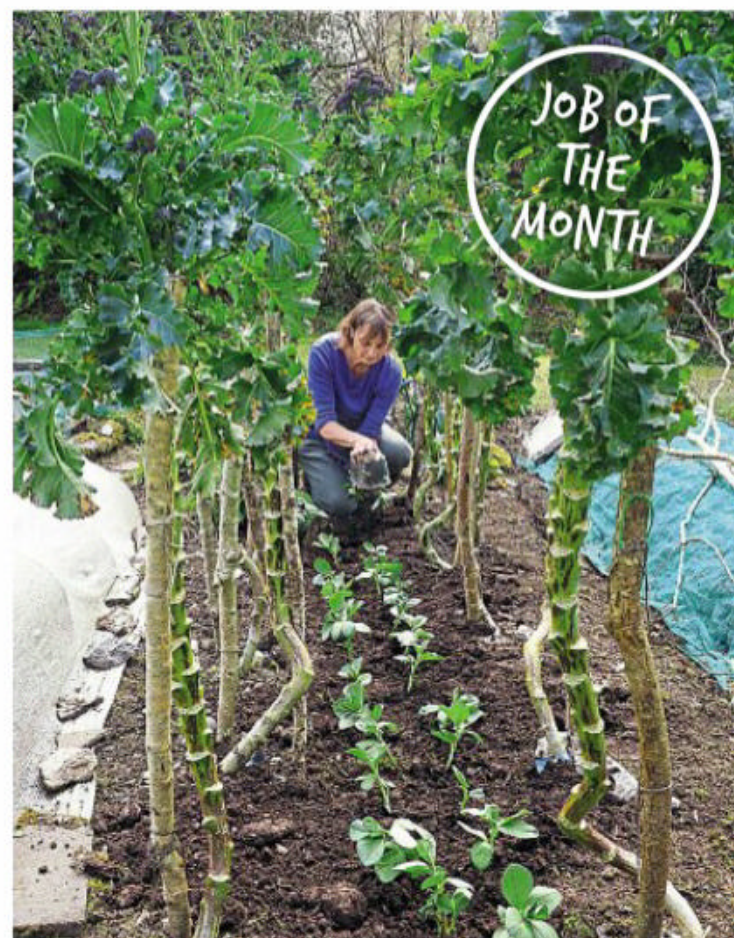


GET PLANTS IN THE GROUND

Young plants in pots need to grow without restriction. Too small a pot can lead to roots winding round and round a ball of exhausted compost. If this continues, then leaves start to yellow and the plant will never reach its full potential. You can pot the plant on into a larger pot of fresh compost, but it is better to plant out into the final growing position if conditions allow.

Beetroot, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, lettuce, celeriac, peas and beans that were sown in pots in February should be planted out this month. All are hardy enough to survive outdoors and you can use crop covers if in any doubt. Soil should be loose and damp so roots soon establish themselves.

If beds are still full of winter and spring crops, try a bit of interplanting so two crops can benefit from the same bed at once. I have often planted a row of beans or peas between the tall stems of sprouting broccoli plants. The beans get enough light and benefit from a bit of shelter. The broccoli will be removed before the beans grow tall and in the meantime the beans get to establish themselves in their final home.





THE ONLY RAISED BEDS YOU'LL EVER NEED

Free home delivery. Minutes to assemble. Last a lifetime.

Recycled plastic has been making waves for a while now as a material for building raised beds. It lasts virtually forever, doesn't put any chemicals into the soil and will never splinter or rot. How many other products are truly lifelong purchases these days? In this ecologically aware age, keeping plastic waste out of landfill while reducing maintenance costs to zero makes a lot of sense to a lot of people, and they can even be recycled again at the end of their long life.

When building them from scratch, recycled plastic lumber is easy to cut and work with standard woodworking tools, but while there are timber yards all over the country, recycled plastic lumber has been harder to find. Home delivery is an option, but because the pieces

manufactured are usually more than three metres (9ft) long, the shipping costs have been a real hurdle. Until now...

The solution has arrived – British Recycled Plastic now produces a range of raised bed kits which require only a spanner for assembly, and are delivered to your home free of charge.

Previously, the company's raised bed kits were available only with one-metre panels but British Recycled Plastic recently added a half-metre panel to the range, making for huge flexibility: sizes from 0.5m x 1m (18in x 3ft) up to 1m x 3.5m (3ft x 11ft) are available as standard, and other sizes are easy to arrange with their friendly Yorkshire-based customer service staff. The kits come with a lifetime guarantee against rot, and delivery is now FREE to most areas of Britain



(some remote areas may need to pay a small delivery supplement).

Available in three heights (30cm/1ft, 60cm/2ft and 75cm/2ft 6in) and in either black or brown, recycled plastic suddenly looks like a very attractive option.

British Recycled Plastic's raised bed kits can be ordered on Freephone 0808 281 2929, by email on info@britishrecycledplastic.co.uk, or order and pay online at <https://britishrecycledplastic.co.uk/product/recycled-plastic-raised-bed/>



THIS
MONTH'S
TOP JOB!

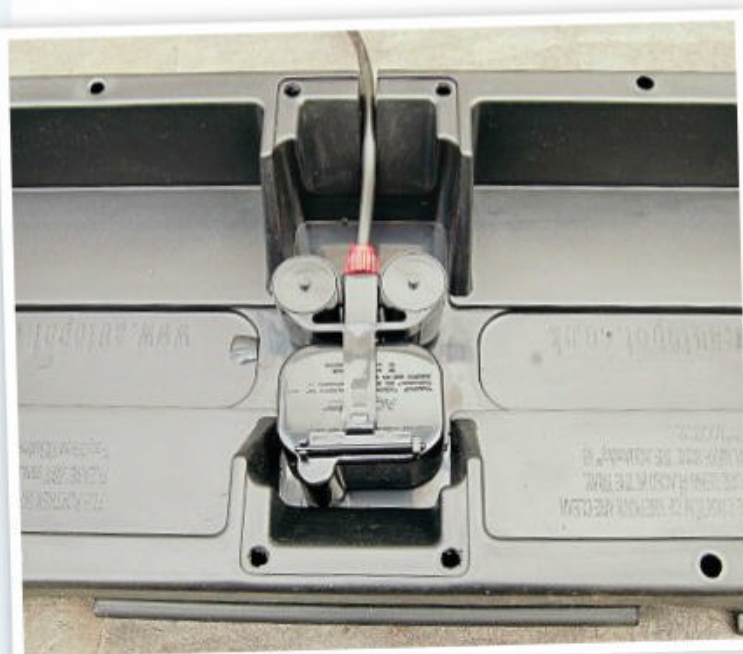
WHAT TO DO IN APRIL

- Sow marrows and courgettes in large cell trays or small pots to produce plants ready for planting out in May.
- Coriander, dill, chervil and parsley can be started off undercover in small plug trays in gentle heat
- Only sow cucumber seeds if you can maintain a temperature of 18-20C (65-68F) day and night to germinate the seeds. If not, wait until May.
- Continue to prick out seedlings of tomatoes, peppers and aubergines into small pots to grow on.
- Harvest spring cabbage and greens as soon as they are ready and then clear the ground ready for more crops.

IN THE GREENHOUSE



WITH
MARTIN FISH



The Autopot tray showing the valve to regulate water

SET UP A SELF WATERING SYSTEM

As a result of growing tomatoes in my polytunnel border for eight years, I'm now starting to get a build-up of root diseases in the soil. I could change the soil in the polytunnel, but that would be a huge job and only temporary, so I have decided instead to grow using a self-watering system. This will protect the plants from soil-borne diseases and make watering through the summer much easier. I've gone for an AutoPot system that's fed from a reservoir of water and nutrients and each of the potholders has a float valve to regulate the water flow to the pots. My plan is to grow not only tomatoes, but also peppers and aubergines in the system.

POT TOMATOES INTO FINAL POTS

If you made an early sowing of tomato seeds back in late February and grew the seedlings on in light, warm conditions the plants should now be well established and ready for their final position. Ideally, this is when the plants are still short and stocky and just showing their first truss of flowers at the tip of the plant. If you live in a very mild area you may be able to plant directly into the polytunnel, but in colder districts the plants may still need a little heat. What I do with my early plants is pot them into 10-litre pots of compost and keep them in the frost-free greenhouse for a few more weeks to keep them growing.



PINCH OUT VINES

Although vines are totally hardy, to get a good crop of ripe grapes we need a warm, sunny summer. In the UK we can't guarantee this, but by growing undercover the extra warmth can make the difference between grapes and no grapes, especially on dessert varieties that need a longer growing season. If growing in a heated greenhouse vines should now be well into growth and as soon as the flower buds develop, it's time to start pinching out to control growth. Count two leaves beyond the small flower cluster and pinch out the growing point. New growth will be made and you will have to carry on pinching out through summer to divert energy to the developing grapes.

CHECK FOR SLUGS AND SNAILS

One of the most common and troublesome pests in the garden is slugs and snails and in a polytunnel where it's warm and damp, they can be a real problem for much of the year. Both will devour seedlings and new shoots at an alarming rate and when you consider that slugs and snails eat up to 40 times their body weight each day, that's a lot of salads and veg! Whatever method of control you use, be it organic pellets, nematodes, beer traps or gritty barriers, the secret is to keep at it all the time to prevent a serious problem. Also check new plants that you've bought or have been given, as slugs hide in the base of the pots!



SUPPORT PEAS GROWING IN POTS

Peas grow perfectly well outside in the garden, but they can also be grown undercover to get an early crop. Sugar snap and mangetout lend themselves to being grown in pots and the tender young pods are perfect for picking to add to summer salads. You can start sowing in February and for a constant supply through the summer, sow every few weeks. I use pots around 25cm (10in) in diameter and sow around 10-12 seeds per pot using a multi-purpose compost. Once the pea plants get to around 15cm (6in) tall, push in some twiggy pea sticks to support them and as soon as the pods start to develop, feed once a week with a high potash fertiliser.



APRIL TIPS



■ In April it may be possible in some parts of the country to plant tender cucumber, tomato or aubergine plants into a cold greenhouse or polytunnel. In very cold parts of the country you may need to delay or at least have some heat in the greenhouse. Cucumbers especially need constant warmth and if planted in cold conditions they will start to suffer and collapse very quickly.

■ In readiness for growing tall plants such as tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers, make sure you have plenty of canes, string and twiggy stems for when you need to support the plants as they grow.

■ Weed between young veg plants regularly as very often annual weeds grow faster than your crops. Either hand weed or use a Dutch hoe to chop the seedlings off while they are small.

■ Keep harvesting leafy crops such as spinach as this encourages new leaves to grow. If you stop, there is more chance the plants will run to seed early.

■ Consider using a cold frame which can be used to harden off veg plants that are destined for the garden and to free up space in the polytunnel or greenhouse.

WHAT'S NEW?

ALL THE LATEST NEWS, PRODUCTS & FACTS FROM THE WORLD OF KITCHEN GARDENING

SPACE SAPLING TO LAND AT EDEN

One of eight young trees grown from pips from Sir Isaac Newton's apple tree and blasted into space with British ESA astronaut Tim Peake is to be planted at the Eden Project.

In 2015 apple pips from the tree were taken on the Principia mission by Tim Peake to the International Space Station. The pips then spent six months floating in micro gravity as part of the Pips in Space project before returning to Earth in 2016.

On their return, the well-travelled pips went to Wakehurst, Kew's wild botanic garden in Sussex and home to the Millennium Seed Bank, where they spent 90 days at 5C (41F) to simulate the winter cold needed to break dormancy. In May 2017, they were warmed to 15C (59F) and the young seedlings started to emerge.

Eden's science team manager Dr Rachel Warmington said: "Eden is honoured to receive this historic tree. We are all about connecting plants and people in our global garden."



DID YOU KNOW?

A dog from Dorset seems to have developed an uncanny knack of harvesting sweetcorn. "Chipper is just amazing," said his proud owner Walter Wachowski. "He can actually smell when the cobs are ripe. A hop, skip and a jump and, before you know it, Chipper is off to the kitchen with a juicy cob locked firmly between his jaws. What a dog!"



NEW SEED COLLECTIONS

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and Mr Fothergill's in partnership have released a seed collection range for 2020. There are eight vegetable collections in all, with distinctive themes such as Vegetable Superfoods, Vegetables for a Vertical Garden, Vegetables from Italy and Vegetables for Containers. Each collection packet has a RRP of £4.99. Available from garden centres and also online from www.mr-fothergills.co.uk



'JUSTMORE' PEANUTS

If you fancy growing some peanuts this year, Lubera are offering 'Justmore', a variety that produces pods that are long and large, with three to four seeds (peanuts) per pod. Easy to grow, either directly in the ground or in containers, this variety is tolerant of low temperatures and wet weather compared to standard varieties. Available from May onwards. www.lubera.co.uk

DO YOU HAVE SOME HOT STORIES FOR OUR NEWS PAGES? SEND THEM TO TFLANAGAN@MORTONS.CO.UK

NEW TRENDS FOR 2020

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has been busy predicting what plants, designs and activities it expects to prove popular with the UK's 27 million gardeners in 2020. Having consulted horticultural experts from its gardens, retail centres, science and communities teams, the RHS is predicting that gardeners will increasingly consider what their plant is grown in, turning to more sustainable growing media such as wood fibre and green waste compost, sowing cover crops to increase nutrient levels and quality, and adopting the 'no dig' philosophy to limit damage to soil structure and wildlife.

It also predicts that growing your own will become an obvious route for many in helping to support the environment, by reducing plastic use and countering food miles, as well as building connections in more communal settings.



THE CHELSEA OF THE WEST

The Cornwall Garden Society 2020 Spring Flower Show will take place on Saturday, April 4 and Sunday 5 at the Royal Cornwall Showground, Wadebridge.

The show promises dazzling displays of daffodils, magnolias, camellias and rhododendrons in the competitive classes; floral and botanical art exhibits; show gardens and more than 130 specialist

nurseries and traders in the Plant Pavilion and Horticultural Heaven

There is also an Artisan Area for eclectic arts and craft, a Growing for the Future activity space for children and a Food from Cornwall marquee.

For further details and ticket information, visit <http://cornwallgardensociety.org.uk/spring-flower-show>

GARDEN ART

The golden age of garden painting between the two world wars will be celebrated in a new selling exhibition at London's Garden Museum titled: Sanctuary: Artist-Gardeners 1919-1939, which includes more than 20 artists. The exhibition is open February 26 to April 5.

In the period between the wars there was an exceptional number of artists who gardened, taking their activities as plantsmen and plantswomen as seriously as they took their art.

After the First World War many artists were finding sanctuary and inspiration in painting their gardens, depicting private, sheltered scenes. The reaction to the trauma of the First World War saw a return to idyllic, pastoral landscapes.

For more information visit: <https://gardenmuseum.org.uk/exhibitions>



Charles Mahoney, *The Garden* (1950) courtesy of Liss Llewellyn



BROGDAL HANAMI FESTIVAL 2020

On April 18 and 19, Brogdale – home to the National Fruit Collection – will be celebrating all things Japanese. Visitors are invited to take a picnic and experience Brogdale's stunning ornamental cherry orchards. Tours of the orchard are offered and a Japanese Tea Ceremony will take place throughout the day, inviting visitors to view the artistic and ritualistic demonstration of serving tea. Japanese drumming and Lajutsu demonstrations will also be held, offering a spiritual and cultural experience. www.brogdalecollections.org/festivals-events



WALLED GARDEN VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Ecolocal, a charity based in Carshalton, Surrey, is looking for volunteers to help renovate the Victorian walled garden in the grounds of The Lodge.

The Lodge walled garden has been in cultivation since the eighteenth century but has been somewhat neglected in recent years. The aim of the project is to bring the garden back into productive use and create a beautiful space



for the community to enjoy.

If you are interested in volunteering, there is a range of tasks from light weeding to serious digging. Refreshments will be provided.

For further details, times and dates of sessions e-mail info@ecolocal.org.uk or call

020 8404 1524.

For more details on what the charity does go to www.ecolocal.org.uk

A LIVING SHED

I took this picture of my dad's garden shed. I think he has managed to combine a green roof with a living wall and a little topiary without even realising it. Not sure whether the plants are now holding up the shed but it is a great haven for wildlife and provides interest in the garden all the year round.

Deborah Brooks, Oldham

TONY SAYS: Wow, Deborah. I think every garden should have one of these!



★ STAR
LETTER
WINS £25
VOUCHER

HAVE YOUR SAY

CONTACT US WITH YOUR LETTERS AND TIPS: TFLANAGAN@MORTONS.CO.UK

FRIENDLY PERSUASION REAPS REWARDS

I persuaded my husband to let me take on an allotment and we were lucky enough to get one in June 2019. We have now joined the Soham Gardening Club, met loads of new and very knowledgeable friends and entered the local garden show! I took a subscription out for *Kitchen Garden* and love it as it's so helpful to novices like us and we get free seeds for next year too!

Carol Weyman, Cambridgeshire

TONY SAYS: An allotment, new friends, free seeds – what more could you ask for Carol?



SEND US YOUR LETTERS – EVERYONE'S A WINNER

Send us your tips and pictures and if your letter is published you will get a £10 Dobies voucher. If you are lucky enough to have yours chosen as our Star Letter you will get a £25 voucher. Your voucher will be sent out with a Dobies catalogue and you can choose to spend your winnings on a fabulous range of seeds,

young plants and gardening sundries. You can get hold of a copy of the catalogue now by phoning 0844 701 7625 or go online to www.dobies.co.uk

You can reach us by letter, email or via our Facebook page: [FACEBOOK.COM/KITCHENGARDENMAG](https://www.facebook.com/KITCHENGARDENMAG)

Email your letters to tflanagan@mortons.co.uk or post to Letters, *Kitchen Garden*, Mortons Media Group, Media Centre, Morton Way, Horncastle, Lincs LN9 6JR



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YOUR VIEWS

PRECIOUS PEPPER



Around January last year, I planted some pepper seeds. I kept the seedlings on my kitchen windowsill and then, when they were ready, I planted five in pots outside and kept the sixth on my windowsill. The outside plants came to nothing, but the one on the windowsill flowered and a single pepper grew. It has been on my windowsill all autumn, slowly ripening, and in January was ready to pick! It has been so long in the growing, I am almost afraid to eat it!

Jennie Gardner, Bath



PAPER ENVELOPE REPLACES PLASTIC

I love receiving my *Kitchen Garden* magazine each month. I was even happier to see that this month's issue had arrived in a paper envelope. I can enjoy my magazine even more now that I know I can recycle the packaging.

Well done everyone. Keep up the good work!

Rachel Dunn, Somerset

Kitchen Garden

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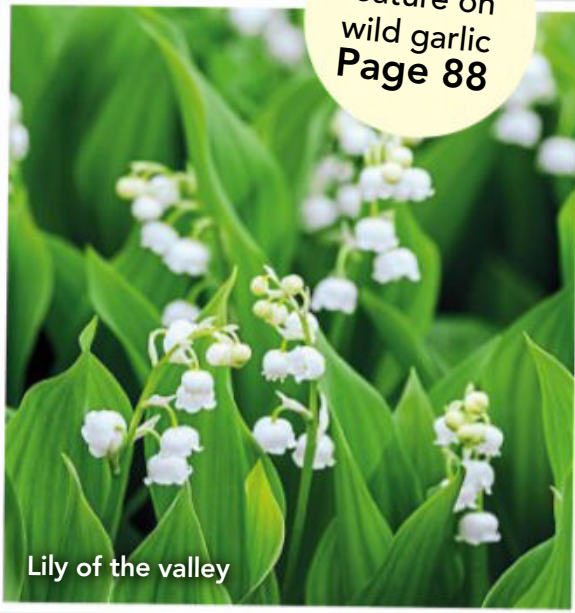
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THE TALKING KG
Kitchen Garden is available on audio CD or USB at very reasonable rates to anyone unable to read normal type. Details from the Talking Newspaper Association of the UK on 01435 866102. ISSN 1369-1821

CAUTIONARY NOTE

Regarding foraging for wild garlic, readers should ensure that they know what they are foraging for – there are many poisonous plants out there with very similar leaves, such as *Convallaria majalis* (lily of the valley). I started using wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*) many years ago. I gathered some seed from the wild plants and have since grown them for many years but keep them in large pots so that there is no confusion with similar leaves. They are a fantastic herb with many uses: I cut fresh young leaves to make garlic butter and I dry the older leaves and grind them to a powder for use as a seasoning. The flowers can also be used fresh in salads or dried and used as a garnish for many dishes. The seed can also be dried for use as a seasoning.

Tom Marlow, Skegness



Lily of the valley

See our feature on wild garlic Page 88

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FROM THE FORUM



BEST PLACE FOR COMFREY?

COLIN2016: I have four comfrey plants ready for the plot, where is the best place for them? Should they be all together or one in each corner, in or out of the sun?

OLD HERBACEOUS: Plant them where suits you best as they will tolerate shade and poor soil. One thing I will say is that even the so-called sterile varieties seem to be setting a few seeds over the last few years, so be prepared to dig the seedlings up early as they can soon spread very quickly.

MONIKA: A warning, Colin: comfrey roots go exceedingly deep, so be sure you want your comfrey plants in that place for ever and ever because if you try to dig them up, it will be very difficult!

TO HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE FORUM VISIT: [HTTP://FORUM.KITCHENGARDEN.CO.UK](http://forum.kitchengarden.co.uk)

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ADVERT DEADLINE: March 2, 2020
NEXT ISSUE: March 26, 2020



KG AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Once you have read and enjoyed your copy of *Kitchen Garden* magazine, why not recycle it? Remove the glossy cover and shred the rest before adding to your compost heap or bean trench. Subscriber copies now come in recyclable paper, while the polythene sleeves in which KG is supplied in shops are recyclable. Look for the label printed on yours and follow the instructions.



LDPE

FULLY RECYCLABLE

Mortons Media Group now uses fully recyclable magazine packaging - please dispose of it at your local recycling centre.



REUSE REDUCE RECYCLE



RECYCLE WITH BAGS AT LARGER STORES

Check Locally Kerbside

TOP TIP

If you're growing peas, see if you can forage some twiggy sticks. These are perfect supports for peas as they grow

"Have you viewed us on YouTube yet?"

Illustrations: Let's Face It



ON THE PLOT WITH THE 3 Mudketeers

The KG team offer chat, tips and gardening gossip

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK!

Well, I take it all back! The Muddies have been very busy this month doing a lot of preparation for the sowing and growing months ahead. As the saying goes, 'Many hands make light work', and the Muddies are demonstrating just what this means – one to dig the trench, one to add the kitchen vegetable waste and one to do the

back filling. Here they are preparing the runner bean plot, adding lots of organic matter which will benefit the runner bean plants to be planted out in June. This traditional technique will help the soil retain its moisture and at the same time add vital nutrients. Come on Muddies, only five more trenches to go!



Are you a subscriber?

Visit: www.mudketeers.co.uk

HANG 'EM HIGH (OR LOW)



My family and I love French beans and I grow several batches of both climbing and dwarf types through the season for immediate use and for freezing. This is the sort of easy-to-grow crop that GYO was made for. Growing beans at home through the summer gives you better tasting beans and also means they haven't been flown half way around the world to get to your plate. I start my first sowings this month in the polytunnel or greenhouse in deep pots and have used home-made paper pots and Rootainers with equal success. These early sowings go on my heated mat to give them just a little bottom heat, but later sowings can be sown direct or simply left to germinate on the greenhouse bench.





BEST OF THE BUNCH

I started to grow these bunching onions last year called 'Red Beard'. I bought the seeds from Real Seeds (www.realseeds.co.uk) and I sowed them in pots, just sprinkling some seed over the surface of some multi-purpose compost. They germinated really quickly and once the seedlings were large enough to handle I transplanted them into troughs. I could have put them out into the ground but I just wanted to keep them contained initially. The trough has been out all winter and the plants have just ticked over, presumably because it has been so mild. Now I think they need splitting and just planting out to grow on. The beauty of these onions is once you have them you can just keep splitting the clump and replanting. The beautiful red stems are a bonus and you can either harvest individual bulbs once they are established or just pluck a few leaves and chop up as you would chives. It has quite a strong flavour so you don't need too many leaves to add flavour.

THE FAMILY JEWELS

Just been checking on our 'Winter Jewel F1' cabbages in the polytunnel – they will be ready to harvest from late spring onwards, producing dark green loose heads.

I sowed these in September into seed trays initially and then, when they were big enough to handle, moved them on into modular six-cell trays. By November they were ready to plant out into the polytunnel. They've been growing slowly but surely over winter but once the weather warms up I'm expecting a sudden growth spurt.

Growing them in the polytunnel has protected them from the strong winds we have had this year and from the pesky pigeons that no doubt would have tucked into them. I've just been taking off any dying leaves and weeding around the plants.

I have some 'Summer Jewel F1' plants on the go too; these can be sown March-May for July onwards harvesting.



GNOME GROWN with Daucus New to growing? Try potatoes

A great crop to introduce children to growing is potatoes. Spuds are relatively quick to grow and digging them up is a real treat

The beauty about this crop is you can grow it in the ground or in bags or pots and either way is good for children to try. You can also buy just small quantities of seed potatoes so if you don't want to grow lots of rows but only a few in a children's plot or in a bag you can do.

Seed potatoes are easy for children to handle and you can dig a row and let the children drop them in. They can learn about shoots and which way up the tubers need to be planted.

First earlies are particularly good as they are ready quite quickly if planted in March/April and harvested in June.

If growing in bags, why not get the ones with flaps on the side? These are great because the children can lift the flap and see the potatoes forming. The flaps need to be secured afterwards to stop any regular light getting in and turning the tubers green.

The children can be encouraged to water the crop, especially if growing in bags, and they will have fun watching them grow. Those planted in the ground will peep through quickly and the children can be involved in earthing them up, covering the shoots with more soil, to protect from any late frosts.

When the flowers are forming it is fun to scrape away a little soil and see how the



Children love lifting potatoes

potatoes are doing. It is like searching for buried treasure, which children will love.

Harvesting them when they are ready, which for earlies is when egg sized, can be a joint effort. An adult may have to do the heavy lifting but the children will really enjoy finding and collecting the potatoes.



Little fingers will find planting seed potatoes easy

Did you know the heaviest potato ever grown weighed 4.98kg (over 10lb)?



Daucus would like to know your top tips for getting children interested in growing fruit and veg. Do write to him via: erawlings@mortons.co.uk

Mudketeers' Club

Are you a subscriber to Kitchen Garden magazine?

If you are, that makes you a member of our Mudketeers' Club, a dedicated website for subscribers ONLY. www.mudketeers.co.uk includes exciting offers, brand new seed variety trials, competitions and unique features just for you.

HOW TO USE YOUR WEBSITE

Go to www.mudketeers.co.uk. You need to register the first time you go on the site. Simply key in your customer ID number (6 digits) found on the white cover sheet that comes with your issue. Input a few details, create a password and you are ready to go. Alternatively call 01507 529529 and speak to our customer services team.



Watch out for this page in the magazine for more highlights on our website dedicated to our loyal subscribers.

HIGHLIGHTS ONLINE THIS MONTH... WIN A TIDY TRAY AND SEED TIN

WORTH £39.98

This useful Garden Tidy Tray from Suttons is perfect for the potting shed. It provides a working area to sow and pot on plants, helping to keep the compost contained. The red shelf at the back is useful to store extra pots, dibber and seed labels. It measures 61x56x20cm (24x22x8in).

