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WELCOME

... to the March issue of *Grow Your Own*! We are finally in the key sowing months, and here at GYO HQ, we couldn't be happier!

#growwithgyo, our fantastic campaign in partnership with the RHS, is stepping up a gear, so turn to page 30 to find out more and get involved! Remember to head to our forum and show us what you are growing!

On the subject of seeds, you will notice that this is our seed sowing special issue, and you'll see our smart little graphic popping up throughout the magazine. With over 100 types and varieties of veg, fruit and herbs to enjoy, you're sure to find something perfect for you. We have also included some fruit and fungi under this banner that aren't started directly from seed, but are keen to celebrate anything you can get out of the starting gates!

As well as this, Nick Bailey is discussing the benefits of having nettles in your growing space (pg.14), Anne Swithinbank is sharing her top tips for bumper harvests of potatoes (pg.32) and RHS experts are shedding light on growing your best-ever tomatoes (pg.24) and raspberries (pg.20).

Also, our *Great British Growing Awards 2020* are now open, so make sure your favourites don't miss out! Find full details on page 58.

We'd love to see your spring plots, so do get in touch on social media and show us how you are kicking off the season.

Happy growing!

Laura



HAVE YOU HEARD?

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GYO is proud to support the organisations shown below. Their members write regularly for this magazine, ensuring that you receive the very latest top-notch advice from industry experts - it's crucial to us that everything you read on these pages can be trusted implicitly. We're also keen to protect the environment and act responsibly in the garden, so will only list man-made garden chemicals where organic remedies are not deemed suitable. Once you've read this magazine, why not donate it to your local doctors' or dentists' surgery? Failing that, magazines can be put out with your recycling for collection.



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This month...

Keep up to date with the latest news from the growing world

NEWS in brief



Top gardening trends for 2020

The RHS has revealed the gardening trends that it thinks will be popular with the UK's 27 million gardeners in 2020. According to its findings, it's predicted that gardeners will be purchasing larger, more show-stopping houseplants, alongside taking a greater interest in the soil that their plants are grown in with more opting for no-dig. Fruit and vegetable growing is also predicted to see a spike as the population becomes more aware of its plastic use and food miles. Plants the RHS thinks will remain popular includes chillies, such as 'Etna' and 'Meek and Mild', as growers continue to favour them for their ease of growing, flavour and colour. Beans, peas, chickpeas, lentils, soya and other legumes will also become a staple of the vegetable plot, pushing out more traditional choices such as parsnips and calabrese.

● The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh will celebrate its 350th anniversary with a year-long programme of talks, events and exhibitions. The programme will be centred on climate change and biodiversity loss with a focus on the current climate crisis. Highlights include an expedition to Papua New Guinea which hopes to discover and record new species of plants and insects, a birthday party in June and a gala in October.

● Bishop's Castle's allotment garden has been granted £9,896 from the National Lottery Community fund. The money will go towards the Altogether Gardening Project which aims to build a place where gardeners can develop their horticultural skills and relax. This will include a seating area, raised herb beds and two brick-built barbecues.

WE LOVE

Greenfingers, a national charity devoted to creating outdoor spaces for children in hospices, and their family and friends, to enjoy, has designated much needed funds to Rainbows Hospice for Children and Young People in the East Midlands in order to extend and update their remembrance garden. The design will include more seating areas for quiet reflection, new trees for additional privacy, a water feature and paths throughout the garden.



Our March highlights...



ROSE

"Find out how to make a hanging basket for your cherry tomatoes with a simple step-by-step on pg 82!"



BLAKE

"Find comic Kerry Godliman revealing her plot staples and why she hates conversations about compost on pg 114."



LAURA

"If you haven't already joined #growwithgyo make sure you turn to pg 30 and find out how to get involved!"

TOP EVENT THIS MONTH

Home to the Bishops of Bath and Wells for over 800 years, The Bishops Palace in Somerset will be hosting the Rare Plant Fair on March 22. You'll have to cross the Palace's moat and drawbridge in order to explore the 14 acres of gardens and purchase interesting and unusual plants. For more information visit rareplantfair.co.uk

32%

of foreign visitors are interested in visiting England's parks and gardens

Source: VisitBritain

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A buzzing plot

"Having given up my allotment (with some reluctance, due to chronic illness) my grow-your-own adventures continue as a beekeeper. I'm now entering my second full season growing bee-food-forage flowers in my out-apiary (previously an unused vegetable garden at the back of a friend's house) in Sennen, near Land's End in west Cornwall. This year I plan to incorporate herbs and other edibles amongst the flowers, adding colour, interest and flavour to the menu for humans and insects alike."