Price £19.99 www.suttons.co.uk

You can also win a Vintage Cream Metal Seed Storage Tin from Gardening Naturally.

This beautiful tin will keep all your seed packets dry and organised. The tin is made



from powder-coated steel and has metal handles and clasps to hold the lid secure. Inside are three compartments for seed packets and labels or mini tools.

Height 18cm x width 23.5cm x depth 18.5cm. £19.99 www.gardening-naturally.com

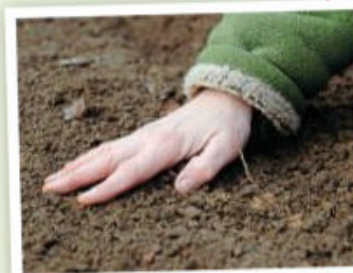
To enter, go to the competition area on www.mudketeers.co.uk and fill in the form.

WIN TRIAL TOMATO SEEDS

Exclusive to *Kitchen Garden* subscribers is the chance to win a packet of two new tomato varieties. Burpee Seeds has kindly offered 50 subscribers the chance to trial tomato 'Honeycomb F1', an exquisitely flavoured golden orange cherry tomato. If you love 'Sungold' you'll love this one! Also try 'Consuelo F1', a new variety that produces an abundance of shiny, red cocktail tomatoes on long trusses. These ripen through the summer and early autumn.

To be in with a chance of winning these seeds, simply go to the competition area on the Mudketeers website and fill in the form.

EXTRA TO VIEW...



- VIDEO: How to tell if your soil is ready for cultivation
- VIDEO: How to sow Brussels sprouts
- Recipe: Rhubarb jam butterfly cakes

* Time limit and conditions apply to offers. See website. Go via our website to obtain the discounts. See page 104 for more details on some of the products (left).

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- ★ **15% off...** Any products from Agriframes

- ★ **10% off...** GardenSkill Pop n Crop Plant Umbrellas, Haxnicks products, Lubera fruit plants

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KG PROBLEM SOLVER

GOT A FRUIT OR VEG PROBLEM? ASK KG FOR HELP

MULCH ADO ABOUT CARROTS

I am in my mid-eighties and bending down to weed is a problem. I have grown brassicas and sweetcorn through black plastic most successfully and I would like to grow onions (from sets), leeks and carrots through plastic too. Have you any advice about how to plant through weed suppressant fabric for those more closely spaced vegetables?

Rev Peter Hawkins, Somerset

★ STAR QUESTION ★
WINS £25 VOUCHER



Steve Ott, editor, Kitchen Garden magazine

STEVE SAYS: I don't see why you couldn't plant the closer-spaced crops such as carrots and onion sets,

leeks, etc, through soil-covering fabric. It may still be possible to plant onion sets and leeks through holes made in the covering, but for crops that might be sown in rows or planted closely in rows such as your carrots, it may be better to cut a long slit in the fabric. Or perhaps rather than a continuous slit leave 15cm (6in) or so now and again intact to help keep the fabric together and prevent the wind from lifting it and blowing it around too much.

Polythene or non-woven soil coverings are ideal. However, they are not so great for the environment and if you are using lots maybe a paper or corn starch material would be better. This can be obtained from a number of suppliers on the internet such as <https://mulchorganic.co.uk>



KEEPING BAY AT BAY

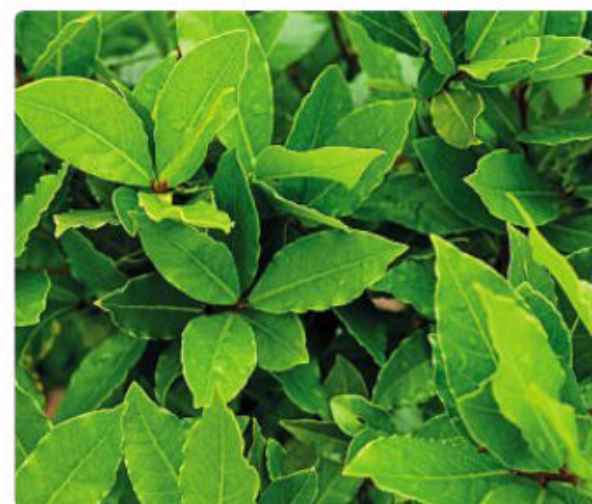
I have a fairly large bay tree in the garden. What is the best way to prune and keep it in check as I don't want it taking over?

Katrina Chapman, Newark



Emma Rawlings, deputy editor, Kitchen Garden magazine

EMMA SAYS: Bay is capable of forming large shrubs or small trees and ultimately may prove to be too large for a smaller space. However, it will tolerate regular pruning (it is often grown as a topiary plant) and can be clipped in to shape several times each year, usually in spring and summer. If grown as an informal shrub, pruning is usually done once each year in late spring after the last frost.



Bay will also tolerate restorative pruning – that is, drastic cutting back if it has become overgrown or neglected and again this is best done in late spring. Plants may take a season to fully recover from drastic pruning.

ALL IN VEIN!

I have been growing 'Sarpò Mira' potatoes on my allotment on and off for several years now, as they yield well, are resistant to blight, and are not too much troubled by slugs, both of which are problems on my Stockport allotment. Unfortunately, some of the potatoes have red veins in them, as shown in the photo, which doesn't look particularly appetising. The sad thing is that it is the bigger potatoes that are the worst affected. This is very annoying if you have baked a potato in its jacket before you discover the problem! Are these potatoes edible? Is there a way to avoid this problem when growing 'Sarpò Mira' potatoes?

Catherine Green, Stockport



David Shaw, director Sarvari Research Trust, Sarpò Potatoes Ltd

DAVID SAYS: It looks as if the potatoes have been infected with Tobacco Rattle Virus (TRV). The disease is called spraing. TRV is transmitted by free-living nematodes (very tiny worms) in the soil and is carried by many common garden weeds. Making sure you have a rotation system in place – so you are not growing your potatoes in the same place year on year – should help in avoiding these nematodes. You could also experiment with other varieties that have resistance to TRV (check the following database: <http://varieties.ahdb.org.uk/varieties>). Diseased tubers are edible. For more information on spraing specifically go to: <https://cropscience.bayer.co.uk/threats/diseases/potato-diseases/spraing>

WRITE IN AND WIN – EVERY QUESTION WINS A PRIZE!

Our Star Question winner will receive vouchers worth £25; the writers of all other questions printed will receive a £10 voucher. They can be redeemed against any products in the latest Mr



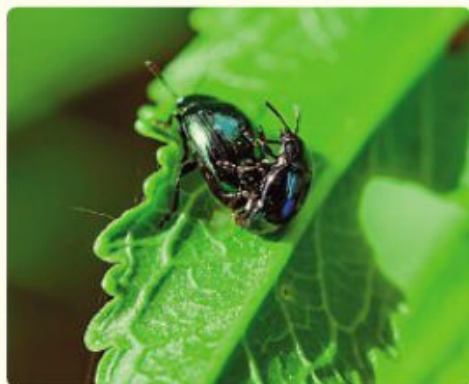
Fothergill's catalogue, which will be sent out with the vouchers so you can choose from the massive range of quality products, including seeds and garden equipment. To receive a free catalogue, call 08453 710518 or visit www.mr-fothergills.co.uk Email questions

to tflanagan@mortons.co.uk or post to Question Time, Kitchen Garden, Mortons Media Group, Media Centre, Morton Way, Horncastle, Lincs LN9 6JR. Please include your full address on letters and emails. We do not publish full addresses.



Flea beetle

This month we take a look at a common pest affecting the brassica family



SYMPTOMS

Leaves will show a number of round holes or pits about 2-3mm in diameter. These can be debilitating especially to seedlings and young plants, though less so once plants have firmly established themselves.

TOP TIP

Start brassica plants off in modular cell trays and plant out when 12.5-15cm (5-6in) tall as they will be sufficiently established by then to withstand flea beetle attacks.

WHAT IS IT?

The flea beetle species *Phyllotreta* and *Psylliodes* cause damage to brassica plants and related plants, including radish, turnip, mustard, rocket and nasturtium. The beetles are black (or can be blue-green or even striped).

They are about 2-3mm ($\frac{1}{10}$ in) in length and have long hind legs, which enables them to leap into the air when disturbed. They hibernate in numbers over the winter and emerge in spring, but affect summer plants too.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Flea beetles do better in dry conditions so keep plants well-watered. Covering your young seedlings and plants with a fine mesh insect netting will keep them out. If the problem is particularly bad, you can spray the crop with an organic insecticide containing pyrethrins such as Ecofective Bug Killer, or a synthetic insecticide such as Westland Resolva Pest Killer. Dragging a yellow sticky trap over the tops of plants will also help to control them.



GROWING ONLINE

We dig into the world wide web to harvest great websites, blogs and tweets

KG YOUTUBE CHANNEL

NETTING ON A BUDGET

Netting frames can be expensive so if you don't have the cash, Tony has come up with a cheap but effective alternative using canes and 500ml plastic water bottles. Such frames can be made to measure and can be used with different types of netting for different types of pest.



Start by pushing in the uprights. You can choose an appropriate height for each upright depending on what you are sowing. Now, with a pair of scissors, make cross slits in each bottle near the top, just wide enough to slot a cane in each end. Some slits will need to be at right angles to each other (for corners) or opposite each other (for extended sides).



Slide the appropriate bottle over each upright then slot in the horizontals. Lay the netting over the frame and peg in at the bottom. Voila!



Search: <http://bit.ly/NettingonaBudget>

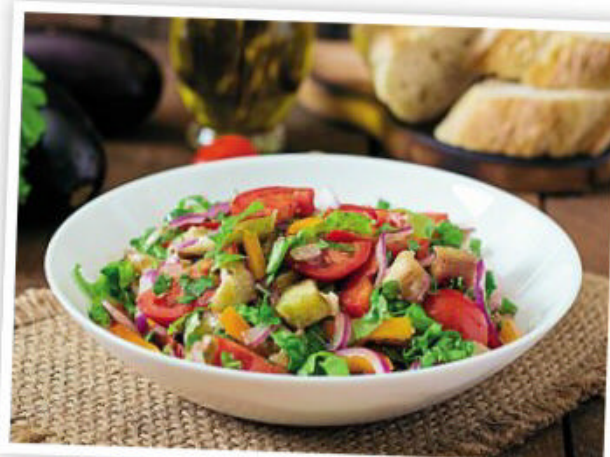


KG FACEBOOK

FIVE HEALTHY HABITS!

A study by scientists at Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health concluded that adopting five healthy habits could extend life expectancy by 14 years for women and by 12 years for men. These were: eating a diet high in plants and low in fats; exercising at a moderate to vigorous level for several hours a week; maintaining a healthy body weight; not smoking and consuming no more than one alcoholic drink a day for women and two for men.

This is what one of our readers told us after she'd read this: "I agree, lots of veg and fruit, fibre is soooooo important to

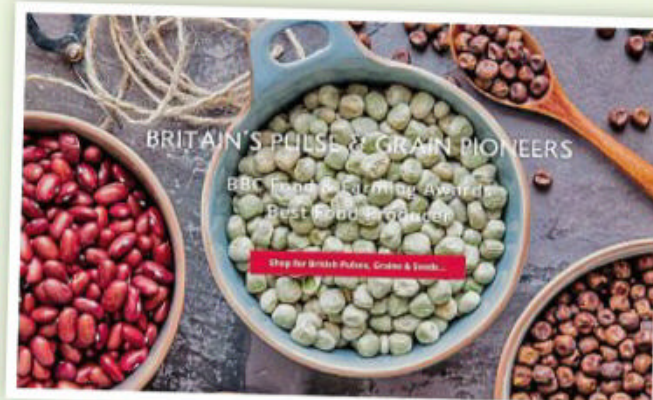


maintain healthy gut bacteria which helps with weight control. I'm plant based so easy peasy. I walk the dogs for an hour a day, or two, depending on weather and do 20 minutes of vigorous other exercise besides housework. I'm 68."

ELSEWHERE ON THE WEB

FINGER ON THE PULSE

Founded in 2012, Hodmedod is a small independent business which supplies pulses, beans, grains and flours from British farms. The company's product offer is a wide one, including dried beans, peas and British-grown quinoa, and ready-to-use canned and roast beans and peas. The site also has very good recipe pages with creative and tasty-looking recipes, such as lentil, camelina and roast veg salad. Or why not try green pea dal and pesto stuffed



conchiglie? A great site for sourcing beans, grains and pulses, and ideas on how best to use them in the kitchen! For more information visit: <https://hodmedods.co.uk>

FROM PODCAST TO TV CHANNEL

The Plant Based Podcast, launched in early 2019, is now building on its success with a new YouTube channel:



Plant Based Podcast TV! The content is a mixture of everything and anything plant based. Michael Perry and Ellen Merry have stepped away from the interview style they use in the podcast to present educational content in a light-hearted way. From wearable plants to allotment fitness workouts, and Plant Based News to planting challenges, each episode focuses on plant-based products and gardening. To watch Plant Based Podcast TV go to: <http://bit.ly/PlantBasedPodcastTV>



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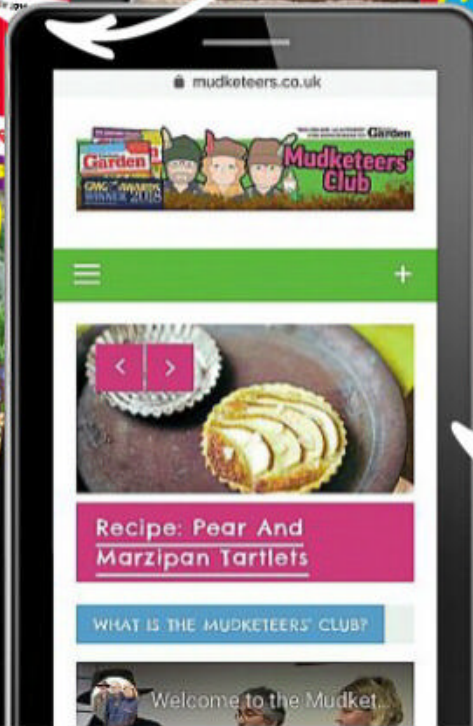
The whole lot for your plot

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Luscious Leeks!

Rob Smith doesn't like leeks, he loves them! This month he offers plenty of growing advice and shares his top five favourite varieties



Leeks, along with onions, have to be one of my favourite vegetables. They are simply one of the most versatile veg we can grow in our gardens and allotments, giving the iconic taste of autumn/winter in many ways, be it blanched, boiled, made into a delicious soup or simply covered in a cheese sauce.

Leeks along with onions and garlic are part of the allium family and are originally from central Asia, where they have been eaten for thousands of years. Both the Egyptians and Romans feasted on these leafy veg before they became more widely grown in Europe in the Middle Ages, and we have loved them ever since. The Welsh even made the leek their national emblem!



Leeks offer lots of options in the kitchen

AVOID DIRECT SOWING

Growing leeks is pretty easy; they aren't the most fussy of veg to get going and by following a few tried and tested tricks you can ensure you'll have a bumper crop come autumn. No matter if you want to grow leeks for autumn, winter, as mini veg or 'spring leeks' (an alternative to spring onions), there is one important thing to remember... don't direct sow your seeds outside! Leek seeds are small and the resulting seedling is like a blade of grass, so starting them off outside in their final cropping spaces would not only mean that your crop would get lost when weeds start to appear, but it would also waste a lot of space early in the year when you could be growing quick cropping veg like lettuce and radish in that space. Before you start, make sure to add lots of organic matter to the bed in the previous autumn as leeks can be greedy feeders. Adding organic matter will also improve the soil structure and make it easier for you to pull your leeks later in the year.

PREPARING FOR PLANTING

Most instructions you see regarding leeks will say 'wait until your plants are as thick as a pencil before planting out'. This is not 100% true as I never wait that long, with my leeks usually being the same thickness as the inside of a Biro pen when I plant them out. By this time the tray should be full of seedlings and pricking them out without damaging them can be a pretty daunting task, but there is a different method you might find better.

Instead, you should water them well and leave them for five minutes. Next grab all the leeks in one hand and gently remove the tray – don't worry if the soil starts to fall away from the roots, that's the idea. Gently shake any remaining soil and you can even gently swish them in a bucket of water to make sure the roots are soil free. After you have done this, it's time to trim the roots and growing tip of your seedlings. This may sound odd, but it will make them easier to plant and produce a better plant. With a pair of scissors, carefully trim the roots so they are only around 5-6cm (2-2½in) long and snip off the top quarter of the plants. Now they are ready to plant.



Pricking out in the traditional way can be tricky

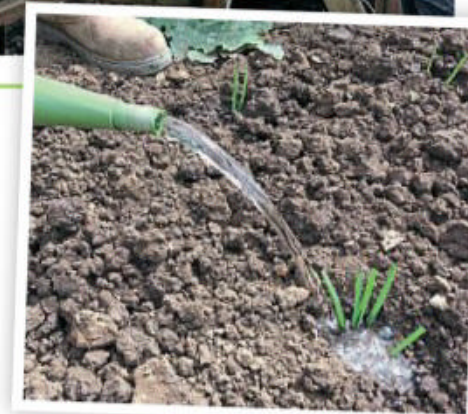
SOW IN MODULES

Leeks are better started off in modules, trays or pots by sowing the seeds around 1cm (½in) deep and 1cm (½in) between seeds in the late winter, normally January through to March (but check the back of the packet for your chosen variety). Within two weeks you should see signs of life as the seedlings emerge with their little seedpod attached, almost like a little hat. Don't be tempted to pull this off, it will drop off as the plant grows. All you will do by trying to remove it is damage the plant and risk introducing disease (or even yanking the seedling from the soil).



PLANTING OUT

When it comes to planting leeks you just need a dibber and a watering can full of water. Firstly, make a hole with the dibber around 10cm (4in) deep, 15cm (6in) apart and 30cm (12in) between rows. This should allow you to slide the newly trimmed leek into the hole, but don't fill it with soil. Once all the leek seedlings are in their holes it's time to 'puddle' them in. This simply means you fill the hole with water, resulting in the hole collapsing around the seedling, filling it with soil without damaging the plant. Keep the seedlings moist until they are established and you see signs of growth, but in the meantime you can sow a row of quick-cropping lettuce or radish in-between your leeks to maximise the space. However, once this crop is harvested its best to leave the leeks to grow on their own as you don't want other plants competing for the space and light.



PESTS AND DISEASES

RUST: This will show as small brown dots on the foliage of your plants, spreading via leaves touching or in damp weather; it will also affect onions and garlic in the same way. Give plants plenty of space to allow good air flow. Do not compost them as you can spread the problem. At the end of the season make sure you clear any foliage from the bed. Do not over-apply high nitrogen fertilisers as this can give rise to soft growth which is prone to disease. Rust-resistant varieties are also available.



A severe attack of rust on these leek leaves

going soft and slimy. There isn't much you can do for this apart from harvest and use the plants that aren't affected as it will spread. Sadly, this can last for many years in the soil, so do not plant alliums in the affected bed and make sure to clean your tools whenever you use them in the affected bed as you can spread the problem.

ALLIUM LEAF MINER:

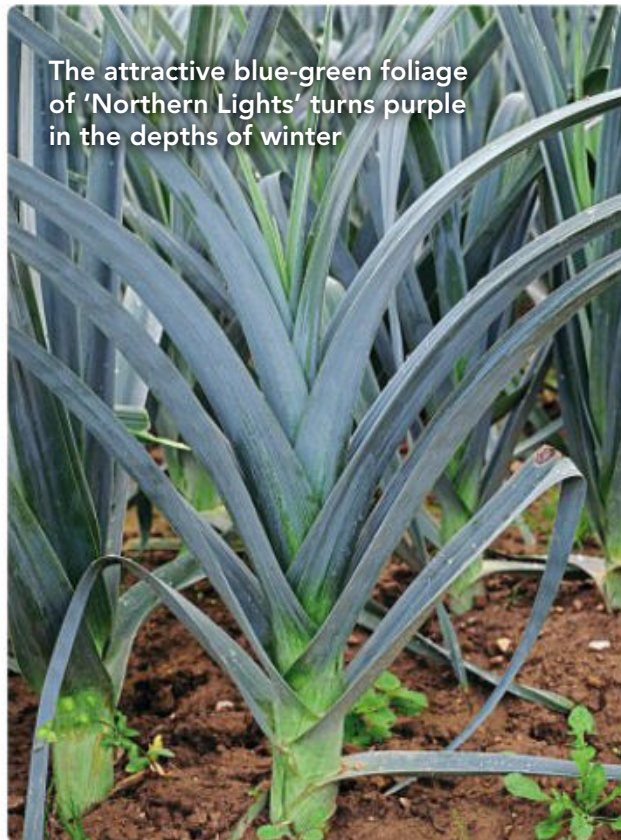
This pest is becoming more pervasive in the UK. The larvae burrow into the shaft of alliums, leaving unsightly holes in the outer layer of the plants, normally in spring and again in October. You can prevent this by covering the plants with a fine horticultural mesh, peeling off the affected leaves or squashing the larvae.

ONION WHITE ROT: This will show as woolly growths around the base of the plant, normally followed by the plant

AFTERCARE

As your leeks grow you can earth them up a little if you like more white flesh rather than green. This is simply done by drawing earth towards the shank of the leek with a hoe, almost like earthing up potatoes but on a smaller scale. The covered section of the leek will then blanch and become white, perfect for any recipe you like. Some people also tie cardboard tubes around their leeks to blanch them as they get thicker, but I like the green part of the leek and don't bother to blanch my plants.

Throughout the growing period try and keep plants weed free as they do not like competition, especially when young. Hand weeding or hoeing are the best ways to weed between leeks. There is less chance of accidentally slicing the side of the plants and damaging them while weeding, which normally results in the plant dying or rotting.



Loosen the roots of the leek with a garden fork before lifting

HARVESTING

When harvesting you'll need to use a garden fork; after all, the plants have been planted lower than ground level and they can develop quite large root systems, making them pretty stubborn! Gently lever the plants from the soil avoiding damage to the surrounding plants. If you aren't going to use them straight away or freezing weather is forecast, you can 'heel' them in by digging a hole, standing the leeks in the hole at an angle and backfilling with loose soil. This will keep the plants from going floppy and also make them easier to pull when needed.



Leeks picked in spring make a flavoursome alternative to spring onions



Leeks thriving along with other crops in one of Rob's raised beds



'Lyon - Prizetaker'

ROB'S TOP FIVE

■ **'STROMBOLI F1'** – Fast-growing for early autumn crops with hybrid quality and a delicious, mild flavour. The medium-long shanks are topped with dark blue-green leaves and will hold well in the ground until required. (www.mr-fothergills.co.uk)

■ **'LYON - PRIZETAKER'** – A re-selection of the original Lyon strain, the old English variety from 1886, this leek produces large, thick stems, which are very cold-hardy and can stand all winter – just make sure you can get a fork in the ground if it's frozen! Great for showing in competitions as they form the perfect leek. Delicious roasted with thyme, or sliced, steamed and served with a cheese sauce. (www.dobies.co.uk)

■ **'BELOW ZERO F1'** – This British-bred leek combines the vigour of an F1 hybrid with extreme cold tolerance to produce superb-

quality leeks that can withstand the harshest of weathers. Leek 'Below-Zero' produces pure white stems with dark leaves that stand well over a long period without bolting. This rust-resistant variety can be lifted from Christmas right through to May. (www.thompson-morgan.com)

■ **'BANDIT'** – A 'blue-green winter' variety. Performs well in bad and cold weather. Tasty, medium long white stems. High yielding and uniform. Resistant to bolting. (www.organiccatalogue.com)

■ **'CHEF'S WHITE'** – A vigorous, easy-to-grow, quick-maturing variety, developed to produce a good length of bulbous white stem, for harvesting in autumn and winter. Can also be used when young as salad leeks, arguably preferable to spring onions! (www.suttons.co.uk)

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North of England Horticultural Society





Delightful Douneside

Some gardens are part of a fascinating story, none more so than Douneside in the quiet village of Tarland, Aberdeenshire. Freelance journalist **Janice Hopper** finds out more



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Ornamentals in the glasshouse

DAVID BUTTERS' TOP TIP

Grow edible flowers, such as viola. They transform even simple salads into a dish of delicate flavours and vibrant colour.



The Terrace Garden

After a scenic drive into Royal Deeside I arrived at this charming Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Partner Garden. Across the season, the 10-strong gardening team grows more than 80 varieties of vegetables, fruit and herbs in the walled kitchen garden, polytunnels and glasshouse. Crops include 'Crosby Egyptian' golden beetroot, 'Black Tuscan' kale, kohlrabi and scorzonera. The gardens also include 17 acres of lawn, an arboretum, terraced, pool and stream-side gardens. So what, or who, is the secret weapon?

Douneside's gardens are managed by Stephen McCallum, the former head gardener of the famed Beechgrove Garden, popular for its down-to-earth gardening approach seen by TV viewers across the UK. Douneside also became an RHS Approved Qualifications Centre in Scotland thanks to the MacRobert Trust Horticultural Training Scheme, which employs trainee gardeners every year.



The busy gardening team at Douneside – Head of Gardens Stephen McCallum far right



Award-winning chef David Butters making butternut ice cream

ORGANIC PRINCIPLES

As I explored the gardens it became apparent that much of the produce makes its way straight into Douneside's kitchen, the only three AA rosette restaurant in Aberdeen and shire. Run by award-winning chef, David Butters, the produce is the talk of his six-course tasting menu, with dishes such as mosaic of wild rabbit terrine with parsley mayonnaise and pickled mushrooms, and assiette of lamb with spring peas and Chantenay carrots. Growing quality fruit and veg to supply a busy kitchen is a tall order for the gardening team.

"Each winter, we trawl through the seed catalogues looking for new varieties and interesting ranges of vegetables to supplement the usual staples," says head gardener Stephen McCallum. "This takes careful planning to ensure space within the kitchen garden,

successional sowing and harvesting, and meeting the kitchen's requirements for volume. We grow all of our produce using organic principles, and harvest three mornings each week to ensure we're picking at the optimum time and to keep the kitchen supplied with a steady delivery of fresh produce."

While the kitchen savours the seasonality and freshness of the produce, it also inspires culinary creativity.

"It's great to be able to nip into the garden and pick some fresh herbs, but nature always surprises me," says head chef David Butters. "In the Douneside kitchen we dislike waste, so if we receive an ample harvest it makes the chefs try new things. Butternut squash ice cream was one delicious, unexpected example. So my advice to any kitchen gardeners is use your imagination, and never stop improvising."

BUTTERNUT SQUASH ICE CREAM RECIPE

- 1 x butternut squash
- 6 egg yolks
- 200g/7oz sugar
- 500ml milk
- 500ml cream
- 50g/1¾oz glucose

1. Slowly cook the butternut squash in the oven for 45 minutes at 170C with tin foil; once cooked, purée in a blender.
2. Whisk the egg yolks with the sugar until pale and fluffy.
3. Pour the milk, cream and glucose over the egg yolks. Once it is all mixed together thoroughly, bring it back to the pan and cook to 78C and pass through a fine sieve.
4. Mix with the squash purée.
5. Pour the mixture into an ice cream machine and churn until smooth.
6. Keep frozen until ready to use.



Above: nutmeg and duck egg custard tart
Left: dining club canapés



STEPHEN'S TOP TIPS

■ Start off vegetables and herbs in cells while you wait for the soil to warm up; you can extend the season by about two months.

■ Vegetable crops deplete the soil nutrients and can cause an imbalance. Have your soil checked for nutrient status every three to five years and adjust. We added superphosphate in minute quantities this past year and the result was astonishing.

■ Invest in drip-feed hoses; they water very efficiently without run-off or waste, and deliver exactly where the plants need it most (at the roots). You can reuse them year after year.

■ Pick all of the leaves from basil plants to make pesto or basil oil but leave the stems. Feed lightly at every watering and you'll get a huge second flush of growth.

CHALLENGING CLIMATE

Another challenge in this stunning corner of Scotland is the climate. The weather in the north-east of Scotland is notably changeable, with the Met Office recording highs of 30.1C and lows of -20.4C in the last 10 years!

"Gardening at 750ft above sea level in rural Aberdeenshire has its challenges," explains Stephen. "We have a short growing season so we start many of our plants in cells in the glasshouse with the aim of having them ready to plant out as soon as the soil is warm enough, usually around the end of April into May.

"The cooler Aberdeenshire summers are excellent for many vegetables such as potatoes and other traditional root crops and, especially, leafy crops such as spinach, salad leaves, herbs and brassicas with little or no scorching, less likelihood of bolting and good standing ability. We have to consider chillies, tomatoes, aubergine and the likes as tender crops and grow those in our polytunnels and glasshouse. We also utilise the polytunnels and glasshouse to extend the season, particularly for herbs."



Tomato 'Tomatoberry' growing inside



From the tasting menu – butternut squash panna cotta



Mosaic of wild rabbit terrine



Vegetables growing in the walled garden



LADY MACROBERT

One final curiosity to discover in the Douneside grounds is an unexpected statue of a Second World War bomber. The house was once the home of keen gardener Lady Rachel Workman MacRobert and her three sons. She lost her eldest son in a civil aviation accident in 1938 and then, tragically, her remaining sons were lost in service to the RAF during the Second World War. The grief must have been unimaginable, but her response was strong. Lady MacRobert swiftly furnished the RAF with a Stirling Bomber to support the war effort, and the statue bears testimony to these heroic deeds.

After Lady MacRobert's death in 1954, the house and grounds went into charitable trust. Today the gardens are a living testimony and legacy to the patriotic MacRobert family: a space that celebrates and nurtures life.

Above left: portraits of the Douneside boys

Left: Lady MacRobert's keen love of gardening is remembered

Below: Douneside House – with Second World War bomber in foreground



VISITING DOUNESIDE

As an RHS Garden, Douneside is open to RHS members and their guests (who pay £5).

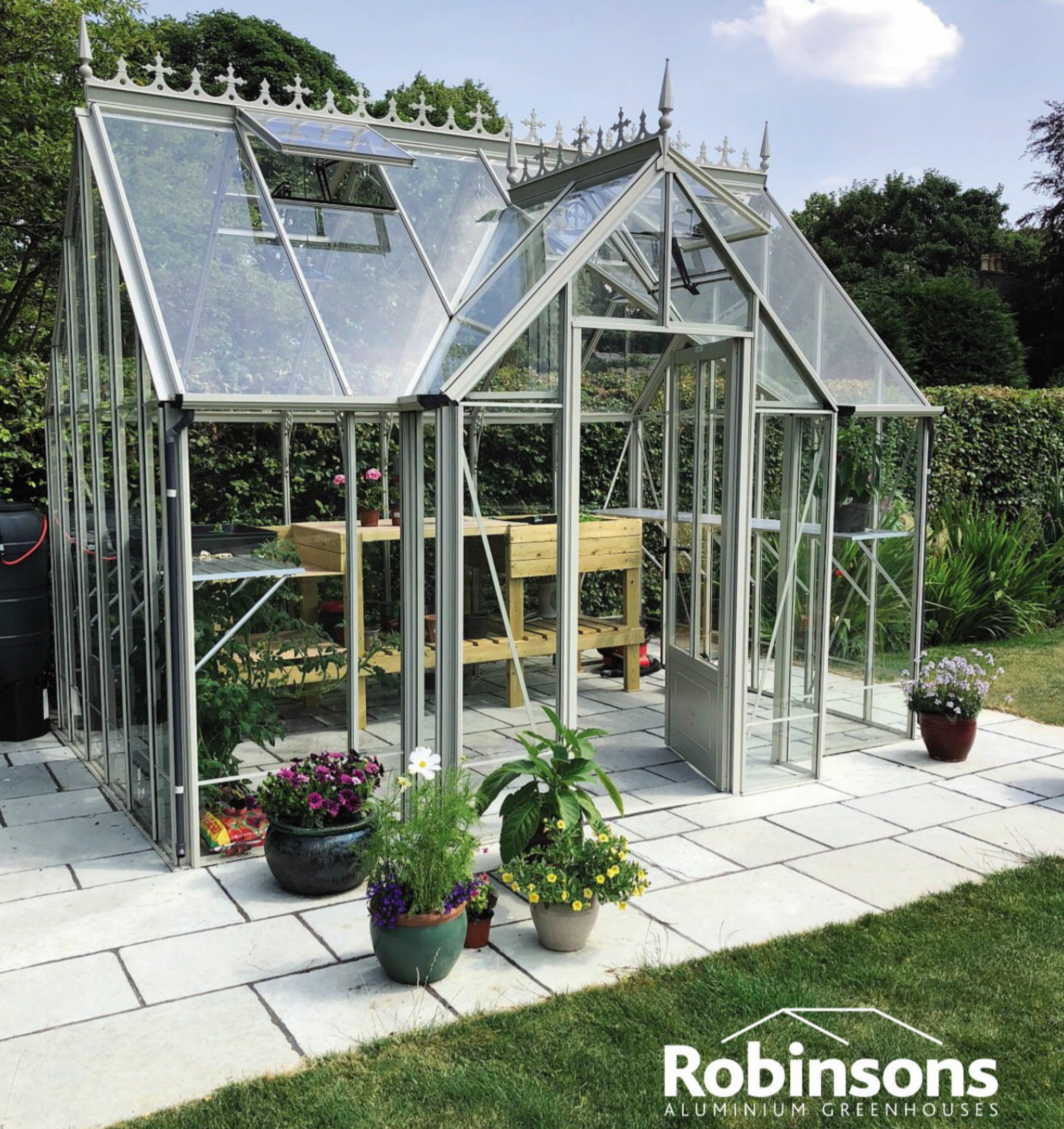
It's also open to hotel guests, and it holds a Gardens Open day every year in June when the gardens are fully open to the public.

**Douneside House, Tarland,
Aberdeenshire AB34 4UL**
www.dounesidehouse.co.uk



“Today the gardens are a living testimony and legacy to the patriotic MacRobert family”






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Let's get growing

Getting ready

to sow Q&A

Here are some popular questions we get asked at KG on preparing the soil and then sowing the seeds

CAN I APPLY MANURE AND GARDEN COMPOST TO SOIL IN SPRING?

Manure is traditionally applied in autumn and winter when digging over the plot or initially, in the case of no dig, a 10-15cm (4-6in) layer of organic matter such as manure, green waste or compost is placed on the surface and left for the worms to incorporate. Then no-dig plots are annually topped up with 5-8cm (2-4in) of organic matter, such as garden compost or manure applied in autumn again.

Applying relatively fresh manure too late in spring is not ideal as it could affect the germination of seeds plus it is not so easy to get a nice fine tilth to sow into. If you have some really well rotted, almost soil-like compost, this can be put on as little as a month before sowing.

For more robust crops such as potatoes, or if planting asparagus crowns and fruit trees, you could incorporate some well-rotted manure or garden compost into the trench or planting hole, ideally mixing in a bit of soil.

I APPLIED MANURE IN AUTUMN. SHOULD I APPLY FERTILISER TOO?

Manure will provide a certain amount of nutrition to the soil but the nutrient levels can be variable so a light sprinkling of blood, fish and bonemeal can be applied as well. This balanced feed will gradually release nutrients, which is better in this instance. You could also apply a light sprinkle of Growmore or chicken manure pellets, the latter being quicker to release its nutrients.

If you didn't get a chance to apply any organic matter in autumn and you have had a veg plot for a few years then it is even more important to apply one of these supplementary feeds.

DO I NEED TO APPLY LIME AND IF SO, WHEN?

This is not always necessary and it is best to test your soil using a pH kit available from the garden centre or for a more accurate test there are some laboratories that can test your soil for pH plus nutrient levels. It is a good idea to do this every couple of years. Most vegetables grow well in a neutral soil of pH 6.5-7. If the soil is more acidic – pH6 or below – then some nutrients may be locked up and unavailable to the plants. If your soil is showing to be deficient then applying lime in winter or before planting can help. The RHS website <https://bit.ly/38cEtM1> offers good advice on what to apply and amounts.

WHAT IS A FINE TILTH NEEDED FOR SEED SOWING?

A fine tilth is a fine crumbly surface of soil ready for seed sowing. It is created by raking over the soil. The soil should either have been previously dug over or, in the case of no dig, just a layer of organic matter applied in autumn. The rake breaks up the clods of earth and you can pull off any large stones. Eventually you create a smoother, level surface into which seeds can be sown more easily.



Now to start sowing ...

IS THINNING OUT SEEDLINGS IMPORTANT?

This is vital, especially if you are growing root crops such as carrots, parsnips and beetroot. If the seedlings are too close it does not give the roots room to grow and you end up with tiny roots. Seed packets give an indication of the final spacing of each crop plant but generally once the seedlings are through and are a manageable size you can start to remove excess ones. Don't remove all at once to their final spacings. Slugs and other pests can still attack, so just remove enough to give a little space between each seedling. As they grow, remove a few more until you eventually end up at the final spacing. At thinning time it is a good idea to have a tiny nozzle watering can and dribble water along the row to settle the soil back around the seedlings you have left.

HOW CLOSE SHOULD I SOW SEEDS?

This varies according to the crop and seed packets usually give an indication. There are suggestions that some seeds such as carrot be sown thinly so there is no need to remove excess seedlings when they come through. Removing seedlings is said to attract pests, in the case of carrot – the carrot fly. However, anyone who has grown carrots knows you often end up with gaps in a row due to poor germination or slug attack. So sowing seeds 5-10mm apart will ensure you get a good row of carrots but not so thick that you can't actually remove the excess seedlings very easily. You will need to remove some seedlings to allow space between the carrots to ensure decent-sized roots.

HOW DO I WATER SEED DRILLS?

Watering the seed drill before sowing can be beneficial. The water soaks deep into the soil and will be beneath the seed. The water can break up any tiny clods of earth in the seed drill, making a smoother surface for the seed. Sow and then sprinkle dry soil over the rows. If weather is very dry at sowing time, use a fine rose on a watering can to wet the dry soil after you have covered the seeds. You probably don't need to water for two to four days after sowing. If no rain falls by day four or five it would be beneficial to dribble some water along the rows. Use a small watering can with no rose. This will concentrate water on the row and allow water to deeply penetrate to the seeds and below. An all-over sprinkle wastes water and most will not even get to the seeds beneath. Repeat this in very dry weather three days later and thereafter once the seedlings emerge. As the plants grow, less water will be needed and hopefully rainfall will provide enough moisture.

This method uses very little water but the moisture gets to where it is needed.

WHEN CAN I START SOWING OUTSIDE?

This will vary depending on where you live, the soil type and what the weather is throwing at us.

It is something that comes with trial and error for most gardeners. A soil thermometer can help. If the temperature of the soil at the seed sowing depth is about 7C (45F), then it is warm enough to sow. Another good indicator is if weed seedlings are starting to emerge. As a general rule the optimum time to sow in most areas is at some point in April but it could be May in colder areas or March in mild, sheltered well drained sites in the south.

DO I SOW ALL THE SEEDS IN A PACKET?

This depends on the amount of seed you get. Some crops, such as tomatoes, often only come with eight to 10 seeds in a packet so you will probably sow all of these in one go. Carrots, lettuce or salad leaf seed packets often contain a lot of seeds. There is a temptation to sow the lot but you could sow just half the packet and then make a note to sow the other half two weeks later. This way you will have fewer gluts and a succession of harvests.

DO I HAVE TO SOW IN ROWS?

No – but it helps to identify the crop more easily as weed seedlings also emerge at the same time. You can just scatter some seeds such as spinach or salad leaves or lettuce if you are picking them small.





The essential sowing kit

Here is your basic must-have equipment for sowing in containers first

1: POTS AND TRAYS

These are essential and if you have a lot of plastic pots, reuse them. Better to reuse them than to throw them out. You can get coir, make newspaper pots or reuse old yoghurt pots or toilet roll tubes.

2: WIDGER AND DIBBER

The dibber is ideal for making holes for larger seeds or for making a hole in the compost to drop a seedling in. The widger, with a fork end and a flat end, is ideal for lifting seedlings to transplant into bigger pots.

3: COMPOST

A multi-purpose compost is ideal for seed sowing but check the bag. Some compost is more suitable for larger plants because it has more nutrients in it. A richer compost can inhibit seed germination. The compost bag will say if the contents are not suitable for sowing seeds. A John Innes seed compost is ideal for seed sowing. Peat free is best but buy a good make of compost to ensure a quality product.

4: POTTING AREA

A tray or a bench which can be used to sow seeds in pots or transplant seedlings is a real help. You can spend a lot of time standing or sitting at a bench so the right height is necessary.

5: BOTTLE TOP WATERER

You can get tiny watering cans with fine roses but these bottle top waterers are brilliant. They screw on to an old plastic bottle and they have such a fine spray of water that they don't squash the smallest seedlings.

6: LABELS

There are many to choose from. Some gardeners are choosing wooden labels now instead of plastic but the plastic ones can be reused time and time again if you clean them each year. You can also get different-sized labels; some are more suitable for seed trays, while others are more suitable for rows of vegetables on the plot. See page 95 for our review of some different labels.

THESE ARE NOT VITAL BUT THEY ARE USEFUL...

SIEVE

This can be useful to cover tiny seeds with a fine layer of compost. Add compost to the sieve, then shake it over the seeds.

VERMICULITE

This inert material is very light and also reflects light very well. It is ideal for sprinkling over seeds sown in pots or trays. It is especially good for things like lettuce seeds that require light.

PROPAGATOR

A useful piece of equipment for very tender crops such as peppers, tomatoes and cucumbers. Seeds will germinate quickly in a propagator; alternatively, you can start them off on a warm windowsill.

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Let's get growing

Quick crop guides

The *Kitchen Garden* team, comprising editor **Steve Ott**, deputy editor **Emma Rawlings** and staff writer **Tony Flanagan**, give their tips on growing some of their favourite crops

Steve's favourites

RADISH

Variety: 'White Icicle'

Why grow?

I grow lots of different radishes and love the fact that they are quick and easy, and if grown quickly with even watering can have a sweetness which tempers their delicious heat. 'White Icicle' is among the sweetest and the long, white roots are a lovely addition to summer salads.

When to sow

March – September

How to sow

Sow direct into weed-free soil in a reasonably sunny position. This fast-growing crop is also suitable for containers and window boxes or for growing among longer-term crops such as sweetcorn or brassicas.

Sow thinly in short drills about 13mm (½in) deep, watering the bottom of the drill prior to sowing to trap water around the germinating seeds. Avoid sowing too many seeds at any one time; it is better to sow little and often for the most tender roots.

Thin the rows if there are any patches which are a little too dense, removing the weakest to give each remaining seedling enough room to develop. This is best done while the seedlings are still small so that removing one does not disturb its neighbour.



Watch out for

The two pests that I find most troublesome are slugs, especially the little soil-dwelling keeled slugs, and flea beetles. The first nibble the developing roots and the second the leaves. Animal-friendly pellets or traps may help against the slugs, but a biological control based on nematodes is a great option in spring once the

soil is warm enough.

Flea beetles can be trapped on sticky yellow whitefly traps moved over the top of the crop each day and sprinkling the leaves with dry soil can also help to deter them. Otherwise, consider covering the crop with fine netting after sowing and be sure to rotate crops to avoid a build-up of this and other pests.

Photo: Kings Seeds

Emma's favourites

LETTUCE

Variety: 'Salad Bowl'

Why grow?

Lettuce is one of my staple crops and 'Salad Bowl' is one of my favourites. It is so easy to grow and the lovely frilly leaves are perfect in a salad and come in either green or red leaved. I tend to either grow it as a cut-and-come-again crop so I harvest when the plants are only 7cm (3in) high, plucking a few leaves as and when I need them or I grow a few on to full size.

When to sow

Late March – July

How to sow

I grow three ways. Some I sow direct on to the plot and these are grown to full size before harvesting. Some I start in cell trays. I use the trays with very small cells and sow one seed per cell. I grow them on a greenhouse bench and transplant out when large enough to handle. I also sow some seeds in a small trough filled with multi-purpose compost. I just broadcast the seed across the surface and very lightly sprinkle some



compost over the top. When the leaves are big enough I just harvest a few leaves when I need them.

Planting out

I think it is useful to have a few tray-grown plants. If there are any gaps in the direct-sown rows I fill up with the cell-grown plants. I also pop the cell tray raised plants into other gaps on the plot. They can also be planted between broccoli or sweetcorn plants and grown and harvested before these other crops are ready.

KALE

Variety: 'Nero di Toscana'

Why grow?

Also called 'Cavolo Nero', this beautiful dark green kale with its puckered leaves is so delicious. I think it's the tastiest of the kales I have tried so far and packed with healthy vitamins and minerals.

When to sow

April – June

How to sow

Two choices. You can sow into a seed bed first. So create a small area of soil that is dug and raked well. Sow in short rows only 40-50cm (16-20in) long. Sow only 5mm (¼in) apart and cover with 2cm (½in) of soil. Once through, remove a few if too close together. When they are about 15cm (6in) tall move them to where they are going to be grown on and harvested.

Alternatively, sow in cell trays. This is my preferred method. I sow two seeds per cell and place the cell trays on a greenhouse bench or you could put in a cold frame, porch or conservatory. When the seedlings are through, I remove one if both have germinated. I grow on and transplant on to the plot when about 13cm (5in) high.

Planting out

Plant out about 45cm (18in) apart and 60cm (24in) between rows. It is best to cover with some butterfly netting as soon as planted out to protect from pigeons and cabbage white butterflies.



SWEETCORN

Variety: 'Swift F1'

Why grow?

Sweetcorn is one of those veggies that really benefits from being grown at home since shop-bought cobs just can't compare with the flavour of those freshly picked from the garden. There are many great varieties, but the supersweet types are a little too sweet and chewy for me. 'Swift F1' is a tendersweet type and hits the spot every time.

When to sow

April – May

How to sow

My preferred method is to sow into deep book-like cells called Rootainers, but in the past I have also used old toilet roll inserts and home-made paper pots to good effect.

The latter can be planted into the ground where they will biodegrade. Fill your pots or cells with peat-free multi-purpose compost and sow one seed per cell into the top about 13mm (½in) deep. Label and water well before placing your trays into a heated propagator or on a heated mat or bench to give 20-30C (68-86F).

Germination usually occurs within a week or so, at which stage the propagator lid can be removed and the seedlings allowed to establish.

Once the plants are about 15-23cm (6-9in) tall they can be hardened off before planting out once all fear of frost has passed.





Tony's favourites

CHILLI PEPPER

Variety: 'Loco F1'

Why grow?

Chillies are one of my favourite plants to grow. There are so many different varieties with different shapes, colours and degrees of heat, and the foliage can be very attractive too. One I particularly like growing is 'Loco F1', which has attractive flowers and produces lots of oval-shaped purple fruit turning to red. It has a medium heat, so has a little bit of punch but not too much to dominate whichever dish you're adding it to. Great as an ornamental too!

When to sow

February – March

How to sow

Chillies are best sown earlier in the year, on a warm windowsill or heated propagator. Even better if you have grow lights which will prevent your seedlings getting 'leggy'. Sow in pots or trays filled with multi-purpose compost, sprinkle some sieved compost over the top and water in. A temperature of 18-25C (64-77F) should ensure germination, but I tend to go for the upper end. Keep the compost moist and when the seedlings are big enough to handle you can move them into



7.5cm (3in) pots filled with multi-purpose compost. At this stage they will tolerate cooler conditions (inside of course).

Planting out

When they are 15cm (6in) tall you can move them on into bigger pots and either leave them on a warm windowsill or, at the end of May, move them into a greenhouse or polytunnel. Water when the compost is dry – avoid overwatering – and then when the lovely flowers start to emerge, feed once a week with a high-potash feed (as in liquid tomato food).

'Loco F1' has a bushy habit so you can leave it be and watch it grow into this beautiful plant. By August, if not before, you will have a wonderful display of purple chillies, which you can pick as and when, or leave and pick when the fruit has turned red.

Watch out for

If you're growing chillies in a greenhouse or polytunnel, slugs can be a problem. Covering young plants with two-litre plastic bottles cut in half will keep slugs at bay and keep the plants warm too. Otherwise, use your preferred slug control methods.

Aphids can be a problem too, so check plants every so often and squish any minor infestations. If the problem is more severe, spray with an organic pesticide which contains natural pyrethrum and fatty acids. (e.g. Ecofective Bug Killer).

LAND CRESS

Variety: Not applicable

Why grow?

Watercress is lovely and easier to grow these days with a variety called 'Aqua' which you can grow in pots, keeping the compost very moist. Alternatively, you can opt for land cress (also known as American cress) which tastes similar and, picked young, is great in salads and soups with its slightly peppery taste. I grow lots of land cress but never seem to grow enough – the key is successional growing so you never run out and it does make for a good cut-and-come-again crop.

When to sow

Indoors – January-December

Outdoors – May-August

How to sow

Sow seeds thinly either in rows or in pots 1.5cm (1/2in) deep. If sowing outside, sow in May – make a shallow drill, cover with fine soil or compost and water in. Rows should be 15cm (6in) apart. When the seedlings emerge, thin out if necessary – the thinnings can be used in salads and soups. Alternatively, sow to the same depth in containers at least 15cm (6in) deep filled with multi-purpose compost. Keep the young plants well watered. Plants will take 7-8 weeks to mature.

Watch out for

Land cress is actually a brassica so you do need to cover the crop in summer with butterfly netting as it won't be long before cabbage white caterpillars have devoured the whole crop.

Flea beetles too can be a problem, creating little circular holes in the leaves. If you cover with fine insect netting you will keep out both the cabbage white and flea beetles at the same time. If it's too late and you do see signs of flea beetles, get a sticky yellow trap and drag it over the tops of the leaves. This will cause the flea beetles to leap up and land on the trap.



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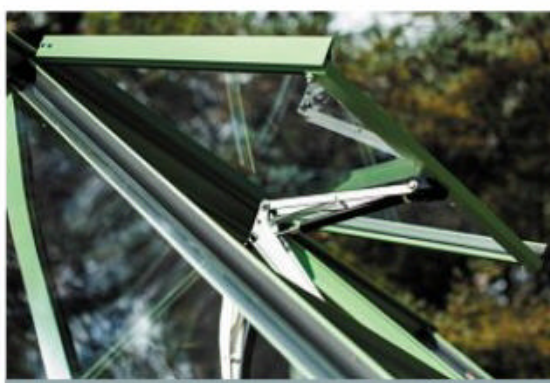
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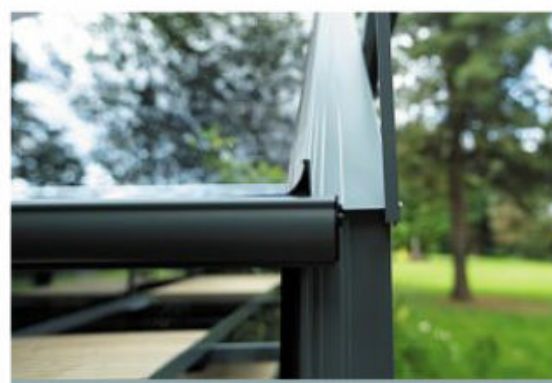
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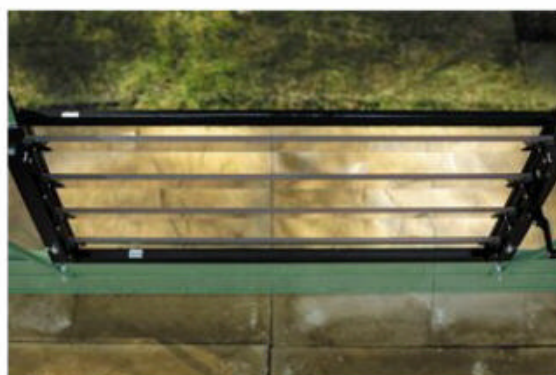
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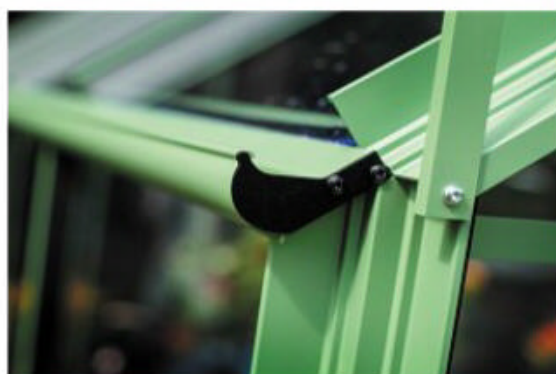
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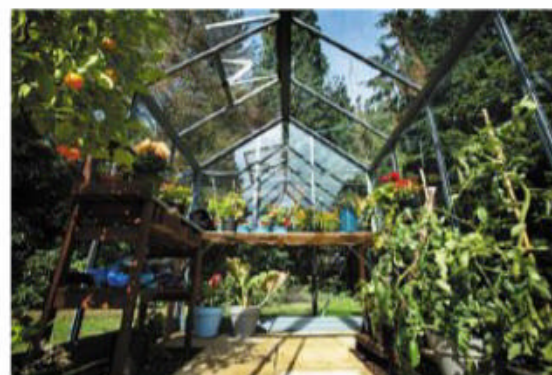
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Let's get growing Under cover

A greenhouse or polytunnel is a real asset to any kitchen garden. **Emma Rawlings** looks at why and offers some tips on using them



Inclement weather can be a real challenge when growing your own so a greenhouse or polytunnel can help give us an edge. They are also great for starting off crops, growing tender ones or they can be used to extend the growing season. You can pretty much grow all crops under cover in a greenhouse or polytunnel but some are better suited.

CROPS PREFERRING PROTECTION

TOMATOES: Some tomatoes can be grown outdoors but many do better under cover and are also less likely to succumb to blight later in the season.

CUCUMBERS: Outdoor types are available but the best smooth-skinned types need a warm greenhouse or polytunnel to do well.

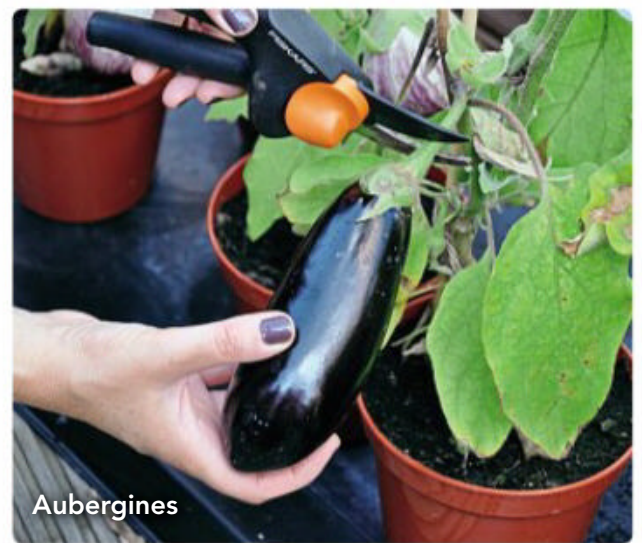
PEPPERS: Chilli or sweet peppers do really well under cover, producing a lot of flowers and fruit.

GRAPEVINE: If you have a large greenhouse or polytunnel a grapevine can be grown and trained into the roof space. The plants are often planted outside the structure so they get enough moisture at the roots and the top growth is trained inside.

AUBERGINES: These do well given some warmth in a greenhouse or polytunnel. It is a good idea to leave the doors open when they are flowering to encourage pollinators in or if growing them in pots, place the plants just outside when flowering and take them indoors afterwards.

MELONS: These can be grown outside in a warm summer but they will do much better under cover.

SWEET POTATOES: These will do better grown under cover. They are a scrambling plant so they need room or you can train them up a wigwam of canes.



Aubergines



Peppers

Extending the growing season

The following crops can be grown outside but sometimes giving them a bit of extra protection can be helpful. A good example is salad crops; the warmth can create softer growth plus you can extend the growing season of these crops.

LETTUCE: Sow earlier in March and later in September under cover.

SALAD LEAVES: These include mixes that might contain mustards, rocket, corn salad and mizuna plus many more. They can be sown in early spring under cover or later, as with lettuce mentioned above.

FRENCH BEANS: You can sow direct in the soil inside a polytunnel or greenhouse mid to late April. Alternatively, start in pots on a warm windowsill in early March and plant out into a polytunnel or greenhouse a few weeks earlier than you would outside.

RUNNER BEANS: Benefit from the additional heat of a polytunnel, but keep doors open to allow pollinators in.

CARROTS: These could be sown in March under cover to get an early crop. You could then sow later in the summer for autumn/winter roots.

COURGETTES: Traditionally sown in April and planted out in June after the frosts have passed. However, under cover you could sow in March in pots on a windowsill in the house and harden off gradually into the polytunnel/greenhouse and plant out in large tubs or in the ground under cover in late April in many parts of the country. Maybe a bit later in colder areas.

SQUASHES: These like a warmer environment and include pumpkins and other winter squashes such as butternut or the summer squashes such as patty pan. Give them the same treatment as for courgettes above. Look for bush forming types as the trailing ones will just take over the polytunnel or you can train them up a structure or along wires. Open doors at flowering to encourage pollinators in.



STRAWBERRIES: Extend the growing season. Grow some outside and some in a polytunnel for earlier or later crops.

BROAD BEANS: These can be sown in September or October and then planted into the polytunnel or greenhouse in late autumn to overwinter and then flower and fruit in May.

POTATOES: These can be started early and/or planted late in a greenhouse or polytunnel. Grow some in pots or bags, planting the tubers in late February/early March for an earlier harvest. You can also plant late tubers for a crop in late autumn.

BASIL: This herb will do particularly well under cover. Grow among your tomatoes.

SOWING CROPS UNDER COVER

Greenhouses and polytunnels are really useful to get crops going that will eventually be planted outside. The main benefit is getting the seed to germinate in a controlled, warmer environment. If sowing direct outside, the seed is subject to potentially extreme conditions plus pest damage. Growing the plants under cover until they are a few centimetres high means they have a greater chance of survival outside.

Most crops, with the exception of the root crops, can be started in pots, cell trays or seed trays. Brassicas such as cauliflower and cabbage are good examples. Other crops such as leeks, sweetcorn and beans can be started in an unheated greenhouse in late March/April and then planted out on to the plot.



Growing in soil borders

This is more common in polytunnels as there is usually more space but there is no reason why you can't have a border of soil in a small greenhouse. The advantages of growing in the ground under cover are that you often get larger, more robust crops and bigger harvests. You can also soak the ground well, which you will need to do, and in theory the crops will be less likely to be water stressed. In pots during the summer you may have to water daily unless you have an irrigation system.

The disadvantage of growing in the soil is you can get a build-up of pests and diseases in this area if cropped for a few years. You can help by good hygiene; remove dead and decaying leaf matter quickly. Ensure the crops remain healthy and quickly remove any that show signs of disease. After the first year consider applying some well-rotted compost or manure and dig in well. After three to five years you may need to remove a good depth of the soil and replace with fresh topsoil or start to use containers instead.



CONTAINER GROWING

Many people grow tomatoes and other crops in growing bags in the greenhouse. It ensures the crop roots are in a healthy sterile medium but watering can be tricky to get right. In the height of summer growing bags may dry out in a matter of hours, so if you can, set up a timed irrigation system. You can also buy hydroponic systems like the Vivigrow from Greenhouse Sensation. These just need topping up with water but they tend not to dry out as quickly as growing bags or pots of compost. You get better growth and fewer problems with tomatoes developing blackened bases. This is called blossom end rot and is caused by dryness at the roots and interruption of water and calcium to the cells in the fruit.



POLYTUNNELS VERSUS GREENHOUSE

Which is best? Well you can't compare easily but generally the pros and cons are as follows:



GREENHOUSE

PROS

- Glass or plastic sheets tend to hold in the heat better than most polytunnels
- Greenhouses are more attractive so are better in a small garden
- Metal ones are lower maintenance and can come powder coated in different colours, making them very decorative

CONS

- Can be expensive
- Therefore they tend to be smaller so don't have such a large growing area
- Wooden ones will need maintenance but do look very attractive
- Glass is not ideal if you have children that like to play ball games!



POLYTUNNELS

PROS

- They come in many sizes to fit any available space. Those with high eaves allow height for tomatoes, cucumbers and grapes
- The growing area tends to work out cheaper than a greenhouse

CONS

- The polythene covering will need replacing at intervals
- They don't tend to be as warm in winter but in summer they can get very hot. Do make sure you have doors both ends and some even come with sides you can roll up

POLYTUNNEL OR GREENHOUSE? THE KG TEAM CHOICE

EMMA: "I have only ever had small greenhouses and I love them for starting off crops. Then in summer I have six growing bags with three tomato plants in each. I still have space for a pot or two of peppers or cucumbers. If I had the space I think I would like a polytunnel for extending the season."

STEVE: "I love my polytunnel for growing all those summer favourites such as tomatoes and cucumbers, but it is probably my greenhouse that gives me the most pleasure. It's where I start many of my veggies and flower seeds in the spring and where I overwinter tender plants and potted fruit trees such as figs and peaches."

TONY: "I like a greenhouse and have a 6x8ft one which is great for starting seeds off in spring. Although not as easy on the eye as a greenhouse, I prefer a polytunnel as you get more space for your money, and you can grow in quantity and a wide range of crops too. The bigger the better!"



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BRASSICAS ARE THE BEST

This month we feature the winner of the My Best Crop category in our 2019 Plotter of the Year competition. Meet green-fingered Carl Walters from West Sussex

Carl is a keen grower of brassicas and the quality of the produce he grows made him a worthy winner, especially as these are challenging crops. In particular, Carl's rather stunning cauliflowers really caught the judges' attention.

Do you have an allotment or garden plot?

I am retired so I have lots of time to spend in the garden growing fruit and veg and trying different things and ways to grow plants. I tend my plot on my own mostly; my wife does however pick most of the soft fruit.

I have several real interests in growing, from hydroponic strawberries to Auto Pots in the greenhouse for tomatoes and cucumbers. These I do in more of a hydroponic way than the usual Auto Pot methods.

I'm a keen grower of brassicas – we tend to have some form of these throughout the year – although I do grow a large selection of fruit and veg to be near self-sufficient, with luck.

I only have our garden but as you will see in the picture, it's now all raised beds due to a back problem. There are 15 beds, many are 4m x 1.5m. Four are 3 x 1.5m and one 1.8 x 1.5m. We have soft fruit along each fence, and blueberries, gooseberries and rhubarb along the north fence with a plum and an apple tree in the corner. We get full sun all day back and front.

How long have you been growing veg?

I have been growing veg since 1971 but have had several long breaks from this due to being self employed in the past. I would say I've been growing veg for more than 30 years.



Due to a back problem Carl now grows in raised beds

Do you grow in containers?

I have grown show carrots in large tubs for the local shows. This year I am trialling potatoes in large cattle lick tubs that I can get free from a local farmer. These are 15in high by 24in across. I follow YouTube and there are many that recommend this so I'm having a go with the variety 'Charlotte', a second early. I've used Jack's Magic and mushroom compost in layers.

Why do you like growing your own?

The most important things about our fruit and veg are quality, freshness, choice, ease of access and travel miles. Also the enjoyment of the hobby – it keeps us sane.

Do you have any favourite fruit or veg that you grow?

I grow early caulis and broccoli for the freezer, as we think spring grown is more tender for freezing. I start these off in late February in the greenhouse, and transplant into large yoghurt pots to grow on unchecked until planting in the brassica cage around the end of April after hardening off. The bed is fertilised a couple of weeks before, applying blood, fish and bone and hoof and horn. This bed is planted later with carrots for the winter; no further nutrients are added, the net keeps the carrot fly at bay too.



Carl's hydroponic strawberries

Do you recycle?

I use a lot of yoghurt pots both large and small for seed sowing and transplanting. I also use many cattle lick tubs for water saving.

Any challenges?

My main challenge this and most years is water. We moved south from Derbyshire 20 years ago and we are on sand now. This soil grows just about anything I try but it dries very quickly and the water meter can go into overdrive at times. It's just not possible to save enough water

to cope. Last year we had 12 weeks with no rain (just a little drizzle twice), not good considering the hydroponics too. We were on dark loamy soil in Derbyshire and of course the weather was totally the opposite.

What are your plans/projects for the plot this season?

Now I've put raised beds in I hope we can carry on getting the best fruit and veg money can buy for many years to come and I hope to go no dig, giving even more ease of access.



Two huge tomatoes Carl grew compared to the smallest

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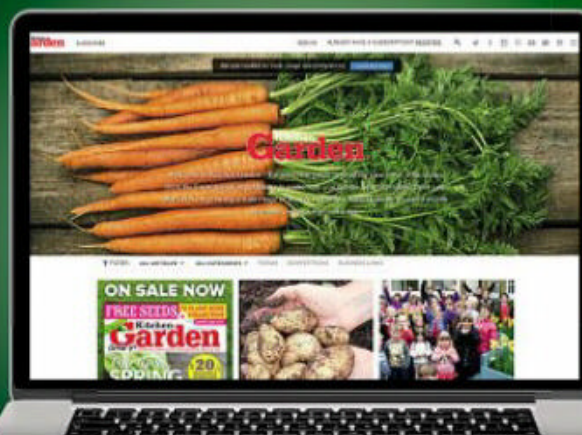
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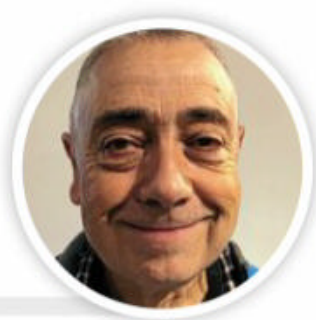




A CUE FOR THE

GREAT OUTDOORS

You don't need a greenhouse to grow delicious cucumbers. **Colin Randel**, member of the RHS Vegetable Trials Assessment Forum, reveals the best varieties for outdoor growing



Regular trials of vegetables are carried out at the Royal Horticultural Society's flagship garden, Wisley in Surrey, to assess which are worthy of the coveted RHS Award of Garden Merit (see panel). One of the veg to be given attention last year was outdoor cucumbers. Outdoor cues are often dark green-skinned with short white spines. The flesh should be crisp with no bitterness for salads, slicing and pickling.

HOW THE PLANTS WERE GROWN

The trial plants were sown on April 23 in heated conditions and planted out on June 4, once thoroughly hardened off. The bed where the plants were to be grown was made ready with the addition of sulphate of ammonia

(a high-nitrogen fertiliser) and sulphate of potash (a high-potash feed) on May 10. Outdoor cucumbers can be allowed to trail along the ground, traditionally on ridges to aid drainage, or given supports. For the trial four tripods were erected per variety to support the plants and two plants were planted per tripod, so there were eight plants per entry.

The plants were fed weekly with a high-potash, trace element-rich feed (similar to a liquid tomato fertiliser) between June 24 and August 5 to keep the plants growing and fruiting strongly.

The old problem of powdery mildew, which is common on many cucumber varieties, appeared on four of the trial varieties in particular – 'Chinese Slangen', 'Chinese Snake', 'Patio Snacker' and 'Bush Champion'.



The judges assess the trial



Below: Powdery mildew (foreground) affected many of the varieties in the trial



'Lili' produced fruit with fewer spines than some

299 fruit (62.57kg). The fruit was shiny, dark bottle green-skinned, cylindrical, 25cm (10in) with smooth white spines. The white flesh was crisp but juicy and free from bitterness. The gardeners found that it performed best on a trellis or tripod, but it can also be allowed to sprawl. (Seeds of Italy.)

'Lili' – First harvest July 15. Final harvest August 30. Total 287 fruits (84.69kg). Similar colour and habit to 'Lungo' but showed fewer white spines and fruits are slightly longer to 30cm (12in). (Not currently available to gardeners.)

'Marketmore' – First harvest July 19. Final harvest August 30. Total 265 fruits (72.49kg). An heirloom variety and still a gardener favourite worldwide. Bottle green-skinned fruits with smooth white spines. Fruits to 20cm (8in). (Widely available.)



Photo: Kings Seeds

Heritage variety 'Marketmore' can still outperform many rivals

JUDGING CRITERIA

The judges were looking for yield, skin quality and thickness, a taste with no bitterness, a long harvest period and disease resistance.

THE WINNERS

Two of the winners from the last trial in 1995, 'Marketmore' and 'Bush Champion', remain popular with gardeners and were entered alongside 15 other hopefuls. This time around, of the 17 varieties entered, only three were awarded an AGM.

'Marketmore' (Kings) had its AGM reconfirmed, while 'Bush Champion' did not. The other winners were 'Lungo Verde Degli Ortolani' (Seeds of Italy) and 'Lili' (not currently available to gardeners).

Several gardener favourites received few votes from the judging panel, for example, 'Jogger' (T&M), 'Bedfordshire Prize' (Kings), and 'Burpless Tasty Green' (widely available).

PLANT PERFORMANCE

From eight plants the winners achieved:

'Lungo Verde Degli Ortolani' – First harvest July 22. Final harvest August 30. Total harvest



The white flesh of 'Lungo Verde Degli Ortolani' was crisp and juicy

WHAT IS AN AGM?

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Award of Garden Merit (AGM) is given to plants that perform reliably in the garden. The plants are trialled, usually at an RHS garden, and judged by a forum of horticultural experts. At each review, plants can have their AGM status confirmed or removed. The AGM list currently contains more than 7500 plants. For more information visit: www.rhs.org.uk/plants/trials-awards

■ Turn to page 114 for full details of the seed suppliers mentioned

The Walk-In Wonderwall® (TM)

Netted Brassica / vegetable Tunnel

The Walk-in Wonderwall provides a wall against the elements and garden pests.

While, at the same time allowing rain and sunlight to enter. The Walk-in Wonderwall is designed for the garden / allotment growers budget and is ideal for the organic grower.

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The unique light weight, yet robust pvc frame needs no base and fixes directly into the earth. The frame is then covered with a fine heavy duty uv rated netting, which drastically reduces wind speed within the tunnel and can withstand very strong winds. The entire growing space can be worked with ease and

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Each stage of assembly is accompanied by a full colour photograph. No specialist tools are required for assembly.

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Some of these can be seen on the customer feedback pages of our website.

The wonderwall has a standard width of 3.5m and is sold in lengths from 2m upwards.

We can however, manufacture wonderwalls to fit your raised beds exactly ie; 2.5m width x 3.2m length.

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The Walk-In Wonderwall®

pat pen

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- PROTECTS AGAINST CABBAGE WHITE BUTTERFLIES/CATERPILLERS
- PROTECTS AGAINST PIGEONS
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The polytunnel in April has some brassicas still to harvest but also some that are flowering to attract beneficial insects like wasps



ALL ABUZZ on the plot

It's all go on the plot as **Stephanie Hafferty** starts sowing but finds time to listen to the birdsong and the busy bees



April truly heralds the spring: longer days, warmer soil and a dynamic energy that lifts the spirits and fills me with the urge to spend as much time as I can outside. I take my morning coffee into the garden to listen to the birdsong and buzzing bustle of nature responding to the call to raise young. Every day there is something new to discover – blossom, swelling leaf buds, the first asparagus shoots pushing up from the earth.

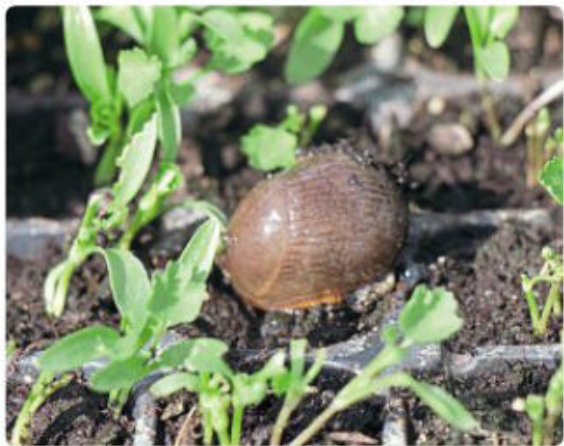
My kitchen is filled with mostly overwintered vegetables: home-grown spring cabbages, carrots from the polytunnel, leeks, chard, kale and trugs full of purple and white sprouting broccoli. I love the burst of flavour from new peas eaten straight from their pods, spicy radish and the first small harvest of asparagus, eaten al fresco for lunch on a sunny spring day (usually with my coat on!).

April is the busiest month for sowing and I am grateful for the preparation I did during the



Carrots grown in the polytunnel

winter months, which means that my no dig beds are ready for planting. It's still too early for tender plants such as runner beans: no matter how bright and mild the days, here in Somerset our last frost date is mid-May. There's enough light now to be able to visit the allotment again in the morning before work, or in the evening afterwards. I find that even 15 minutes of pottering at the plot, hoeing or trowelling out the odd emerging bindweed roots, can boost energy levels and clear my mind.



WATCH OUT FOR SLUGS

Slugs love this time of year too. Regularly check seedlings, especially in greenhouses, for slugs, snails and woodlice, who like to hide under the seed trays by day, coming out to feast on newly emerging seedlings.

SOIL SOLARIZATION

Sometimes neighbouring plots are left to go very wild, blowing weed seeds on to my beds. I raise almost everything in modules before planting out, which means that they are easy to hoe around, but for beds where I am direct sowing (parsnips, carrots, radish, spring onions) soil solarization can help reduce weeds. This simple technique requires a sheet of clear pre-used polythene: eg. wrapping from large items such as mattresses, builders' protective plastic, or off-cuts from polytunnels. It doesn't have to be perfect and can be reused year after year. Two to three weeks before you want to sow, hoe the bed, water if it has been very dry, then cover with the polythene, using large stones or bottles filled with water to weigh it down. This creates a micro-climate which encourages the weed seeds to germinate, heating up when it is sunny, which kills off the weeds. A few days before sowing seeds, I remove the polythene, hoe again (for luck!) and sow.



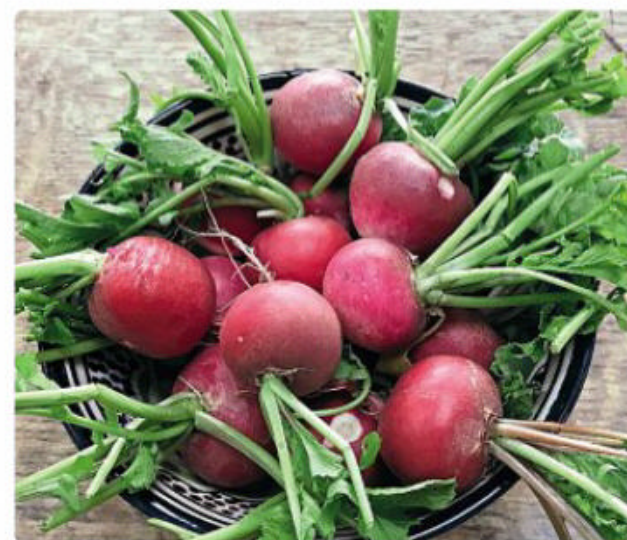
Polythene covers an area of ground to encourage weeds to grow but also helps warm and protect the soil. A bonus in an April hail storm

GARDENERS' FRIENDS

I love to see bees and other insects foraging on the spring flowers – even the aphids are welcome in moderation because they will provide food for a host of other wildlife. One insect that I most look forward to seeing in April is the queen wasp, busily chewing wood which is mixed with her saliva to make an intricate paper mache nest in which to raise her colony. This starts off small, not much bigger than an egg, where she lays a few eggs that become her first workers (sterile female wasps). They take over the nest building, which increases in size until there are potentially hundreds of wasps in the colony.

The queen is larger than the worker wasps at 20-25mm in length (workers are 12-17mm) and survives the winter months by hibernating in a cosy crevice. There are approximately 9000 wasp species in the UK, some of them so small that we can hardly see them. We are most familiar with social wasps: the Common wasp (*Vespula vulgaris*) and the German wasp (*Vespula germanica*). There are also thousands of different kinds of solitary and parasitic wasps – unlike the social wasps, these never gatecrash our barbecue parties and we rarely notice they are there!

Wasps are truly a gardener's friend and extremely important for the environment: not only are they excellent plant pollinators, but they are superb predators of aphids, caterpillars and other insects, which are fed to the wasp larvae. If there were no wasps we would have an explosion of aphids and other insects so it really is worthwhile cherishing them. Wasps are an excellent ally in organic pest control and should be as welcomed as bees.



The first radish crop of the new season

GOOD EXERCISE

There's so much to do, I sometimes find myself trying to fit three days' gardening into one day at the plot, which can leave me stiff and aching! Sowing, harvesting, planting and clearing overwintered plants certainly gives us an excellent work out, exercise for the body and the brain – our bodies love to move.

I especially enjoy clearing the brassicas, twisting the stems to leave as much of the root system as possible (this benefits the soil life and soil structure) and then enthusiastically chopping into 15cm (6in) pieces for the compost heap – superb stress relief!

WONDERFUL WASPS

They are fascinating, busy creatures. I have a small insect water pool at my allotment (an old plant saucer filled with stones) where wasps, bees and other small wildlife can drink, the stones providing a safe perch so no-one drowns. Did you know that wasps wiggle their bottoms while drinking? It's a charming sight. The busy social wasps will repay your kindness by feeding cabbage caterpillars to their larvae. Parasitic wasps lay their eggs in the caterpillars: I often find these on windowpanes and walls, rows of little larvae emerging from the host caterpillar.

To encourage parasitic and social wasps I make sure there are flowers that attract them at my allotment as much of the year as possible, including dill, coriander, marigolds, lobelia, mallow and brassicas – I leave one or two brassica plants to flower and grow a band of plants along one side of the plot, creating a welcoming habitat. This wildlife border also feeds bees, birds and hoverflies, and creates a home for beetles, spiders and other insects, and looks beautiful: a win-win situation for us all.



Did you know that in the UK social wasps are estimated to feed 14 million kg of insects to their larvae annually?

April is blossom time



IN APRIL I AM SOWING...

Leeks, all varieties of beetroot, potatoes, broad beans, peas, spring onions, tomatoes for outside growing, parsley, chard, cucumbers, courgettes, squash, sweetcorn, lettuce, spinach, basil, shiso, carrots, tomatillo



QUIRKY CROPPERS

Photo: Karen Blakeman

Bored of beetroot? Tiring of tomatoes? Fed up with French beans? Then grow something completely different, downright eccentric even! **Benedict Vanheems** offers some less-than-usual crops to try



Don't get me wrong, I love common or garden vegetables as much as the next gardener. You can't beat a just-picked, sun-warmed tomato, a densely fleshed nutty courgette or the first of the season's new potatoes. Oh, and personally I'd be lost without the ever-versatile Swiss chard!

Our regular line-up of dependables forms a very solid foundation to the kitchen garden. We grow them because we know them but also because we love 'em! But another reason we tend and toil is to try new things – the sorts of rare, tasty treasures you just won't find in the supermarkets.

Every growing season I resolve to plant something a little zany. It's a bit of fun but perhaps more importantly a great way to broaden those culinary horizons. Last year it was pots of lemongrass – perfect for adding a punch of freshness to Thai dishes. This year it's the turn of heritage squashes, warts (literally!) 'n' all.

So let's open our minds and admire a catwalk of quirky crops. Most may be unfamiliar but that doesn't necessarily make them difficult to grow. In fact, some are even easier than their better-known alternatives. Are you ready for a line-up of weird but wonderful? Great stuff – then let the show commence!

MALABAR SPINACH

Also called climbing spinach or Ceylon spinach, this slightly fleshy leaved climber has no relation to true spinach. You can use it in exactly the same way though – steamed or added in handfuls to a stir-fry. Malabar spinach is most popular in India, a country distinctly warmer than our murky shores! For best results grow it under cover, in a polytunnel or greenhouse. That said I have seen it growing very happily outside in Oxfordshire, and with rambunctious gusto at that.

To grow it, sow the seeds into pots or module trays in mid to late spring and germinate in a warm propagator. If you want to grow it outside wait until the risk of frost has passed then harden off before planting out about a foot apart. Plants need sunshine, fertile soil and, of course, supports such as trellis or a bamboo tepee to get them off the ground, though you can leave stems to trail along the ground if you wish. As soon as the first warm spell arrives – boom! – plants will put on rapid growth, reaching taller than head height by the second half of summer. Keep vines well-watered in dry weather to stop them flowering, which turns the leaves bitter. Harvest leaves as you need them.



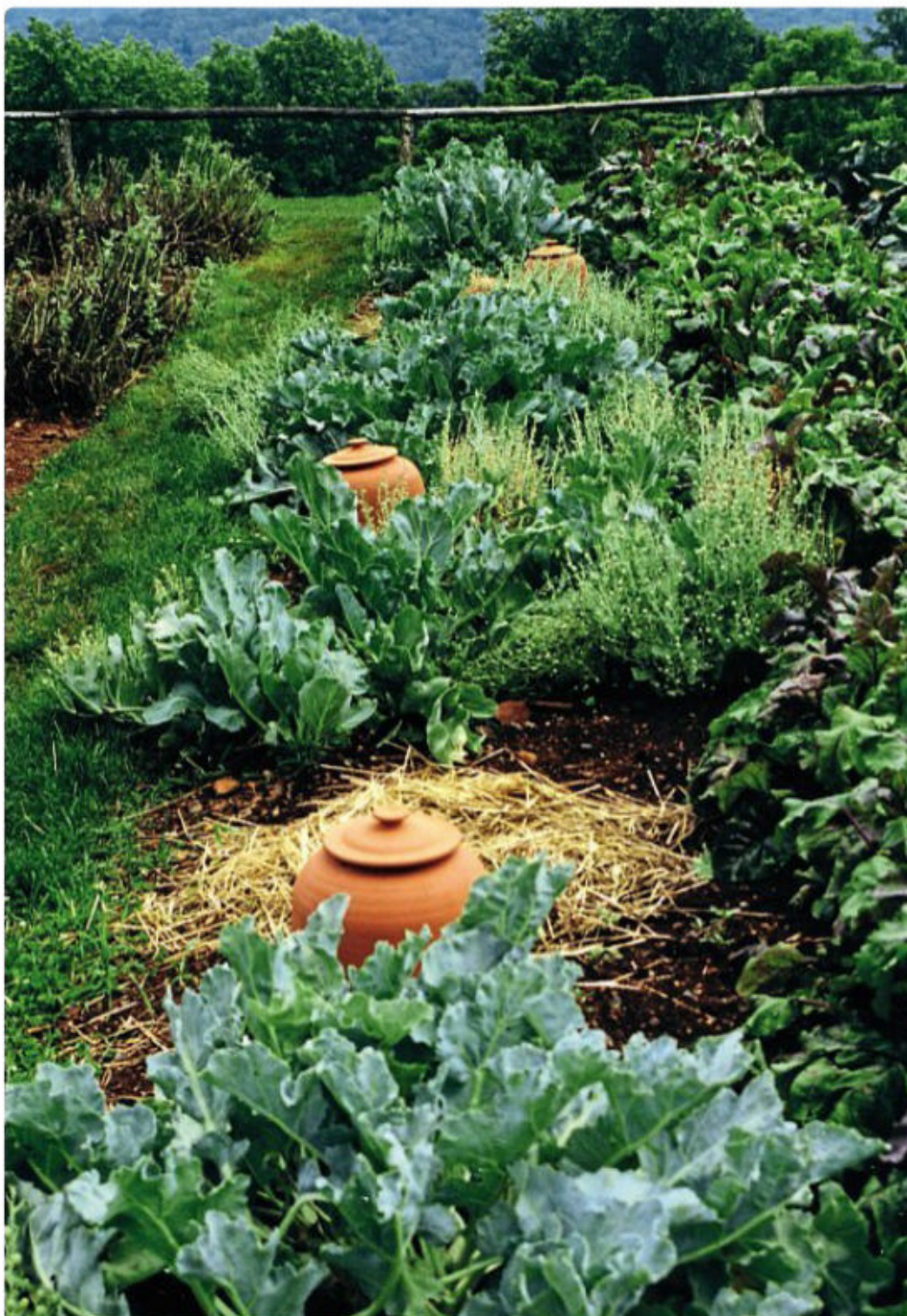
Offer Malabar spinach adequate support to climb high

Photo: F Delventhal

SEA KALE

Let's take a trip to the seaside for our second quirky cropper. Sea kale is a British native which, so long as you reserve it a sunny spot in free-draining soil (to mimic its seashore habitat), should reward you with several very distinct harvest opportunities. The first is in spring as the new shoots push through. These can be forced, like rhubarb, in forcing pots to exclude the light. The crisp, tender stems that result may be cooked like asparagus, and they aren't a world away in taste either. Next come the leaves, enjoyed like cabbage or kale. Then there are the unopened flower heads which are almost indistinguishable from sprouting broccoli. Finally, the tiny white flowers that follow have a hint of sweetness that make a pretty finishing flourish to desserts.

Sea kale is a perennial plant that needs time to find its feet. Leave it alone for three years before taking your first harvest and your patience will be rewarded with a truly hardy, fuss-free friend.



Mature sea kale plants crop generously

Photo: Rhonda Fleming Hayes



Force sea kale shoots for a delicious springtime treat

Photo: Stephen Shirley

PERILLA



Red perilla also makes an attractive plant for bedding schemes
Photo: Huerta Orgázmika

More leaves please! You got it – and perilla, also called shiso, is royalty among them! Frequently used in Japanese cuisine, perilla is as at home in salads as it is in stir-fries. Its taste-topping credentials – think a cross between basil and mint with a hint of cinnamon – make it perfect for pairing with seafood; in Japan it is often used in sushi and battered as tempura.

Choose between red and green perilla. The attractive deep red, almost purple form was a hit with the Victorians who used it within their bedding schemes. But if it's flavour you're after, go green. Soak the seeds overnight then sow them on to the surface of moist compost. Pop sown pots into a propagator to germinate, or cover with a clear plastic bag, held in place with an elastic band.

Once the seedlings have grown on a bit they can be pricked out into their own pots then planted about a foot apart once there's no longer any chance of frost. Grow it in the sunshine, in free-draining soil, and regularly pinch out the growing tips to encourage bushier plants. Harvesting begins as soon as plants are big enough to recover from each picking.



Pick perilla little and often
Photo: Kenichiro Matohara

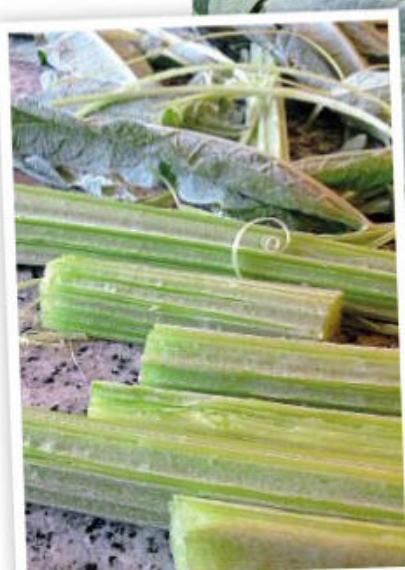
CARDOON

Cardoon and globe artichoke appear very similar at first glance. In fact, the former is a sub-species of the latter. They're both equally theatrical that's for sure, with great thrusting thistle leaves and stunning mauve flowers that come alive with bees and butterflies the moment they open. But whereas globe artichokes are grown for their flower buds, cardoons are cultivated for their thick stems, like celery on steroids.

Look out for the heritage variety 'Gobbo di Nizza', which produces exceptional broad, white stems that can be sautéed, made into soup or eaten raw, dipped into olive oil like the Italians do. They are also delicious cooked as a sort of gratin, with lots of cheese, and the roots can even be eaten like parsnips.

Sow seeds in spring into pots of multi-purpose compost then plant out the young plants into well-drained soil in direct sunshine. Cover them with mulch for the winter and they should survive through to the following year. It is worth growing this statuesque plant in the ornamental border, where it will add height and no end of drama; good looks and good eating!

Prepping cardoon stems in the kitchen Photo: Lablascovegmenu



Cardoons are eaten for their muscly stems

Photo: Edsel Little

SALSIFY

Another quirky crop that enjoys well-drained soil and a place in the sun is salsify. This super-hardy root is sometimes known as the 'vegetable oyster' because of its passing resemblance in taste. The roots look a bit like parsnips and can be eaten just like any other root vegetable. It's easier to grow than parsnips, though, and was often grown by Victorian gardeners. Quite why it fell out of favour is a mystery!

Sow salsify seeds in spring once the soil has warmed up into rows about 30cm (1ft) apart. Like parsnips, they take a few

weeks to germinate, so don't fret if they aren't up within days. Thin in stages to about 15cm (6in) apart, remove weeds as they appear and water in dry weather. Enjoy the roots from autumn onwards. You can leave them in the ground until you're ready to enjoy them and – just like parsnips – taste improves with exposure to frost. The roots are fairly brittle, so take time to work around the roots with a fork before lifting.

Right: Salsify looks very similar to parsnip, and is grown much the same way

Photo: Thompson & Morgan



Oca is closely related to wood sorrel

OCA

Take a look at the leaves of the oca and you'll immediately see how it is a close relation to wood sorrel. Oca is a staple of South American diets but is quickly gaining kudos here as Brits discover the pleasantly lemon tang of its knobbly tubers. The acid notes soften over time which gives the discerning palate two chances to indulge: sliced thinly to eat raw for a crunchy, citrusy explosion of flavour; or cooked like miniature potatoes to drop into stews and the like.

Oca, sometimes called New Zealand yam, are remarkably resilient – they don't suffer from blight like potatoes and the tubers won't turn green in the sunlight once harvested. Plant seed tubers about 8cm (3in) deep into free-draining soil after the last frost, or get a head start by planting them in April into pots of multi-purpose compost to plant out as bushy young plants. Mulch around plants to keep the soil moist.



Photo: Mike Linksvayer

The colourful skins of oca make for an attractive addition when the tubers are thinly sliced into salads

Tuber formation occurs quite late in the growing season, so continue to water into September if it is dry. Tubers aren't dug up until late November or early December, after the foliage has fully died back in the first hard frosts of the season. Lift them up, let them dry off then store them somewhere cool and with good air circulation like a garage. Tubers can reach up to 10cm (4in) long, with one plant producing anywhere up to 50 tubers.

SEEDS AND GRAINS



AMARANTH: This produces protein-rich grains similar to quinoa. Shake the seeds from the dry seed heads then winnow off the chaff. It stores well after drying further for another week.

Photo: Eileen Kane



CARAWAY: A member of the carrot family, producing pretty umbel flowers adored by hoverflies. A biennial, keep it watered in the first year then harvest the seeds in the second.

Photo: Andrea Michaela Traut



POPPY: Grow your own poppy seeds and use them for home-baked breads and cakes. The seeds are harvested from the mature, dry seedpods of the opium poppy, *Papaver somniferum*.

Photo: Théo



BLACK ONION SEEDS: Actually, the seeds of nigella, or love-in-a-mist, black onion seeds look exactly like their namesake. Sow the seeds of this hardy annual into prepared soil in autumn or early spring.

Photo: Craig Lymm



PUMPKIN SEEDS: Not a quirky crop, admittedly, but how many of us are guilty of tossing out the seeds of our prized pumpkins? Stop! Roast them with salt and spices for a healthy snack.

Photo: Miriam Kato

SWAP SHOP

Save yourself a lot of effort by swapping common annual vegetables with their perennial vegetable alternatives. Growing perennial vegetables that keep going year after year is a smart move. It will save you the bother of re-sowing every season, while yields should improve as plants establish.

COMMON ANNUAL CROP	PERENNIAL ALTERNATIVE
Kale	Daubenton's kale or Taunton Deane kale
Sprouting broccoli	Nine Star perennial broccoli
Leek	Babington's leek
Onion/Spring onion	Egyptian onion
Swiss chard	Sea beet
Rocket	Turkish rocket
Winter purslane	Siberian purslane

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- **VICTORIANA NURSERY:** 01233 740529, victoriananursery.co.uk

WONDERFUL WEEDS

If you can't beat them, eat them! Leafy weeds are a surprising source of fresh, nutritious salad greens, especially in spring when our cultivated crops are only just out of the starting blocks.

NETTLES: Nettles in your garden? Then you're blessed because these stinging staples are top of the class for iron-rich greens. They are also the food plant for the caterpillars of a wide range of butterfly species. Use the leaves as a spinach replacement – just be sure to don the gardening gloves before picking!

Photo: Arpent Nourricier

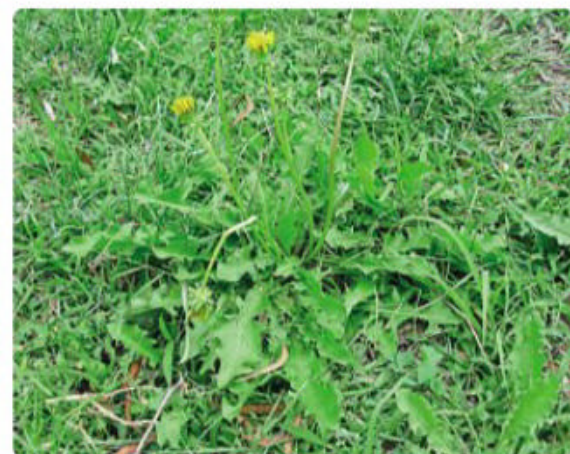


GREATER PLANTAIN: Often found growing in very firm, moist soil, and often in lawns, young plantain leaves have a surprising taste that's halfway between mushroom and asparagus. I thoroughly rate it but you do need to pick the leaves while they are still young and tender.

Photo: Simon

KING HENRY: Introduced to our shores by the Romans, this spinach-like plant may also be forced in spring as an alternative to asparagus. In fact, this is one weed worth introducing and the seeds, available from Victoriana Nursery (01233 740529, victoriananursery.co.uk) are sown from April.

Photo: Joan Simon

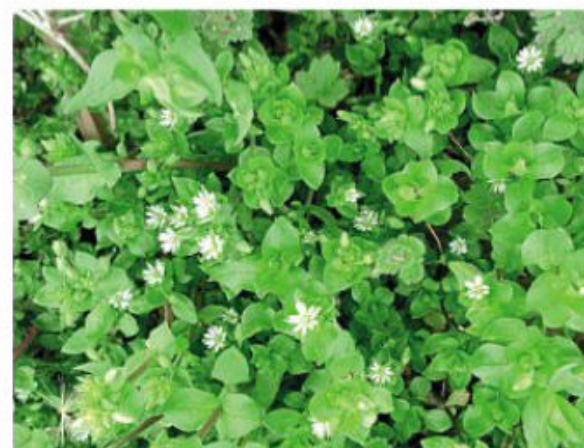


DANDELION: From the French dent de lion (lion's teeth), referencing its saw-toothed leaves, the pop-up-everywhere dandelion has a silver lining. Fresh spring leaves are a great addition to a garden-foraged salad; pick the leaves often enough and that persistent taproot will eventually run out of energy.

Photo: Harry Rose

CHICKWEED: Clump-forming chickweed grows fast and all of it's good for eating: stems, leaves, buds, flowers – the lot! Rich in vitamin C and omega-6 fatty acid, enjoy it fresh in salads, steamed or swirled and wilted into a springtime soup. It has quite a few medicinal properties too.

Photo: Crystal B





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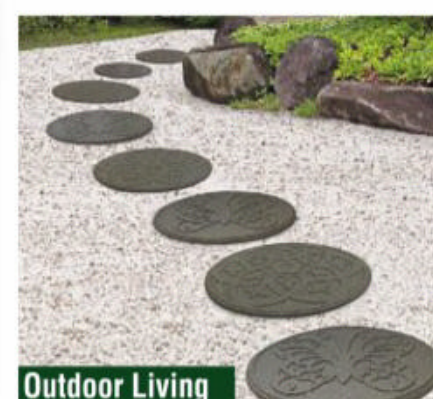


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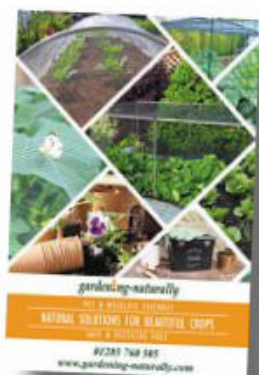
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FOOD FOR YOUR EARS

We chat to online gardener **Richard Suggett** from Littlehampton, West Sussex, otherwise known as The Veg Grower Podcast.co.uk

What first got you interested in growing your own food?

I first got into GYO when I was 10 years old (I'm now 37). It just seemed like a natural curiosity at the time although I would hide this from my schoolmates. We had a patch of garden at the very top of my mum's house that I transformed from brambles to a vegetable patch. My grandfather and other family members got wind of this and offered help. My grandfather has always grown food in his garden which I always saw growing up and he would often encourage me and this included a Christmas present of manure one year (lucky me). What I did not know, until a couple of years ago when my grandfather passed away, was that he grew up on a plant nursery and at the outbreak of the Second World War, his headmaster got him to teach his classmates to grow food too. I have since inherited his greenhouse, which has a very special feeling when I'm working in there.



Richard in the greenhouse he inherited from his grandfather

You mention on your website that you have a veg garden and an allotment – what do you particularly like to grow?

I am only really interested in growing edibles. I find it hard to give a definitive answer to one thing I especially like to grow – my favourites are always what are in season at that time. The first strawberries, the first peas etc. are always the best. I guess if I had to choose a particular favourite, it would have to be chilli plants.



Chillies are among Richard's favourite crops to grow

You keep chickens on your allotment. Do they pose any particular challenges? Any top tips?

I've got three chickens and four quail that I keep at home. The quail are easy as they have to remain in their aviary. The chickens can demolish any plants given half the chance. The chickens really enjoy salad leaves, which I have to protect with mesh or my VegePod that I purchased this year. They don't eat certain plants, such as tomatoes, but they would scratch the ground and uproot the plants. To combat this, I started growing my tomatoes in plastic pots that I cut the bottom off and sunk into the ground. I hope to move the chickens to the allotment to help with weeding as it might help get rid of the couch grass and will allow them a lovely retirement.

You are very active on lots of social media platforms. What made you turn to social media to record your veg growing?

I started recording podcasts in 2013 at a time when there were few UK-based gardening podcasts. Podcasts are such a great format to digest while busy on the plot or driving. Like radio there's an intimacy and audio also gets the imagination working. So I decided I might as well create my own podcast in the hope that it might inspire others to get into GYO and podcasting. I have heard from listeners that they have taken an allotment because of my podcast and that's made the project truly worthwhile. I don't believe in preaching to people; instead I prefer to demonstrate how I do things and the listener can take away what they want from it. I also run a YouTube channel which was originally intended to advertise the podcast but has become its own entity – although my main focus is always the podcast. I also have Twitter, Instagram, a Facebook page and Facebook group.

Any tips for those wanting to set up their own gardening website or Facebook page?

My top tip is to be consistent! If you are going to put content out there, make sure it is regular. Monday night is the release night regardless of what happens, it's really important to me that



Home-grown tomatoes destined for Richard's favourite tomato and coconut curry

I do this for myself and my listeners. Another tip is to engage with your audience and find out about them and what they like. A simple acknowledgment goes a long way. Finally, and my wife would agree as she loves podcasts, always be yourself and be authentic, the audience knows when this is not the case.

You get out and about regularly visiting shows and fellow allotment gardeners. Do you get the feeling that allotment gardening is in a healthy state?

Allotment gardens are not appreciated by those who are not in the bubble, which is a worry for the future. However, those that are in the bubble are some of the most approachable and friendly people you could meet. Many allotmenters are more than happy to share advice, experience and seeds or plants. I am also seeing at shows and events that allotments are making more of a presence. And I often have conversations with people who would really like to see allotments featured on TV. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that it might happen.

You keep tabs on what you spend and the value of the produce you harvest on the allotment and veg garden. Do you feel growing your own saves you money?

I have found that growing your own will save money but that's only one advantage. The



The chickens are being sent to the allotment to enjoy their retirement

fresher, tastier food that is produced is far more satisfying than anything bought from a shop. I also know what has gone into producing my food. There are no nasty chemicals and with the lowest possible food mileage, it makes GYO much more environmentally friendly.

Do you have plans to try new crops next year or plans to grow more or less of any particular crops?

This year I grew chickpeas for the first time. I grew them in different areas to see where they grew best and found that they like drier, poorer soils. However, I also learned that to grow enough of this crop to last all year I would need to grow a lot more plants and so in 2020 I plan to grow a long row of them.

This year I am going to try growing dahlias for the first time. Dahlias are edible so it fits in nicely with my whole ethos of only growing edibles.

Any improvements you are hoping to make on your veg patch or allotment this year?

I'm going to try straw mulching in 2020 as I would like to see if that will help reduce the couch grass on my allotment. I'm also currently rebuilding my beds. Originally they were made from pallets which lasted a few years but now I'm replacing them with some much thicker, stronger wood which will hopefully last longer.



Richard was still at school when he discovered his love of veg growing

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BY POPULAR DEMAND

On Derby's Ashbourne Road and District Allotments there seems to be no end to the demand for small spaces for newbie allotment gardeners to put down some roots, as Potty Plotter Elaine Crick explains



Having completed their year on the starter plots, our new gardeners are now 'battle-hardened' and raring to move on to full-sized allotments as and when they become available.

It seems these former Starter Plotters are limitless in their energy, for rather than putting their feet up over the cold winter months to grab for the seed catalogues and dream, they have been busily clearing the little starter plots in preparation for more newcomers, so that now they are clean and tidy for the season ahead.

Caz and Michael Joyce are two such newbies, now fully qualified allotment gardeners who have been clearing their new full-sized plot and preparing it for spring sowings. Their handiwork is clearly visible from the pathway: the rubbish has gone, the once overwhelming couch grass has been cleared, and suppressant has been laid over the bare soil.



The rubble has gone from Mike and Caz's plot and soil membrane laid over to kill weeds



Mark finishes clearing his Starter Plot ready for the new occupants



By popular demand a new batch of Starter Plots is nearly ready

What of their Starter Plot? “We’ve never had such brilliant parsnips,” gloated Mike. “We’ve still got kale, sprouts and more parsnips on there,” he continued as both go on to share their plan to clear their Starter Plot, enthused after seeing the beginning of the work by the volunteers on the ‘new new’ Starter Plots.

The creation of the site’s next set of Starter Plots is underway to meet the demand from enquirers to the site. Time is of the essence, so yet again the volume of noise has increased and the team of volunteers is back at work. As they crack on, the Howcroft family are busy next door clearing their Starter Plot (as the additional rules stipulate in their tenancy agreement).

Sarah said: “I have been planning for our new full-sized plot from my armchair and seeds have arrived – though I keep reminding myself it’s a long-term project. I had grand plans to get properly on top of our new plot in the autumn, to rotavate and get the onions in, but the weather changed so instead we are clearing this plot ready to give back.

“We have been meaning to do it for a fortnight or so but wanted to get out the last of the parsnips. Done! And I think now it is finished.”

We see the tools are cleaned and neatly stacked in the tool shed. “That’s it!” exclaimed Grace (the 13-year-old daughter) as we have the return of the



Gill and husband Daniel unload the recycled fencing

first Starter Plot ready to be re-let.

It’s Saturday and we know that we will find Gill Black on Plot 86 (with Wilson the dog of course). We scurry in the drizzle along the path and see Gill. “For me it’s time to tackle the basics. I have to balance time against need. I work full-time and have a family too so have taken lots of advice about how to get on top of the plot.”

A sensible approach to what can be overwhelming for many new allotmenters, but

Gill is eager to learn and is never-ending with questions.

“I still doodle designs any chance I get... and dear husband has trundled down and assembled the fencing as promised. It looks wonderful and has transformed the plot, with enough fence left to create a separate entrance into what I envisage will become a magical orchard where I plan to scatter wild flower seeds to encourage bees from the site to visit.”



Sarah spent the winter clearing her permanent full-sized plot



Ingrid is looking forward to moving to a full-sized allotment

GET GROWING

Gill has certainly begun to shape her 'Plot 86' as a replica of her doodle design and though the main digging is yet to be done, her main objective is to rid the plot of the remaining rubbish and rubble.

Ingrid Preston meanwhile remains on her Starter Plot, waiting for a bigger plot to become available. As the first frost sets in she starts a little bonfire. "I've cleared the polytunnel. Last year I had so many tomatoes from it. I will tidy this plot while I have time." It makes sense and demonstrates the neat and tidy nature of her personality.

Mark Willcox had a great crop of potatoes on his Starter Plot last year and has taken the Brussels sprout tops as he starts to clear yet more chard.

"We have cleared lots of space now on the new plot and have learned that we planted everything too close together on our little Starter Plot," he chuckled. "Chard, cabbages, as well as potatoes, but next season we will do it better – though the soil here is very different to our new plot so it will be great to see the difference to this."

He continues on as we accompany him and Roly (the dog) to Plot 121. "The runner beans are the funniest story," he said. "We planted a 'wigwam' of them and, of course, we didn't know how long to wait for signs of growth. A couple of weeks later, still no sign of shoots so we planted more beans and suddenly when the sun

shone, we ended up with a forest of beans and lost the bamboo canes! They kept us going for weeks!" (See main pic page 64.)

We asked Mark about the challenges of being a new plot holder. "It wasn't the growing on the Starter Plot, it was the watering in the polytunnel! We had not planned to visit the site every day but we had to come to water. Ironically, as time went by we got used to our

daily visits and now we have had the experience of growing in a polytunnel we know that it will not be something we want just now – though if we had not used one this year I think we would be planning to buy one."

That's experience for you Mark and no-one knows what is around the corner – (though some have suggested The Potty Plotters are round the bend.....!)



Mark and Roly are now the proud tenants of Plot 121

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ELAINE'S TOP TIPS

Sure-fire parsnips, sweet peas and sweetcorn from the Potty Plotter Elaine Crick.

How many of us sow our seeds and wait? We look. We fiddle. We check. We moan! Well here's a tip for the impatient allotmenters of this world!

FOR PARSNIPS:

1. Wait for the week you plan to plant your parsnip seeds. Prepare your ground and grab a nearby tight-lidded plastic container such as an old clean takeaway box.
2. Thoroughly wet a piece of tissue paper, kitchen roll or similar and lay it on the bottom of the container.
3. Pop your seeds on the paper making sure each seed is in contact with the wet paper.
4. Wet another piece of paper and lay on top of the seeds.
5. Clip the lid on the container and place on a light, warm window sill.

6. Check the seeds after a few days and you should see the tails (roots) on the seeds!

7. Set the germinated parsnip seeds 4 inches apart on a fine tilth on the plot and gently cover. Each seed is a guaranteed success in very little time!

I have done the same with sweetcorn that are good to grow within a week – as are sweet peas!



Sensational strawberries!



Love strawberries? Who doesn't? Grow them yourself and get set for unrivalled flavour, juiciness and all-round indulgence, says Benedict Vanheems



Succulent and sun-warmed strawberries need no introduction. They're the epitome of summer, when life is sweet – and so are the strawberries!

For a country so obsessed with these buxom berries you'd think we could do a lot better than the bland, sometimes wince-inducing bullets sold in the supermarkets. (And how often have you picked up a punnet only to discover half of them haven't even fully ripened to red?).

In fairness to commercial growers their priority is resilience and shelf life, which means fruits are necessarily picked very early, before they have reached their zenith of flavour. Gardeners, on the other hand, can go all out on taste and aroma, picking the best varieties to pick at the peak of perfection and devour within minutes. Mmmm... you just know garden-grown strawberries are going to be sublime!

SUNSHINE MEANS FLAVOUR

It may surprise you to learn that strawberries are originally woodland fruits, which means they tolerate shade pretty well. In fact, they don't just tolerate shade – they grow very happily in it. That may be the case, but the sweet taste we're after only develops with the warming kiss of sunshine. So plant your strawberries where they can bathe in the sunshine.

Ground conditions are another influence on flavour. The perfect soil drains well while retaining enough moisture to promote steady growth. Any soil – whether heavy clay or light sand – can be nudged towards this Goldilocks ideal by simply incorporating plenty of compost before planting. Further mulches of organic matter can then be laid around plants later on in the growing season and over winter



Sweet somethings: sensational strawberries to make you salivate!

GET GROWING

for the worms to dig in for you. Help fruit production some more by regularly watering on a liquid fertiliser that's high in potash (such as tomato feed) from the moment the first flower buds appear.

PLANTING STRAWBERRIES

But let's not get ahead of ourselves; first we need some plants! At this time of year bare-root runners are hitting the shelves. They don't look like much but, believe me, these are plants full of potential, poised to burst into life the moment they're planted. Order yours as soon as you can and pot them up as soon as they arrive. Popping them into the warmth of a cold frame or greenhouse will speed their establishment.

Growing on runners in pots of multi-purpose compost isn't essential but does give them a chance to leaf out in peace, away from cold soil and slugs. The healthy young plants can then be transferred to their permanent positions a month or so later, as soon as the ground has warmed up around the end of April.

Plant runners at the right depth so that the growing point is level with the surface of the compost. This is important: too deep and plants could rot or simply fade away, while too high and they will rock about and be prone to drying out.

Runners or plants obtained later in spring can be immediately planted out into prepared soil. Use a string line to achieve straight rows, spacing plants at least 45cm (18in) apart. Dig a hole for each plant, spread out the roots of bare-root runners and backfill with soil, firming with your fingertips as you fill. Water to settle the soil, then continue to water regularly in dry weather.

Strawberries also grow well in containers, growbags and hanging baskets, but are at greater risk of drying out, so stay vigilant and water as needed to keep plants lustrous.



Plant strawberries within a cold frame for the very earliest pickings



Slugs: raising growing bag strawberries off the ground moves them out of harm's way

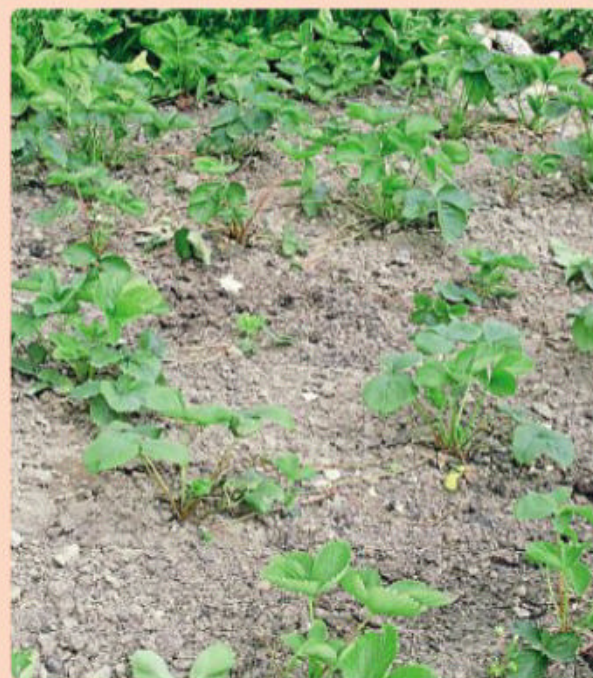
HOW TO PLANT STRAWBERRIES



1 Pot up strawberry runners into quality multi-purpose compost. Then grow plants on in a greenhouse or cold frame until mid-spring.



2 Plant out once the soil has warmed up. Make sure the growing point of bare-root runners or the compost level of potted plants ends up at soil level.



3 Space plants at least 45cm (18in) apart to encourage good airflow and so sunshine can reach every plant. Water in dry weather to help plants establish.



Netting needs to keep birds off but still allow pollinating bees access

GROWING ON

Try to avoid wetting the leaves when you water or apply liquid feed. Damp leaves increase susceptibility to mould, exacerbating the effects of any dull, wet weather, so get the hose or watering can spout right in there, under the leaves and close to the crown of the plant. Properly spacing plants out in the first place will also help to sidestep potential mould issues by ensuring good air circulation.

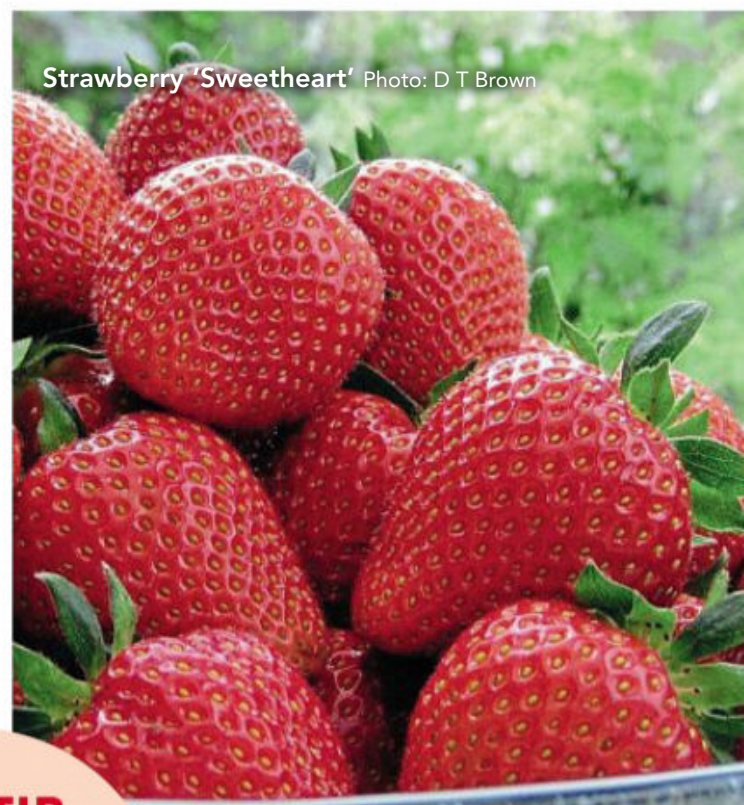
Weed regularly to eliminate the competition. A sharp hoe makes light of this task but do take extra care close to plants because it's all too easy to accidentally sever the crown in your enthusiasm. I suggest hoeing between rows, then hand weeding to finish.

As soon as the fruits have set it's time to defend plants against their two nemeses: birds and slugs. Lay netting specifically for keeping birds off because the holes will still be big enough to allow bees in to pollinate. Set slug

traps, filled with beer, to organically collect and dispose of slugs.

This is also the time to lay straw down to raise fruits off the soil to stop them getting muddy or gritty. Don't lay straw any earlier or it could serve as a cool and shady hideout for slugs. You could use black plastic mulch or weed membrane instead, planting the strawberries into X-shaped slits then folding the flaps back after firming into position. Straw or purpose-sold strawberry mats are probably easiest for smaller-scale plantings, while dedicated strawberry beds may benefit from the efficiency and extra warmth afforded by black plastic or membrane.

Remove the long, thin runners that emerge from the crown of the plant, especially during their first season. These divert energy from flower and fruit formation. Assuming your plants are healthy and disease-free, you can then use these to raise new plants from the following season.



Strawberry 'Sweetheart' Photo: D T Brown

TOP TIP

Freeze sudden gluts and misshapen strawberries to drop into smoothies or to turn into home-made ice cream.

KEEP THEM COMING

Pick berries as they ripen. Extend the harvest window further by planting a mix of early, mid and late-season varieties, which should keep you going from June to August.

Everbearers, also known as perpetual strawberries, are another option, cropping sporadically throughout the summer and into early autumn. A range of varieties will maintain interest and ensure there's always something to pick.

You can, of course, grow plants under cover too; just be sure to open doors and vents on warm days to keep the air moving and so the bees can get in. Early-season varieties, combined with such a cosseted environment, could see you picking berries as early as May.

Strawberries planted in the spring will give a modest crop in their first summer before gearing up into full production for their second and third years. After this point plants weaken and yields decline, so it's time to replace plants with fresh – either bought in or propagated from runners.



PROPAGATE NEW PLANTS

Plants produce lots of runners from late summer, which can be used to grow new plants. Simply pin the plantlet at the end of each runner on to the ground or into a pot of compost to root. Once they've rooted, sever them from the mother plant and grow them on. Transplant or plant into fresh ground the following spring.



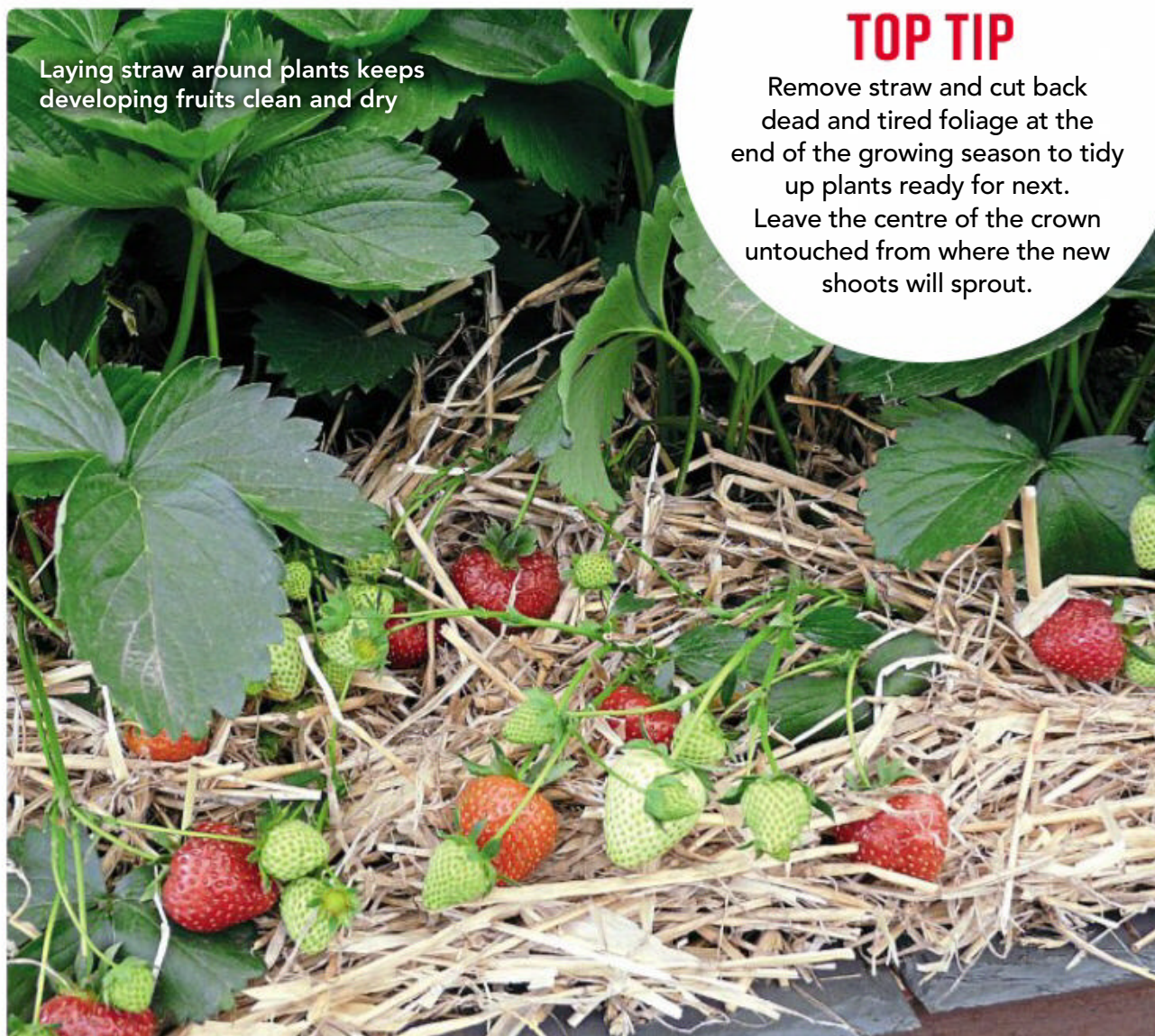
Use deep, wide containers for patio plants



Strawberry planters look attractive but you'll need to water often to keep plants from drying out



Plant three to four strawberries per hanging basket. Water and feed regularly



Laying straw around plants keeps developing fruits clean and dry

TOP TIP

Remove straw and cut back dead and tired foliage at the end of the growing season to tidy up plants ready for next. Leave the centre of the crown untouched from where the new shoots will sprout.

SAVE ON STRAWBERRIES!

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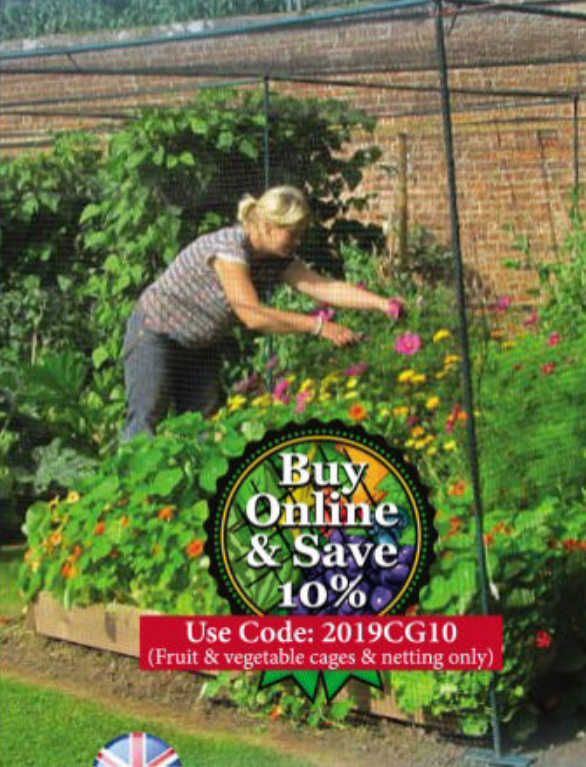
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Come into the shade

If you have a very shady part of your garden, why not grow redcurrants or whitecurrants? asks fruit expert David Patch. There are some really sweet and tasty varieties to choose from too!



For most of us, the part of the garden that gets very little sunlight during the day is one of the trickiest areas to manage successfully. The ornamental gardener is almost spoilt for choice with a rich tapestry of ferns, hostas and woodland bulbs to create year-round interest. For the fruit gardener, it is much more problematic – we are always striving to grow the sweetest, most delicious produce and it is sun that forms the sugars in the fruit. This month we are going to look at one of the very best plants for growing in just such inauspicious conditions – the redcurrant.

The redcurrant (*Ribes rubrum*) is a member of the *Ribes* genus in the gooseberry family. It is considered a native plant through much of northern Europe. There are several other closely related species, native across other parts of the globe, but the redcurrant that we know has been cultivated in gardens for several hundred years.



Succulent, sweet and vibrant, redcurrants are a great fruit to have in the garden



BELGIAN AND FRENCH ORIGINS

It's thought that large berried cultivars were first selected in Belgium and north east France in the 1600s. The French town of Bar-le-Duc has a long history of making a fine redcurrant jelly, highly prized by foodies to this day. The currants are picked by hand and the pips removed using a goose feather – very intricate and labour-intensive work, which no doubt contributes to the high price of these little jars of heaven.

Plant your own bush and you can enjoy making this fine accompaniment to lamb or turkey – using a goose feather is entirely optional! Whitecurrants are exactly the same species, botanically, but they are a naturally occurring albino variant (lacking in pigment, so the currants are an exquisite translucent ivory colour). Whitecurrants are also generally slightly sweeter, so are an excellent choice for eating fresh.

Redcurrants are extremely tolerant of shade – they will happily grow and crop even on a north



Above: The French town of Bar-le-Duc has a long history of making a fine redcurrant jelly

Right: Whitecurrants are the same species but a naturally occurring albino variety

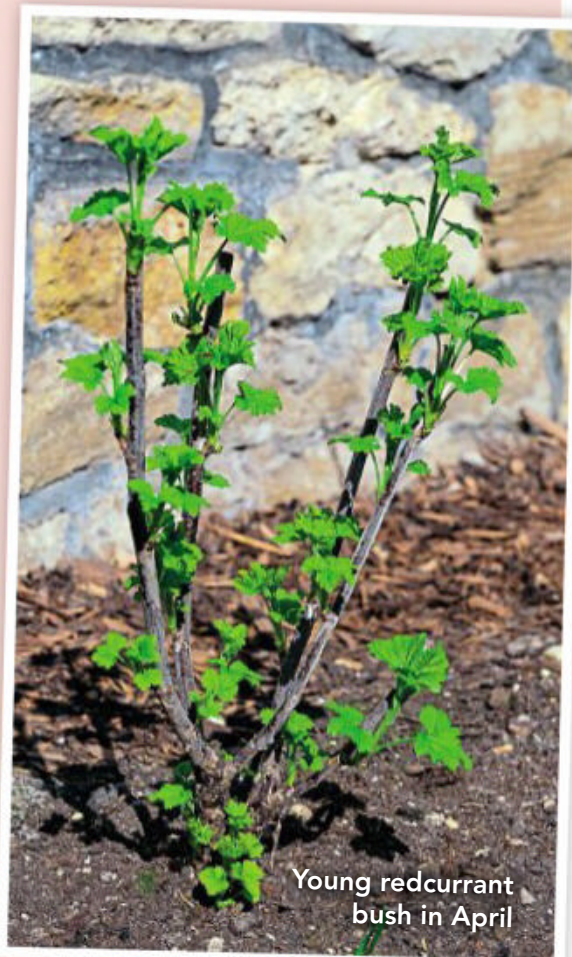
wall where they receive no direct sunlight. They will happily grow in almost all soils, although for preference they do slightly better in a soil that doesn't dry out in the summer. In southern England you can occasionally come across clumps of wild redcurrants that have escaped from gardens and they are generally growing in among groves of alders in damp woodland. Recreate these conditions – shade and moisture – and your redcurrants will thrive.



PLANTING

The traditional time for planting is during the winter months when nurseries will offer bare root bushes. These days you will be able to find pot-grown plants at a garden centre all year round, although the choice of variety will be smaller. As ever, take extra care if planting during the hot summer months and keep well-watered until established. Redcurrants will grow to a reasonable size, so allow 1.2m (4ft) per plant if growing as a traditional bush. Prepare a generous planting hole, incorporating plenty of organic matter to improve soil structure and moisture retention.

Redcurrants, like their close relative the gooseberry, respond well to mulching in early spring to seal in moisture. In most soils they will not need extra feeding, although if you have some tomato feed to hand they will enjoy a little if applied when the flowers are forming in April.



Young redcurrant bush in April

PRUNING

Redcurrants fruit on old wood, so although they are normally grown as free-standing small bushes, they are very amenable to being trained as single cordons or fans against a wall or fence. Pruning is very straightforward – once they have finished fruiting in late summer, just prune back any unwanted growth. Start by clearing out the centre to allow better air circulation (think of a wine goblet and you won't go far wrong) and then cut back any new growth by about half to keep the plant in check. If training as a cordon, shorten any sideshoots to 6cm (2½in) or so. The old wood stays productive for years, so it's more about shaping the plant to suit the space than any particular need to increase yields.





Blisters on the leaves of redcurrant bushes indicate the presence of aphids

PESTS

As with many soft fruits, the main pests are birds. They are very partial to redcurrants, so net plants to protect your crop so it can ripen fully, otherwise it will disappear before you get a chance to enjoy any yourself. Having said that, red- and whitecurrants are some of the easiest and most trouble-free of all fruit crops. Young foliage in spring can be attacked by aphids – you'll notice the distinctive blisters as the leaves pucker and curl – but it never overly affects crops. Use a soft soap solution, or blast the foliage with a jet of water from your garden hose, and you'll prevent the worst of the damage. The damaged foliage will be removed by the late summer prune.

WHITECURRANTS

■ **'BAR-LE-DUC'**. Named after the French town, which has been producing its red and whitecurrant jams and jellies for more than 500 years, this is a very special variety – not the largest fruit, but certainly the finest, sweetest flavour. One for the currant connoisseur!

■ **'BLANKA'**. Highest yielding variety – up to 2kg (over 4lb) per plant – huge long sprigs of ivory white fruit.

■ **'VERSAILLES BLANCHE'**. Probably the most widely available variety, and has much to recommend it. Early to crop and produces long bunches of creamy yellow fruit. High yields. Quite vigorous, so allow plenty of space.

■ **'WHITE GRAPE'**. This has a sweet flavour with large berries. Crops heavily and makes great wine and jelly.

■ **'WHITE PEARL'**. Also known as 'White Transparent'. Excellent flavour, the fruit turn to a pale gold honey colour when fully ripe. Sweet enough to eat raw.



'White Grape'

REDCURRANT VARIETIES

■ **'JUNIFER'**. Probably the earliest cropping variety, you can harvest long sprigs of full bright red berries from the end of June onwards. Crops heavily on young and old wood, so quick into production. An excellent recent introduction that is bound to become a firm favourite.

■ **'ROTET'**. Another late-season variety, very heavy cropping.

■ **'ROSETTA'**. One of the latest varieties to flower and crop, so excellent if you live in a cold spot prone to late frosts, or if you want to extend the season well into August. Heavy cropping and a good flavour.

■ **'STANZA'**. Mid-late season. Dark red berries with a great flavour. Growth is more compact than some others, so an excellent choice where space is at a premium.



'Red Lake'

■ **'FAY'S NEW PROLIFIC'**. A very old variety, introduced by Lincoln Fay of New York in 1808, this has some of the best flavoured fruit. Thin-skinned, large, dark red berries produced in abundance.

■ **'RED LAKE'**. Bred at the University of Minnesota in 1933, this is an old favourite that is still offered by most nurserymen, and for good reason. Extremely productive, with long sprigs of large red shiny berries with an excellent flavour. Highly recommended.

■ **'LAXTON'S NO. 1'**. A traditional English variety, which again has stood the test of time and still stands up against the newer introductions. Earlier to ripen than 'Red Lake', the individual berries are a little smaller but the crops are heavy. Excellent mildew resistance.



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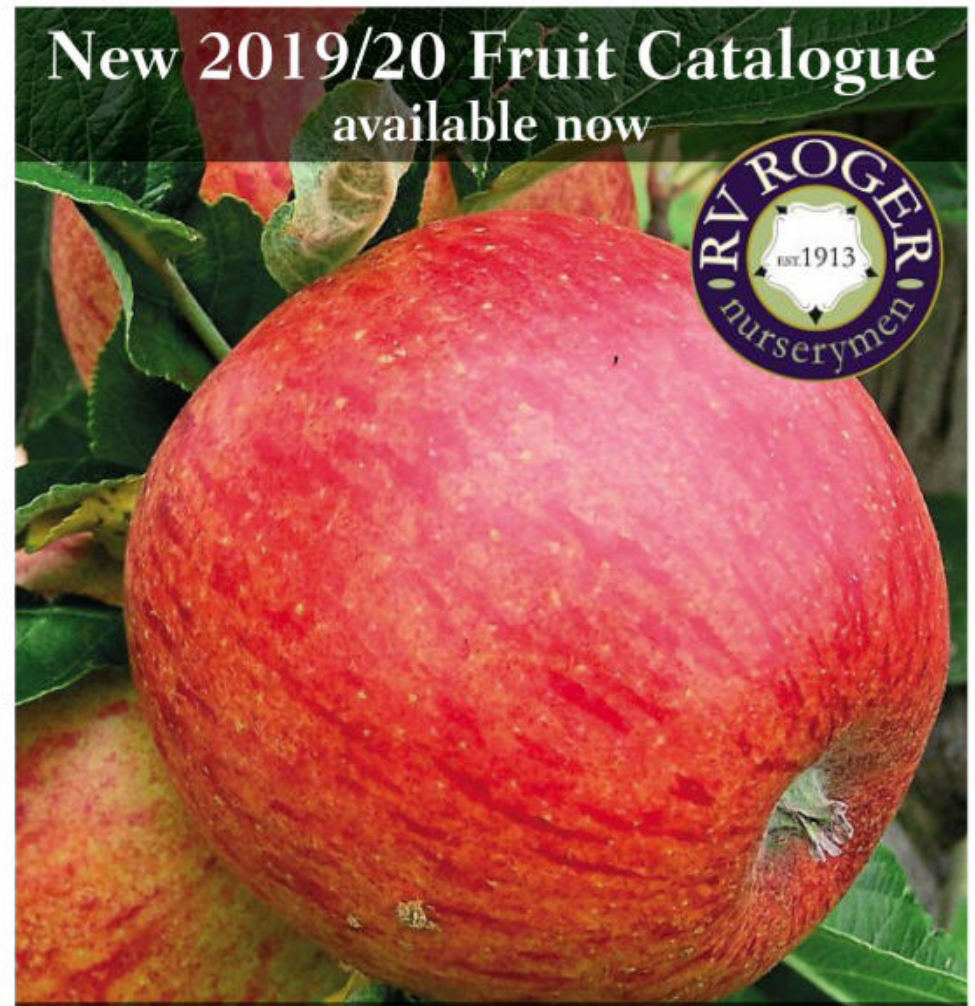
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The benefits of borage

It's easy to grow, produces beautiful flowers and it's great for attracting pollinators. You can use it as a herbal tonic or pop it in your Pimms... what's not to love? asks **Julie Moore**



With its brilliant blue starry flowers and charismatic fuzzy stems and leaves, borage is a plant that has plenty of garden appeal. As an added bonus, it looks attractive even before it flowers, particularly when the 'hairy' stems and buds are covered in morning dew or rain! It can be eaten, used for medicinal purposes, attracts beneficial insects, deters pests, adds nutrients back into the soil and as one of the most important ingredients of Pimms No.1, you really don't need many excuses to grow borage.

With its brilliant blue starry flowers and charismatic fuzzy stems and leaves, borage is a plant that has plenty of garden appeal



Hailing from the Mediterranean, it should come as no surprise that *Borage officinalis* prefers well-drained, light, rather poor sandy or chalky soil in a sunny spot. Borage is best grown directly from seed in late spring or early summer in its final position so as not to disturb its long tap root. For an earlier crop, sow individual seeds under protection in loo rolls in early spring. Harden off before transplanting to the final position once the threat of frost has passed. As the plants can easily grow to 60cm (24in) tall by 50cm (19in) wide, give them plenty of room to grow when you're sowing.

This diverse annual is easy to grow. In fact, the hard part is keeping it under control in your garden – it's a prolific self-seeder, so you may find you only need to sow borage once. If you don't want borage plants all over your plot in future years, collect or destroy flower heads before they turn into seeds. Even the most vigilant gardeners are likely to have a handful of seedlings pop up throughout the plot every year.

Borage can play a key role in maintaining the biodiversity on your plot by serving as food and breeding grounds for indigenous insects as well as contributing to the overall health of the ecosystem.

MAGNET FOR POLLINATORS

Planting borage is a great way to attract a myriad of beneficial insects and pollinators to your plot. Pollinators prove relentless time and again by offering their pollination services to enable us to enjoy freshly harvested food of the highest nutritional quality. Bumblebees and honeybees love borage, also nicknamed 'the bee plant'. The blue star-shaped flowers provide high levels of both pollen and nectar from early summer for

"The blue star-shaped flowers provide high levels of both pollen and nectar from early summer for three months or more"



Borage can play a key role in maintaining the biodiversity on your plot by serving as food and breeding grounds for indigenous insects



Borage blooms are relatively shallow with easily accessible nectar





It's a prolific self-seeder and comes back year after year



Planting borage is a great way to attract a myriad of beneficial insects and pollinators to your plot



The nectaries refill very quickly, making borage a prolific food source for pollinators

Ant on the hairy stem of a borage plant

three months or more – regular deadheading will prolong the flowering season until the first frosts. Borage blooms are relatively shallow with easily accessible nectar which attracts bees with short tongues such as the buff-tailed bumblebee. As an added bonus, the nectaries refill very quickly, two minutes in fact, so if a flower has been recently visited and cleared out of nectar, the next pollinator only has to wait a short time for the nectar to be replenished. Given that comfrey takes around 40 minutes to replenish while other flowers may take 24 hours to refill, borage really is a prolific food source for pollinators.

COMPANION PLANTING

Borage is a good companion plant; being not only attractive to pollinators, it plays host to blackfly, attracting them away from your prized crops and in so doing, provides a valuable food source for a natural gardening ally, the hoverfly. From a gardening perspective, hoverflies are a particularly advantageous insect: adults are valuable pollinators searching out sources of energy-rich pollen and nectar (hoverflies are one of a handful of insects that can digest pollen, a rich source of

protein for their eggs) while the larvae of many of the commonest species are huge consumers of aphids (green or blackfly). As hoverflies have short tongues compared with many bees and butterflies, they are limited on suitable flowers that they can extract nectar from. It's not surprising that hoverflies find the shallow, nectar and pollen-rich flowers of borage irresistible!

LACEWINGS AND BUTTERFLIES

Planting borage not only provides nectar and pollen for lacewings, it is a host plant for lacewings to lay eggs. Lacewing larvae are the perfect pest control, having a voracious appetite for aphids – a single larva can consume 200 aphids a week!

But lacewings aren't the only insects to use borage as a host plant. Painted lady butterflies, which instinctively lay their eggs on thistle plants, also find an acceptable substitute in the hairy leaves of borage.

GET GROWING

Borage is a food source for another gardening ally – the ground beetle. Being mostly predatory and part of a well-balanced ecosystem, they act as important biological control agents. Some species will climb borage plants to feast on aphids.

For ants, borage has another delicacy to offer. Ants, attracted to a delectable nutrient on the woody seed coating, carry away the seeds, acting as an ideal transport system for the dispersal of the plant!

Borage aids any plant it is inter-planted with by increasing resistance to pests and disease. Other pests that are deterred by borage include cabbage worms and tomato worms. Plants that grow particularly well with borage include strawberries, runner beans, tomatoes, squash and cabbage.

SOIL ENRICHER

Borage is a member of the Boraginaceae family and is related to comfrey. Like comfrey, it has a deep taproot that mines nutrients too deep for other plants to reach. It pulls these nutrients into its leaves where they continue to accumulate until the plant dies and, through decomposition, the nutrients are returned to the soil and made available to other plants. Borage produces a lot of above-ground biomass that accumulates nutrients and is a valuable compost ingredient. A word of warning: don't compost flower heads turning to seed otherwise you may have a plot full of unwanted borage next year!

An alternative is to treat borage as a living soil enricher. Planting borage as a green manure is a win-win situation, affording a period of beauty and a season of giving back to the earth. Once the flowers are spent but before they go to seed, chop the plants back into the soil to slowly release their nutrients. The deep taproots will help break up and aerate the soil.

Borage also makes an excellent fertiliser. Simply put some leaves in a container and add



Borage produces a lot of above-ground biomass that accumulates nutrients



Borage tea, seen as a multi-purpose tonic

“Pick young leaves fresh throughout the summer – they do not dry or freeze very well”

water to cover. Put a lid on the container and leave to ferment for a fortnight. Drain off the solids and dilute the solution one part to 10 parts of water to use as a weekly fertilizer. The solution will keep for several months.

HERBAL MEDICINE

Fresh borage flowers and leaves are ingredients in herbal medicine while the oil extracted from the seeds has herbal properties too. Traditionally, borage tea was seen as a multi-purpose tonic that could speed healing, reduce stress, relieve fears and instil courage, soothe digestive issues, ease throat and chest infections and purify the blood.

Most people encounter borage in a Pimms. But don't stop at drinks; with a refreshing cucumber flavour, borage has a multitude of culinary uses. Don't be put off by the hairy leaves – once in the mouth, the hairs dissolve! Pick young leaves to cut up into salads or cream cheese. Try them combined with spinach, added to a ravioli stuffing or even cooked as a stand-alone vegetable much like kale. Fresh leaves are bursting with mineral salts and are particularly good for those following a salt-free diet.

EYE-CATCHING FLOWERS

The blue flowers create eye-catching garnishes for savoury or sweet dishes and on iced gazpacho soups. Try tossing them in a salad of baby greens and edible flowers. When using borage flowers in a salad, be sure to add them last minute as the dressing will cause them to wilt and any vinegar will discolour the blooms. The flowers can also be crystallised for cake decoration.

Harvest flowers when they are just fully opened to use fresh or for freezing or for drying to add colour in pot pourris. Pick young leaves fresh throughout the summer – they do not dry or freeze very well. Do take care when harvesting borage as it can cause skin irritation on contact in some individuals.

With so many merits, you could say that borage is a 'super' plant. Treat this easy-to-grow herb well and you'll be rewarded with stunning and tasty flowers, lush foliage, fertile soils, a plot buzzing with a myriad of pollinators and beneficial insects and increased yields. It's no wonder that borage is perfect for a lazy summertime. Anyone for Pimms?



Borage and nasturtium flowers add colour to this salad

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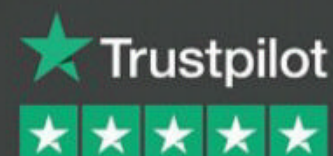
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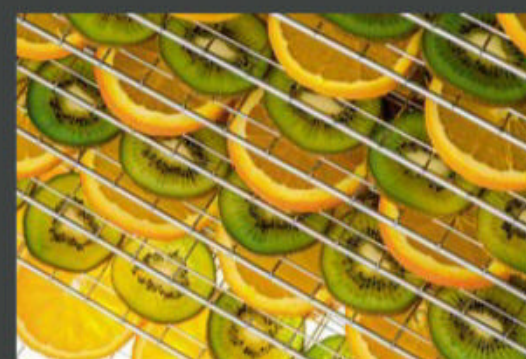
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YOU KNOW YOU'RE A GARDENER WHEN ...

In this light-hearted look at what it means to be a gardener, journalist and garden lover **Becky Dickinson** explores the consequences of being a member of the green-fingered community



From spending more money on gardening tools than you do on clothes, to getting up in the night to check on your precious seedlings, there are some things only a gardener will understand. But don't worry, you're in good company. How many of the following can you relate to?

1 You struggle to sleep at night worrying whether your seedlings are safe from slugs. You have even been known to go outside to check, possibly with a pair of scissors or bucket of salty water in hand.



2 You have also been known to get up in the night and to brave the cold in pyjamas and slippers because you've forgotten to bring in those tender plants you're hardening off... and you don't even care what the neighbours think!



3 No matter how often you wash your hands, you will probably never have clean fingernails again. Nail brushes just don't seem to last like they used to!



4 You tell yourself you're just 'popping outside' to quickly water some plants and end up spending three hours weeding, or staking, or pruning.





5 In spring, your house could be mistaken for a nursery. Your windowsills may never be the same again and finding the kitchen table or door might be tricky. Expect domestic 'disagreements'.

6 You have far too many packets of seeds, but still can't resist buying more. The same goes for those 'bargain corner' plants that are just begging to be rescued.



7 You are often to be found on dark winter nights, huddled by the fire with your 'stash' of seeds like a modern-day Fagin with his box of jewels as you reorganise them for the umpteenth time. (Now should I sort them by family group or month of sowing?)



8 You don't call them tomatoes, you call them 'Lylia Cerisette', 'Sweet 100', or 'Sungold F1', or whatever it is you're growing this year. The same goes for all your other crops.

9 Supermarket carrots (even organic ones) taste revolting. Real veg has mud on it and you ignore those spots and bruises on the apples – every bit tastes just great!



10 You check the weather forecast multiple times per day. Who knew that a weather app could be so addictive!



11 Sometimes you just wander around your plot looking at everything without actually doing anything. You may have a tendency to mumble to yourself at the same time!



12 All you want for Christmas is a polytunnel...and a bigger garden to put it in.



13 Your favourite shop is the garden centre – your family groan every time you suggest 'popping' in. Naturally, you have a reward card and there is always the promise of food for the non-gardeners in the party.



14 You treat your plants like children. You feed them, tuck them in when it's cold and rush to support them in stormier times.

15 You have far too many gardening magazines, but can't bear to recycle a single one. If you are really obsessed, you may even treat yourself to binders to keep them in perfect order and use sticky notes to tag favourite features.



16 Despite your best intentions, your labelling skills still require improvement. Blame those pesky birds – they must have stolen the labels again.



17 You can never have too many gardening gloves. Or wellies. Or hats. All of which are often to be found steaming gently as they dry out in the shed after the last downpour.

19 You always have random pieces of string in your pockets.



18 Having suspected someone else of borrowing them, you are constantly finding favourite tools among the veg where you left them months before and which are sometimes rusted beyond repair.



What singles you out as a true gardener?

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20 The stack of old pallets on your neighbour's plot begins to take on a strange allure. They are not just old pallets – they could be your next compost bin, raised bed or greenhouse staging.

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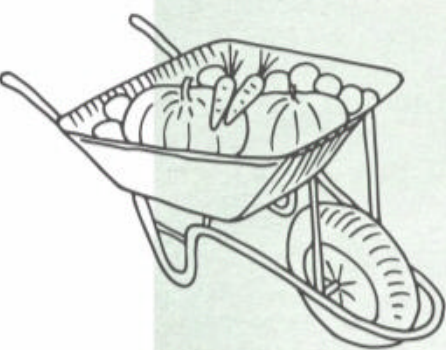
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TONY FLANAGAN
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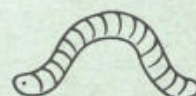
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THE WONDERS OF WILD GARLIC

Forage it for free or plant your own, wild garlic is something to savour, says Wendy Pillar





Wild garlic growing in the woods with bluebells in the distance. Do not confuse with lily of the valley (see p15)

In mid April, I start to get cravings for garlic bread after bike rides. This is because the lanes and woods are suddenly full of wild garlic, and the aroma gradually increases in potency over a few weeks. In May, the garlic erupts into clouds of white flowers, usually with a backdrop of bluebells further into the shade of the woods. It's a sight that can take your breath away – as well as leaving you hungry!

In Italy, in April, you see people at the roadsides gathering baskets of wild greens to take home for their dinner. It's a completely normal practice and local knowledge includes dozens of species. We don't have that tradition in the UK, but it's well worth starting one for the wild garlic. Not only is it easy to use and tasty, but it has all the health benefits of its domesticated garlic relative, such as lowering blood pressure.

If you live near countryside where wild garlic grows, there is no need to cultivate it yourself. It grows in such abundance that foraging it for personal use does no harm, and it is easy to identify. If it looks like the picture and smells of garlic, it's wild garlic. Just seek permission from the landowner before picking and make sure you haven't picked anything else in with it.

A VIGOROUS PLANT

However, if you prefer to forage really close to home, wild garlic is a simple plant to grow in a corner of your plot. Available from specialist suppliers (e.g. Victoriana Nursery and Pennard Plants), grown from bulbs and supplied as a pot-grown plant, it is just a matter of planting it and letting it do its thing. It is a useful plant because it likes the shade under a tree, is abundant in the hungry gap when little else is, and has died down by midsummer. Mine is planted under an apple tree. It is a vigorous plant that will invade if abandoned, but harvesting keeps it well under control.

All parts of wild garlic are good to eat, from the flowers to the bulbs. The leaves are at their best before the flowers appear. The flavour is strongest when eaten raw, as in pesto, and mildest when cooked. You can boil it briefly and use like spinach, or mix it with spring greens or spinach to give them extra flavour. You can shred it into salads mixed with milder greens, or add it to cooked dishes. It goes particularly well with lemony sorrel, which is fortuitously abundant at the same time.



The flowers can be added to salads to enhance colour and flavour



Pungent fresh wild garlic leaves

EARTHY FLAVOURS

The flowers can be added to salads for decoration and a flavour punch, and the stems with buds can be pickled in vinegar and used throughout the year as you would use chives.

Wild garlic goes well with earthy, native flavours – Cheddar, not Parmesan, and hazelnuts not pine nuts. Cream is another good partner, as are potatoes – try wilted wild garlic mixed with leftover mashed potato and fried up bubble-and-squeak style.

Any way you can imagine using garlic-flavoured spinach will work. It's a great plant to feast on in its brief season for a flavour boost and a healthy tonic for the body after winter.



WILD GARLIC RISOTTO

SERVES 2

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- Around 700ml/24fl oz of hot chicken stock
- 1 glass white wine
- 250g/9oz risotto rice
- 100g/3½oz mushrooms sliced
- Juice of half a lemon
- 50g/1¾oz roasted, skinned hazelnuts, chopped
- Large handful of wild garlic, shredded
- 50g/1¾oz good Cheddar cheese

1. Heat the olive oil in a saucepan.
2. Add the onion and cook gently until soft.
3. Add the mushrooms and hazelnuts and cook for a few minutes.
4. Add the rice and stir for 1 minute, before adding the glass of wine.
5. Let the wine bubble off, then add some of the stock.
6. Keep adding the stock a ladleful at a time, stirring, and cook for 15-20 minutes. You want the rice to be just cooked, but with a little bite left.
7. When the rice is almost done, add the lemon juice and wild garlic and stir for a couple of minutes.
8. Let it stand for a minute or two, then stir in the cheese.



Wild garlic often grows with nettles, which combine well in the kitchen too

WILD GARLIC AND NETTLE SOUP

- Equal quantities of wild garlic, nettles and sorrel (about as much as will pack into a 1 litre jug), washed. You can replace the nettles and/or sorrel with spinach or more wild garlic.
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 litre of chicken or vegetable stock
- Thick cream

1. Heat the oil in a pan, and gently cook the onion until soft.
2. Add the stock and greens, and cook for a few minutes.
3. Blend in a food processor.
4. Serve with a dollop of cream and some good bread.



WILD GARLIC PESTO

- 100g/3½oz wild garlic
- 50g/1¾oz Cheddar grated
- 50g/1¾oz hazelnuts, skinned & toasted
- Olive oil
- Juice of half to a whole lemon

1. Process the wild garlic in a food processor.
2. Add the cheese and process again.
3. Add the hazelnuts and process until a paste forms.
4. Add the lemon juice and, with the motor running, trickle in olive oil, until it is of the consistency you want. Taste and season, adding more lemon juice if desired.

The pesto can be stirred through pasta or potatoes. I like it with potato gnocchi, topped with Cheddar cheese and quickly grilled.

PICKLED WILD GARLIC BUDS

Pick the flower buds when they are just beginning to crack open, along with a few inches of stem. Pack them into a hot, sterilised jar. Heat 400ml/14fl oz of vinegar with 3 tbsp sugar until the vinegar reaches

boiling point and the sugar has dissolved. Pour the vinegar over the buds to fill the jar and seal immediately.

Once opened, refrigerate and use within a couple of weeks.



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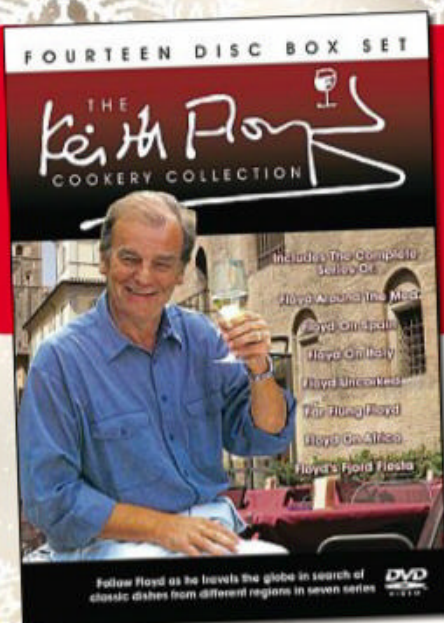
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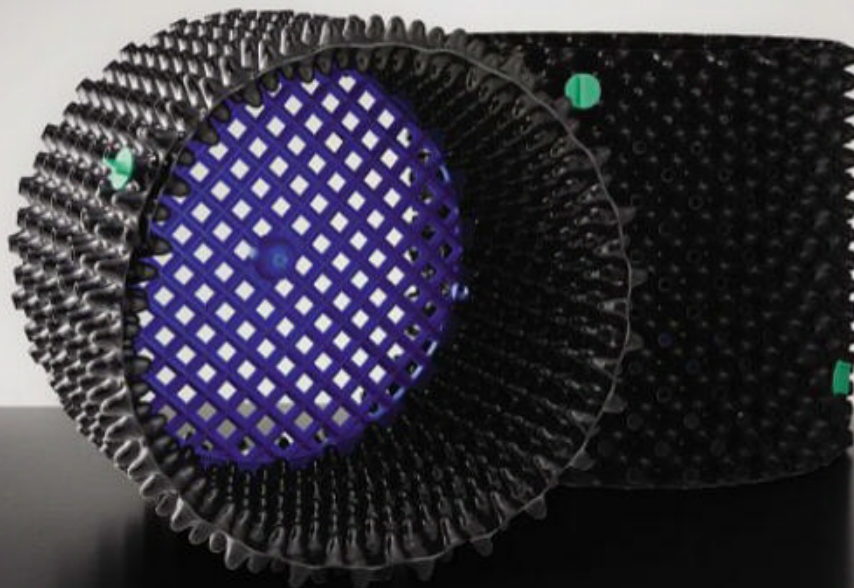
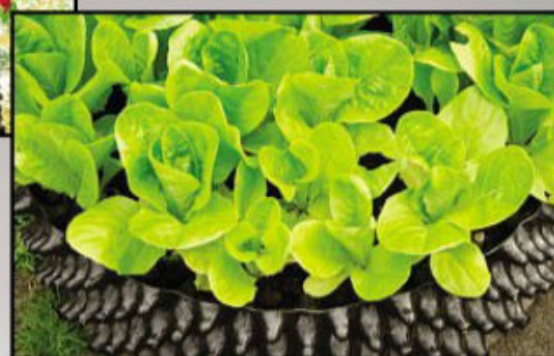
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Edible lupin 'Dieta'

Photo: Garden Organic/
Anton Rosenfeld



Luxuriant lupins

Think of lupins and you'll probably think of flower borders. So you may be surprised to learn that a few lupins have long been used as food crops, as Sally Cunningham explains



Anybody interested in healthy eating and the increasing popularity of a vegan diet will be aware of the ever-increasing number of legume-based protein sources, which seem to be forever multiplying every time you visit a supermarket. Tofu, lentils, chickpeas, beans and lupins all are recommended as powerful amino acid builders, but surely you can't eat lupin seed straight out of the garden?

Well, you can... but not just from any old lupin. The flowering types we are most familiar with are based on hybrids mostly from the Californian tree lupin, *Lupinus arboreus*, a substantial plant found on seashores around the UK where it's often planted to stabilise dunes, and *Lupinus polyphyllus*, the Texas Bluebonnet, common over most of North America.

Both of these plants are poisonous, so it's not surprising that if you indulge in a quick snack of seeds from the brightly coloured flowering lupins you'll have a very uncomfortable few

hours, although it's unlikely to have lasting consequences.

Edible lupins come from different species, on either side of the Atlantic – *Lupinus albus* and sweet forms of *L. angustifolius* from the Mediterranean and *L. mutabilis* from the Andes. They've been cultivated for millennia, and originally needed prolonged soaking in salt water to remove bitter alkaloids. Now, however, modern strains can be eaten after boiling, just like dried kidney beans, and are claimed to have beneficial effects on gut bacteria.

The main varieties are 'Haags Blue' and 'Dieta', which were the subject of a Garden Organic Member's Experiment in 2018. 'Haags Blue' has better cold tolerance on a dwarf plant and crops earlier with smaller and darker beans. 'Dieta' can give heavier crops but needs more space, and isn't suitable for all regions of the UK. Another *L. angustifolius* variety, 'Sonet', is sold by Sow Seeds as a green manure crop and this is also edible.



'Haags Blue' has good cold tolerance

WARNING: Never eat seeds from ornamental lupins and always prepare the seeds from edible lupins as instructed by the supplier. If you're allergic to peanuts, avoid lupins too, to be on the safe side.



Sow into cell trays in April

As befits Mediterranean plants, lupins need full sun and a free-draining, fertile soil. Sow lupins in cell trays during April rather than broadcast, as they, like their flower garden cousins, are notorious for being slug magnets: you will need to protect them throughout their life from mollusc attack. Transplant to around 5-8cm (1-3in) between plants – 'Dieta' grows much bigger, so needs extra room – and allow 15cm (6in) between rows. Flowering should start around six or seven weeks after transplanting and seed is allowed to ripen on the plants until pods are rattling dry, as you would for home-saved drying beans.

SUPPLIERS

We have been unable to identify a supplier of 'Haags Blue' but seeds of 'Dieta' can be purchased from Real Seeds: www.realseeds.co.uk; info@realseeds.co.uk Sow Seeds: www.sowseeds.co.uk 'Sonet' Seeds of Italy: www.seedsofitaly.com supply a heritage variety. Note: this must be properly prepared before eating.



Lupin seed pods nearly ripe for harvest Inset: Lupin seeds

Photos: Real Seeds

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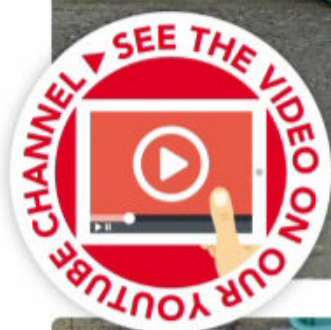


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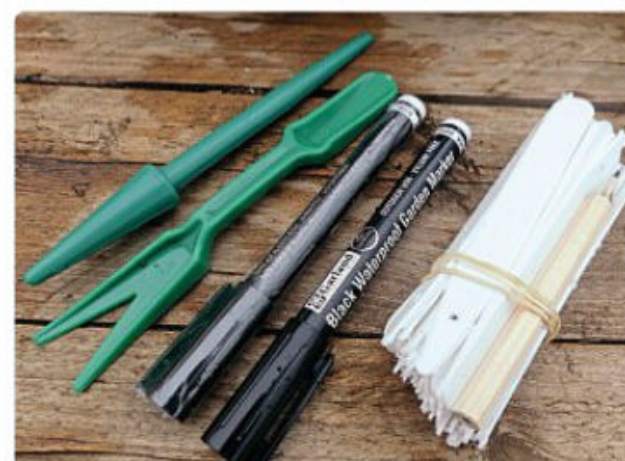
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KG VERDICT

This is an excellent starter pack which has most of what you need to get sowing. There's plenty of vermiculite to aid germination, a very good quantity of labels (plus markers), a dibber and widger, and bottle top waterers that will provide a fine spray to delicate young seedlings. We were particularly impressed with the three mini propagators, perfect for starting tomatoes, chillies, aubergines, peppers and other seeds.



WHAT TO BUY | SEED SOWING KITS



SEED SOWING SET

This seed sowing set includes four bottle top watering roses, a dibber and widgee, a seed sower gadget, 50 white 12.5cm (5in) plastic labels, a marker pen, 50 jiffy pellets packed with compost, two seed trays with covers and a packet of 'Gardener's Delight' tomato seeds so you can get sowing straight away.

TWO WESTS & ELLIOTT

www.twowests.co.uk

TEL: 01246 451077

PRODUCT CODE: SOPROFSSS

PRICE: £19.99

KG VERDICT

This is a good sowing set, offering a very useful range of products to make a productive start with your sowing. The two seed trays with covers are of good quality and will function as mini propagators. With jiffy pellets (of which there are plenty), bottle top waterers, labels, marker and seeds, this sowing set offers good value for money.



SEED SOWING KIT

This kit includes one propagator, four plant labels, eight seed starting discs, four seedling pots and a growing guide. It also comes with three tomato seed packets, 'Gardener's Delight' (cherry), 'Bloody Butcher' (medium size) and 'Super Marmande' (beefsteak), with herb or chilli options available too.

GREENHOUSE SENSATION

WWW.GREENHOUSESENSATION.CO.UK

TEL: 0845 602 3774

PRODUCT CODE: N/A

PRICE: £12.50

KG VERDICT

Not as comprehensive as some of the other kits on offer, this is not without its merits. The tray comes with a plastic lid so seedlings will get that extra warmth they require. The method is to sow the seeds into the compost discs, water in and then place in the propagator. When the roots begin to show they can be moved into the pots provided.



SEEDBALL – BUTTERFLY MIX

BEST FOR VALUE FOR MONEY

Each seedball contains about 30 seeds to attract butterflies to your garden. There are 20 seedballs in a tin, each one combining a mix of purple loosestrife, forget-me-not, musk mallow, red campion and yarrow, plus a variety of annuals.

SEEDBALL

<https://seedball.co.uk>

TEL: 020 8802 5565

PRODUCT CODE: N/A

PRICE: £6



KG VERDICT

The seedballs can be scattered either in autumn or spring. Each tin of 20 seedballs is enough to cover 1sq metre (39 x 39in) of garden. Alternatively, you can place them in pots filled with compost. When placing the seedballs you need to leave at least 10cm (4in) between each ball. Bird mix and bee mix seedballs are also available.





BEE MAT SEED CARPET

The mixture contains annual, biennial and perennial plants to encourage bees in particular. Seeds include common knapweed, greater knapweed, goldenrod, chrysanthemum mixes, borage, anise, hyssop, Californian poppy, verbena, lacy phacelia and viper's bugloss. 200 x 50cm (78¾ x 19½in).

CROCUS

www.crocus.co.uk

TEL: 01344 578 111

PRODUCT CODE: N/A

PRICE: £9.99

KG VERDICT

This is a simple way of creating a bee-friendly area in your garden. All you need to do is roll out the biodegradable mat on to a weed-free spot and cover with about 5cm (2in) of compost, top soil or sharp sand (this will secure the mat in place), then water in. The mat also has the effect of suppressing weeds. Lay the mat down in spring and keep moist.



SEED TAPES

BEST FOR SMALL SEEDS

Each seed tape is 6m (19½ft) long and can be cut to purpose. Seeds are embedded in the biodegradable tape, so sowing a row is quick and easy. The range includes perpetual spinach, lettuce, carrot, radish, chard, beetroot, leek, parsnip and more.

SUTTONS

www.suttons.co.uk

TEL: 0333 043 0700

PRODUCT CODE: N/A

PRICE: £2.99



KG VERDICT

Sowing small seeds can be fiddly and it is easy to sow too thickly or thinly, so seed tapes offer a convenient alternative. All you need to do is to create a drill to the length you require and then cut the tape to fit. Cover with compost or soil to the appropriate depth as indicated on the packet and water in. There is a good variety of seeds in the range.



DE REE SEED DISCS

Each packet contains four 8cm (3in) seed discs, each disc a different variety. Four different collections are available: chilli, Italian herb, tomato and herb. Seeds are embedded in the discs which are then placed in a pot, covered with a light sprinkling of compost and watered in. Place in a warm place with plenty of light.

AMAZON

www.amazon.co.uk

TEL: order online

PRODUCT CODE: N/A

PRICE: £1.25

KG VERDICT

This is a simple way of starting off your seeds – all you need to supply is four pots and some multi-purpose compost. We went for the traditional kitchen herb seeds, which included sweet basil, coriander, chives and parsley (moss curled). This is good value for money considering you get four pots of herbs that will sit nicely on the windowsill.



IDEAS TO INSPIRE YOUR LITTLE
ONES TO GROW THEIR OWN



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**YOUR FREE HERB
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WORTH £4.50**



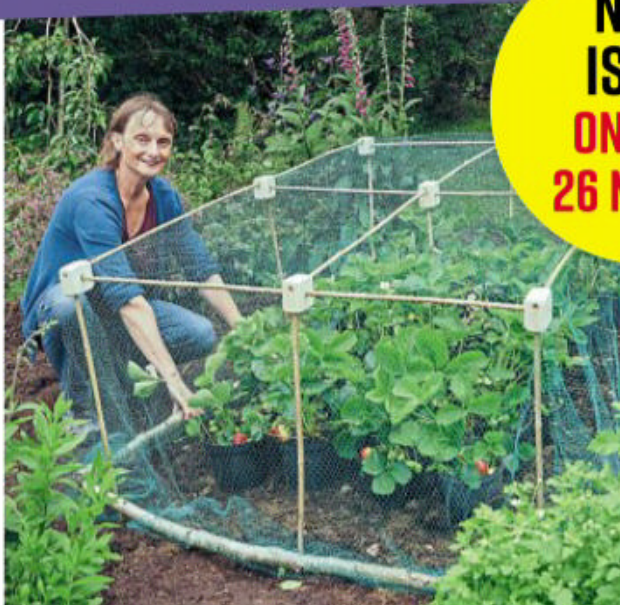
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elho's corsica vertical forest is a unique hanging system for your balcony, fence or wall - letting you create a vertical garden within minutes.

The corsica collection has been a much-loved bestseller for years, and this new vertical system turns everyone's favourite plant pot into a modern, urban jungle.

A smart solution for limited space, and one that looks fantastic, the corsica vertical forest pots are available in sets of three.

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www.elho.com/en/

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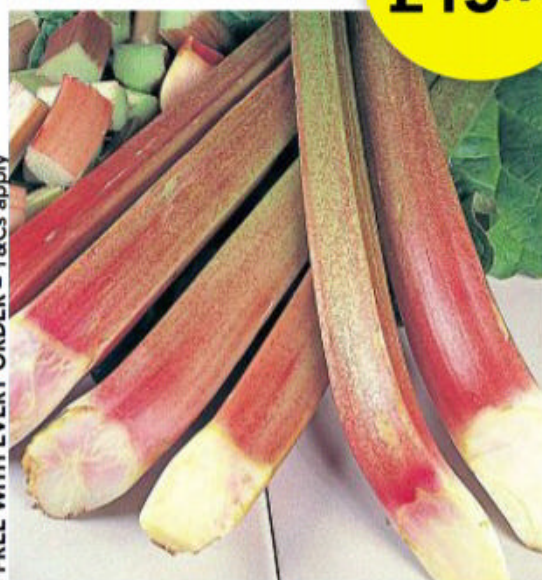
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RHUBARB 'TIMPERLEY EARLY' X3 CROWNS

Rhubarb is a crop very close to our hearts and makes the perfect addition to homely crumbles, pies and preserves. So easy to grow, it is ornamental enough to be used in the flower border, with huge, deep green leaves and attractive red stalks. 'Timperley Early' is one of our favourites and the earliest of all rhubarbs – it is often ready for picking from February onwards (earlier if forced). You can expect long, thick, red based stalks, which are very tender and flavoursome – a real delight for so early in the year! Supplied as one-year-old fruit crowns.

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ALSO IN THE KG SHOP THIS MONTH

LONG CROPPING STRAWBERRY PLANT COLLECTION

The perfect strawberry runner collection to extend your strawberry picking. The collection contains 10 A+ runners each of the below varieties:

■ **'MALLING CENTENARY' (EXTRA EARLY)** – This variety has a superb flavour with uniform and glossy, bright red, conical shaped fruit which is well displayed on the plant, making picking quick and easy. Fruiting from early to late June.



'Malling Centenary' (Early)

■ **'ELEGANCE' (MID-SEASON)** – Expect exceptional fruit quality with a large number of heavy fruited trusses on strong, disease resistant, upright plants. The attractive fruit has strong skin, firm flesh and a magnificent flavour.



'Elegance' (Mid-Season)

■ **'MALWINA' (LATE SEASON)** – Probably the latest strawberry worth growing in our home gardens. Fruits are a very bright red and what's more

the flesh is very red too – much stronger in colour than many other varieties. The large fruits are full of flavour and will crop through to the end of July. Plants are resistant to disease.



'Malwina' (Late season)

SAVE
£12

10 runners of individual variety – £14.95
Buy the collection (30 runners, 10 of each) for £32.85 – saving £12 on individual prices

BLACKCURRANT 'EBONY' FRUIT PLANT

One of the sweetest blackcurrants we've ever tasted! A genuine dessert variety with fruits up to twice the size of standard varieties – perfect for eating fresh off the bush and adding to fruit salads. Thin-skinned, juicy and deliciously sweet but still with a familiar blackcurrant taste, they form a neat and bushy shape with an open habit, making picking easy. Ebony is actually 15% sugar, much higher than other blackcurrants. Plants deal with harsh winters and hot summers well with excellent mildew resistance too.

1 bare-root plant only £11.95
Buy 3 plants for £29.85 – saving £6



SAVE
£6

GIVEAWAYS

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TO ENTER OUR GIVEAWAYS SEE PAGE 114 OR VISIT THE KG WEBSITE

TOPSOIL HEALTH CHECK

When did you last revitalise your beds and borders? What about checking your soil for potentially toxic elements?

For a bumper crop of fruit and veg that's safe to consume, and floral displays worthy of Chelsea, it helps to start with organic-rich, fertile topsoil manufactured from carefully selected, reliable sources.

A long-time trusted supplier to the landscaping industry and an RHS award-winner, Rolawn has developed a range of peat-free topsoils that are both highly productive and exceptionally safe. In fact, Rolawn tests over and above the standards required for certification for residential home-grown use (BS3882:2015).

Rolawn Blended Loam Topsoil is a multi-purpose topsoil suited to a broad range of planting and landscaping schemes. It is a loamy sand including silts, clays and soil conditioners.

Vegetable & Fruit Topsoil from Rolawn is a fertile blend of topsoil, organic matter and soil conditioners formulated for a wide range

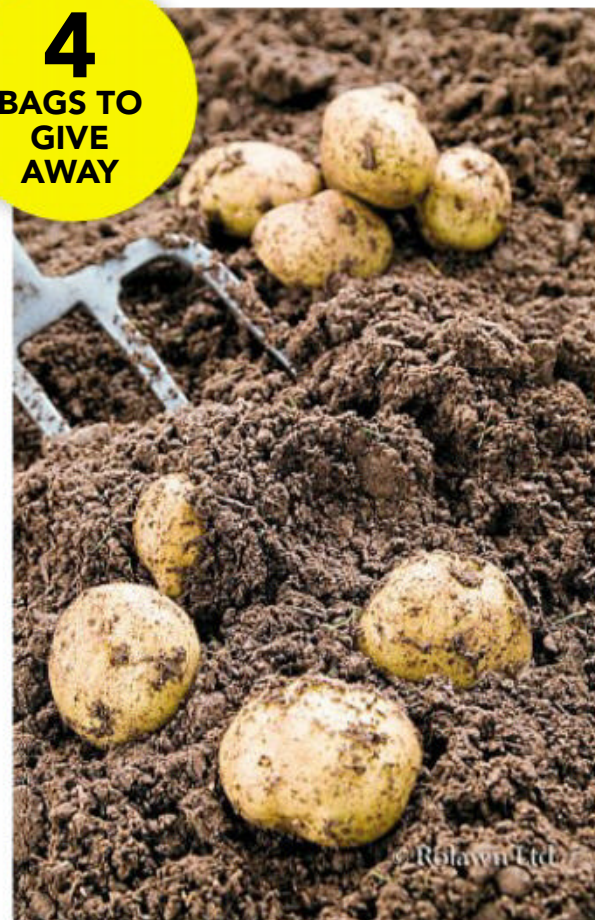


of crops. It does not contain manures, which are variable and potentially harmful.

Both topsoils come in bulk bags containing approximately 1m³ – that's up to 66% more product than one tonne of many alternatives, and covers up to 20m² (24yd²) at a depth of 50mm (2in). The average price per bag, including delivery to a UK mainland address, is £135.

Discover more about turf, topsoils, barks, mulches and lawncare products from Rolawn at www.rolawn.co.uk or call 01904 757300.

4
BAGS TO
GIVE
AWAY



We have four 1m³ bags of topsoil, each worth an average of £135, to give away. Winners can choose either Blended Loam or Vegetable & Fruit Topsoil.

WIN A GRAND DAY OUT AT BLENHEIM PALACE

The Blenheim Palace Flower Show returns for its eighth year from Friday 26 to Sunday 28 June, and we've teamed up with Blenheim Palace to offer you the chance to win a family ticket for four people to this unmissable show, set in the stunning palace grounds in Woodstock, Oxfordshire.

The 2020 show will see the return of the Grand Floral Pavilion, showcasing the UK's finest nurseries with eye-catching and impressive displays. A new addition for this year is a Floral Street. Horticultural experts will be giving talks and answering queries, and you can browse stands selling hundreds of gardening products in the Shopping Village. Other shopping areas include the Home and Country Living Pavilion and the Food and Drink Pavilion.

Admission includes entry to the palace grounds, so you can make a day of it and explore Blenheim Palace's Formal

Gardens and 'Capability' Brown Parkland.

The family tickets are valid for four people to visit the Show, Parkland and Gardens on June 26, 27 or 28. They expire on June 28, 2020, but can be converted on the day to a free annual pass allowing entry to Blenheim Palace, Parkland and Gardens for up to 12 months. (Entry to externally organised events is not included.) Visit www.blenheimpalace.com for more information and opening times.

To find out more about the show, visit www.blenheimflowershow.co.uk

We have seven family tickets, each worth £69, to give away.



7
FAMILY TICKETS
TO GIVE
AWAY



SLUG CONTROL – ORGANIC-APPROVED

Neudorff's methaldehyde-free Sluggo Slug & Snail Killer and Sluggo Slug & Snail Killer Ultra are both certified by the Organic Farmers and Growers Association. The formulations are highly effective, and at the same time protect animals that eat large amounts of slugs, such as hedgehogs and birds.

Their active ingredient is iron-III-phosphate, an iron compound that also occurs in nature. Once it has been ingested, the slugs will withdraw to their hiding places and die there, leaving no unsightly mucus trails.

Sluggo Slug & Snail Killer Ultra, the next-generation slug control from Neudorff, contains double the active ingredient of original Sluggo, which means double the

coverage. Its unique micro pellets provide many more baiting points, making it particularly effective against juvenile slugs in early spring.

For more information, visit www.neudorff.co.uk

We have 14 prize packages of a 650g bottle of Sluggo Slug & Snail Killer Ultra plus an 800g bottle and a 1kg shaker box of Sluggo Slug & Snail Killer, each worth a total of £22.47, to give away.

Use plant protection products safely. Always read the label and product information before use.

**14
PRIZES
TO GIVE
AWAY**



**12
PAIRS TO
GIVE
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BACK DOOR SHOE SOLUTION

With every one of its designs telling a story, Backdoorshoes' new Hedgehog design will both raise money for Iford Meadows Hedgehog Rescue, Bournemouth and delight hedgehog-loving customers. The design is based on photographs of hedgehogs that the rescue centre was nursing back to health.

Backdoorshoes were created to solve the problem of how to make quick trips into the garden without getting soggy socks or fiddling with boots or laces. Made of a foam EVA formula that won't crack or perish, with removable washable insoles, they're waterproof, lightweight, durable and comfortable.

The range of unique, vibrant designs continues to expand, with a new Leopard Flip Flop and Clog also joining the range recently. Ladies' designs are available in UK sizes 3 to 8, while the men's Chunky Tread range comes in sizes 8 to 14.

For more information, visit www.backdoorshoes.co.uk

We have 12 pairs of Backdoorshoes – Hedgehogs, worth £26.95 per pair, for ladies, and Grass Chunky Tread, worth £31.95 per pair, for men – to give away.



**6
VOUCHERS
TO GIVE
AWAY**



STUNNING COLOUR AND TIMBER PROTECTION

Thorndown supplies its range of high-performance water-based eco-paints from the foothills of Glastonbury Tor. Designed for interior and exterior use, they contain architectural-grade VOC-free colour pigments that last for many years.

Peelable Glass Paint is made with a 100% recycled plastic resin and is perfect for greenhouse and conservatory shading. Available in white and in 35 colours, it's easy to use and remove – simply paint it on with a roller, and when it's time to remove it, pick at a corner and peel away! For that decorative touch, choose from six seasonal and floral stencil craft packs.

Thorndown's Wood Paint is highly water-repellent and durable, with a lifespan of

up to 10 years. Choose UV Clear, containing ultraviolet blockers, for preserving the natural timber look, or from 48 colours in the core colour chart – or peruse the new Somerset Heritage Colour Collection.

Find out more at www.thorndown.co.uk

We have six £50 vouchers, to spend on products from the online shop, to give away.



WHAT TO BUY

BACK TO SCHOOL ON GARDENING →

Learn the secrets of self-sufficient vegetable gardening from the world's leading experts with an online course from Learning with experts. Your tutors will lead you step by step through selecting and preparing your vegetable patch, and planting your first seeds, through to advanced techniques for planning your planting and keeping your plants healthy in order to guarantee the very best results and a year-round harvest.

Price: from £29
www.learningwithexperts.com
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UMBRELLA COVER ↓

The Pop n Crop Plant Umbrella is a completely new and unique way to protect fruit, vegetables, herbs and other plants from pests and pets. It really couldn't be simpler or quicker – just open the umbrella, push the spike into the ground until flush, and peg it down, for instant and rather handsome crop protection. It covers an area 1m (39in) in diameter and 75cm (30in) high, and the 4mm mesh stops birds, butterflies and other pests.

Price: £24.99 for one/£59.99 for three
www.gardenskill.com
Tel: 01902 725055

CLOCHE CLIPS →

For the canny gardener, Two Wests' exclusive Super Cloche Clips are a must-have. These sturdy reusable clips enable you to turn spare pieces of glass or plastic into tent-shaped cloches with ease. Made from aluminium with BZP-treated fittings, they will last a lifetime, and having a mechanically tensioned action, they can be used over and over again, season after season.

Price: £3.50 for two/£16.50 for 12, plus £4.99 p&p
www.twowests.co.uk
Tel: 01246 451077



SUBSCRIBER
← **SAVING:**
10% off Pop
n Crop Plant
Umbrellas until
April 1, 2020

STOP WEEDS BEFORE THEY START →

Resolva Weed Preventer from Westland is a first in the UK marketplace, offering an organic, time-saving, preventative weed solution. This highly effective new product is made from 100% plant-based natural ingredients and is safe for children and pets. Resolva Weed Preventer forms a physical barrier that stops weeds establishing, reducing the need for hand-weeding. It is simply sprinkled on to bare soil and then watered in to provide six weeks of protection. It does not damage established plants.

Price: £10.99 for a 2.5kg tub
www.gardenhealth.com
Tel: 01480 443789



ONE-STOP LAWN SHOP ↓

STIGA has been a name to trust on lawnmowers for more than 80 years, and 2020 sees the launch of a brand new website, where you can find STIGA products quickly and also get detailed advice on best-practice lawncare. You'll be able to access all STIGA mowers and gardening tools, including featured products of the month, buy direct or get dealership information, check out expert hints and tips and the STIGA gardening calendar, and access catalogues and manuals.

www.stiga.com/uk
Tel: 0800 669 6326



The new STIGA COMBI 43 Q DAE (RRP £399)

TAKE YOUR VEG UP A LEVEL ↓

The new Green Basics Veggie Wall from elho is an all-in-one solution for patio and balcony gardeners, with a trellis for climbing vegetables, fruits or flowers and a built-in water reservoir within the 78cm by 33cm by 25cm (31 x 13 x 10in) matt black planting trough. Standing 80cm (31in) high, the Veggie Wall is made from waste materials using renewable energy.

Price: £59.99
www.elho.com
Tel: 013 751 57 50



**SUBSCRIBER
← SAVING:**

20% off
D T Brown's Plant Tonic No. 8 until May 31, 2020

JUST THE TONIC ↑

D T Brown's new and exclusive Plant Tonic No. 8 is a skilful combination of natural biofertilisers, concentrated seaweed, yucca extracts and chitosan. For all vegetables, fruit and flowers, this stimulating elixir is scientifically proven to increase flowering, vitality and yields, enhance germination and root development, and promote plant nutrient uptake for better drought and frost tolerance. It gives excellent pest and disease resistance, and is useful for improving soil fertility and healthy microbial activity. Each one-litre bottle makes up to 400 litres, to cover up to 2000m²/21,400 square feet.

Price: £14.95 plus £4.95 p&p
www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk
Tel: 0845 371 0532

TRICOLOR TUBERS ↙

The new Sweet Potato Edible and Ornamental Trio from Thompson & Morgan features high-yielding compact varieties in three striking colours. T&M says: "Our photos show how pretty these ornamental sweet potatoes are, but you'll have to taste them to believe their flavour. Heavy yields mean you'll be surprised at harvest time too." Perfect additions to sunny borders, their compact growth makes them ideal for large patio pots too. The trio comprises 'Tahiti', 'Tatakoto' and 'Makatea'.

Price: £9.99 for three potted plants/£17.99 for six, plus £4.95 p&p
www.thompson-morgan.com
Tel: 0333 400 0033



*** REMEMBER:** To claim your exclusive discounts you MUST first go to www.mudketeers.co.uk and log in using your subscriber number to discover the voucher codes required. Terms and conditions may apply.

SOMETHING
TO SAVOUR!



Spring is in the air so step into action with these delightful dishes, courtesy of our resident chef **Anna Cairns Pettigrew**. This month the key ingredients are onion, radish and spring onion



ROASTED RADISHES

The humble little radish is surprisingly tasty fried in a glug of olive oil. Perfect for serving as a side dish.

SERVES 4 as a side dish

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 15 minutes

- 450g/1lb radishes, sliced in half
- 2 large sprigs of thyme
- Sea salt to taste
- Olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced

1. Heat a large heavy-bottomed frying pan to high heat and add a generous glug of olive oil, then add the radishes. Using a wooden spatula, flip the radishes in the pan while they brown. Cook for a few minutes, allowing them to caramelise.

2. Lower the heat slightly then add the thyme and continue to cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

3. Next, add the garlic and cook for a further two minutes while stirring, taking care not to burn the garlic. Remove from the heat and serve, seasoning with a little salt.



SPRING ONION & HUMMUS ON TOAST

Try something a little different on your next slice of bread with this tasty use of spring onions.

SERVES 2

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 5 minutes

- 1 x 400g tin of chickpeas
- 1 small clove of garlic
- 1 tbsp tahini
- 1 lemon, juice of
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- Sea salt to taste
- 2 large spring onions
- 2 slices of bread

1. Drain and tip the chickpeas into a food processor.

2. Peel and add the garlic, then add the tahini, a good squeeze of lemon juice and the olive oil.

3. Season with a pinch of sea salt, then turn the processor on and blitz.

4. Use a spatula to scrape down the sides of the bowl, then blitz again until smooth.

5. Have a taste and add more lemon juice, salt or a splash of water to loosen if needed. Set aside.

6. Next, cut the spring onions lengthways. Heat a frying pan to medium-high heat, and place the spring onions cut side down on to the hot pan. Sear for two minutes until slightly charred.

7. Prepare the bread slices by topping them with hummus and the cooked spring onions. Serve immediately.



SPRING ONION POTATO CAKES

A great accompaniment to a poached egg and some seasonal asparagus. Or serve them up with a crisp salad for lunch.

SERVES 4

Preparation time: 20 minutes

Cooking time: 25 minutes

- 450g/1lb mashed potato
- 4 spring onions, chopped
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 1–2 tbsp plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- 1–2 tbsp whole milk
- Oil, for frying
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. In a bowl, mix the mashed potato, egg, flour and milk. It needs to be a fairly thick dough, so you may not need all the milk.

2. Season the mixture well with salt and pepper and stir in the spring onions.

3. Using lightly floured hands, form the mixture into potato cakes, about 2cm/¾in thick and 7cm/2¾in diameter.

4. Heat a thin layer of oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add three or four cakes and fry for 3–5 minutes each side, until crisp and golden brown.

5. Keep the potato cakes warm in a low oven while you cook the rest, then serve.

SUBSCRIBE TO *KITCHEN GARDEN VISIT*
WWW.CLASSICMAGAZINES.CO.UK/KG235



RED ONION BIRYANI

Serve this aromatic biryani as a colourful centrepiece with your choice of seasonal veg. Here it is made with red onion, plenty of garlic and green peas.

SERVES 4

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 45 minutes

- 1 tbsp oil
- 1 large red onion
- 1 tbsp sultanas
- 1 thumb piece of ginger
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 potato, diced
- 2 tomatoes, skinned and diced
- A handful of peas
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp curry powder
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 4 cardamom pods
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper

- 500g/17½oz rice
- 1 lemon, juice of
- A handful of cashew nuts

1. Preheat the oven to 220C/fan 200C/gas 7. Pour the oil into a large roasting tin or ovenproof dish with a lid and put in the oven for a couple of minutes to heat through. Add all the vegetables, sultanas and the spices to the dish, except the peas, stirring to coat them in the hot oil. Season with salt and pepper and return to the oven for 15 minutes until beginning to brown.

2. Meanwhile, soak the rice in a bowl of cold water for 15 minutes. Then drain.

3. Remove the vegetable dish from the oven and mix in the soaked and drained rice. Add the peas and 1 litre of freshwater and stir. Lower the oven to 190C/fan 170C/gas 5. Cover the dish tightly with a lid or foil and bake for 30 minutes until the rice is tender and the liquid has been absorbed.

4. Stir in the lemon juice and check the seasoning, then scatter over cashew nuts. Serve.



RED ONION JAM QUICHE

Make this quiche extra special by preparing your own red onion jam. Served alongside a peppery rocket salad it is delicious.

SERVES 4

Preparation time: 35 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour

FOR THE PASTRY

- 110g/3¾oz plain flour
- 50g/1¾oz cold, diced butter
- Pinch salt
- Cold water, to mix

FOR THE ONION JAM

- 1 tbsp oil
- 2 large red onions, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp mustard seeds
- 60g/2oz brown sugar
- 125ml/4½fl oz balsamic vinegar

FOR THE FILLING

- 4 eggs
- 275ml/9¾fl oz double cream
- Salt
- Pepper
- 90g/3oz mature cheddar, grated
- A sprig of thyme

1. Preheat the oven to 200C/fan 190C/gas 6 and put in a baking sheet to warm.

2. Rub the butter into the flour with the salt until you have coarse breadcrumbs. Add water a little at a time using a round-bladed knife to mix until the mixture just comes together. Form into a ball, cover with cling film and refrigerate for 20-30 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, make the onion jam by heating one tablespoon oil in a pan, then add the onions and mustard seeds and cook for 10 minutes until the onion is soft.

4. Add the brown sugar and a splash of water. Cover and cook for 15 minutes, then add the balsamic vinegar.

5. Bring to the boil and simmer for a further 15 minutes until syrupy, set aside.

6. Roll out the chilled pastry and press it gently into a lightly greased flan tin. Prick all over with a fork and bake in the oven on the baking sheet for 20 minutes until pale gold.

7. Whisk together the eggs, cream, seasoning and cheese, then pour into the pastry case. Add spoonfuls of the jam over the egg mixture in a random pattern. Pick the leaves off the thyme and scatter over the quiche.

8. Bake in the oven for 25-30 minutes until the filling is just set and lightly golden. Leave to cool slightly before serving.



RADISH RAITA

Try adding radish to this Indian raita recipe and serve as a dip or with a hot curry.

SERVES 2-4

Preparation time: 10 minutes

- 200ml/7fl oz Greek yogurt
- 2 radishes, grated or thinly sliced
- ¼ tsp red chilli powder
- 1 tsp cumin powder
- 1 green chilli, finely chopped
- Small bunch of parsley and/or coriander leaves, chopped

1. Whisk the yogurt in a bowl until smooth.
2. Add the remaining ingredients and season with a pinch of salt.
3. Serve chilled.



THE BUS STOPS HERE!

Derby's Ashbourne Road and District Allotments has a claim to fame – it is home to three repurposed bus stops. Potty Plotter **Elaine Crick** explains



It's not every allotment site that can boast a bus shelter and surely fewer still that have two. But what other allotment site in the UK can claim three bus shelters? Strange but true!

The 'shelter theme' seems to have grown by accident over the years and rumours have grown as to how that came about so that it has been the frequent subject of conversations among plotters and visitors alike. Each structure is firmly planted on the beautiful allotment site at Ashbourne Road and District Allotments (ARDAA) situated within the centre of Derby and each has a unique story of its own.

The oldest and oddest by far is the bus shelter on Plot 16 which has been carefully tended by Finbar Lillis for the past 17 years. When asked about the unusual discovery on his plot, Finbar recounts this mysterious story.

"This whole plot was in a sorry state back then," he said. "Nothing would have surprised me as to what was in or on the plot and in those days allotmenters did bury what they didn't want! So, when I took over the plot and started to dig, I literally hit what I thought was just a lump of metal. I thought it was corrugated metal sheeting, but as I dug deeper, I uncovered numerous components, including sheets of plate

glass all lying under the soil but quite neatly packed and only a small proportion of the glass was broken."

Finbar then put all the parts together and only recognised what it was when he started to read the graffiti scrawled along the inside of the shelter.

"The kind of things we would have scraped into the metal with the school compass," he confessed, but sadly (though probably for the best), the words and names have since been painted over and are now not visible.

And what of the structure? It sits proudly on the plot and is used as a greenhouse! Blocks have been slotted along the interior to create

raised beds and Finbar has successfully grown cucumbers, tomatoes and aubergines in the soil. It's a great building complete with the 'bus stop' request sign and a most brilliant and unique form of upcycling!

The second bus shelter came about when the site's 'Potty Plotters' Elaine Crick and Julia Slater, of BBC Radio Derby fame, established the Growing Academy in 2018 (see *KG* January 2020). "All of us need a sit down now and again," said Julia, "though we try to keep our male volunteers on their feet for as long as possible! We designed the plot and created the 3D model to show the team what we planned for the plot. We popped a bus shelter on the plan as a perfect seating area and honestly, it was done as a bit of tongue in cheek."

The Plotters shared the plan with the allotmenters on site and "within a few days calls came in from people who had spotted a bus shelter on a nearby piece of land owned by the neighbouring Derby University," said Elaine. "The location was perfect – somewhere adjacent to the 8½ acre allotment site!"

So, armed with the written directions of where the 'treasure' might be located, the Potty Plotters hotfooted it round the boundaries like a couple of hungry bloodhounds. Within half a mile of the allotments the couple spotted the dilapidated, battered bus shelter lying neglected and forlorn on its back, covered in mud, muck and grass. But who was the current owner?

Elaine set to on a mission to trace the owner of the structure. A few telephone calls later she eventually made contact with the head of security at Derby University. Having established ownership and suggesting that the ARDAA could help 'un-fly-tip' the bus shelter, the university agreed! Not only did the head of security give permission for the allotmenters to have the shelter – they offered to deliver it to site! Result!



Finbar's greenhouse bus shelter sits majestically among the plants

"Lots of plot holders use the shelters and they really are a talking point for people"

Once on site, the shelter was scrubbed, polished and secured firmly in position on the Growing Academy plot where so many weary plotters now take refuge and catch up on vegetable stories.

What of the third bus shelter? This was created and designed by our all-round genius Eric! He is one of those men who is never without a tape measure and can turn his hand to almost anything. As the volunteer allotmenters had almost completed the first of their six starter plots on site in spring of 2019, the team decided to buy a seating area for the new allotmenters.

"I think I could make that," said Eric as he looked at the new 3D model of the area. No sooner had he said this than the team scurried about the site and gathered wood from all areas and delivered it to his plot. With help from Martin, Gerry and Barry, Eric created the new seating area – our number 3 bus shelter! And no word of a lie, as Eric and his team worked on the new wooden structure, another plot across site was vacated and in that abandoned shed the Potty Plotters discovered another 'bus stop request' sign. "It was meant to be," laughed Elaine. "Why would someone have kept that in their shed?"

But who cares? The shelter was painted by Tracey and her eight-year-old twins Fynn and Sam Swift and the newly found sign was handed over to Eric like a trophy from the Queen's own treasures. Eric fixed it firmly and squarely to the corner of the beautiful new wooden bus shelter and folk stood back in admiration. A bench (recycled from pallets) was delivered by Sam (another plot holder) for the interior seating.

Lots of plot holders use the shelters and they really are a talking point for people, but no doubt you are wondering if buses come around the site to stop at each of the shelters? "Not to date," announced the Potty Plotters, "but then we have never seen a bus 'root' on an allotment site!" (And the audience groaned).



Eric's wooden recycled bus shelter

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