Lisa Spooner



Star Letter

Sharing is caring

"One of the most exciting parts about this time of year is about planning what I want to grow. Like every other reader, I try and balance tried-and-tested traditional veg (I'll always grow my potatoes, runner beans, peas, tomatoes and carrots) mixed with a few new things each year. I successfully grew hanging basket tumbling tomatoes for the first time last year and had a go at some (not quite so successful) sweetcorn. I love to get my *Grow Your Own*

subscription each month, not just to read the magazine, but also to find out what free seeds are thrown in for good measure. Thanks to *GYO* I rarely have to buy many of my own seeds because my greenhouse is well-stocked. The ones that I don't want to use or have already got enough of, I swap with others at my Dorset allotment meaning I'm always quite a popular neighbour!"

Margaret Litchfield

Thanks for sharing your story Margaret. Your WOLF-Garten Star Letter prize is on its way!

Show us your growing pics!



"I grew kohlrabi for the first time last year ('Azure Star'). They were stunning!"

Kelly Bramill



"These little patio pot aubergines were amazing last year and just kept on producing! More of these this year alongside some 'Black Beauty' I think."

Gill Irving



"My assistant gardener had great success with his heritage tomatoes along with potatoes and beans."

Lynne Drewery



Write to us

Share your garden tales, pictures, community projects and tips with us for a chance to win a pair of WOLF-Garten gloves. Our *Star Letter* will receive a pair of these gloves which are designed to offer a snug fit with a breathable fabric, just state small, medium or large with your letter. Email **blake.roberts@aceville.co.uk** or write to us at 25 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Road, Colchester, Essex, CO2 8JY.



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OVER to YOU

We asked our followers whether they've taken any measures to help boost earthworm numbers on the plot. Here's what they said:

"With 'no dig' the worms soon return. I would never dig my garden now that I realise how much it harms soil life."

@millie.williamson

"When we first moved to our little farm there were no earthworms at all. We started adding shredded leaf mulch each autumn after creating designated beds and paths. We only use organic fertilisers and adopted no-till methods."

@gailkerr

"With my allotment, I had to dig it over because it was so overgrown, and not a single worm to be seen! A year on, mulching and very little soil disturbance and finally the worms are back!"

@the_shepherd_ess

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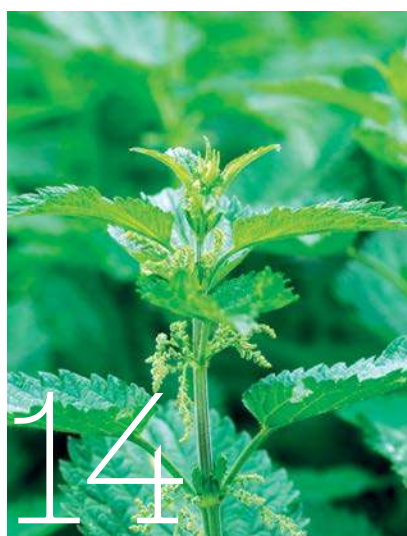
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March's **BEST CROPS!**

Top expert advice to inspire you to grow more
in the fruit and veg garden this month



Nettles

Nasty or nice? Nick Bailey continues his series on 'useful' plants with the notorious nettle



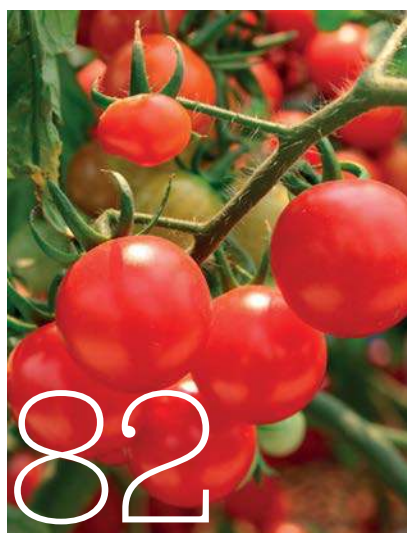
Super spuds

Anne Swithinbank delves into the dos and don'ts to growing tasty tatties



Edible houseplants

Have a go at growing all manner of edibles in your home with David Domoney's advice



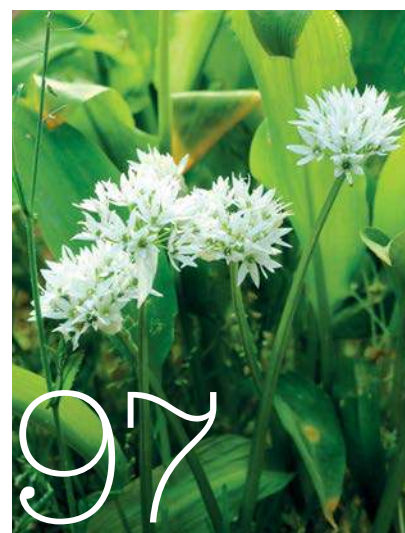
Tumbling toms

Learn how to make a hanging basket for tomatoes with this extract from *Small Summer Gardens*



Fruit garden

Kim Stoddart tells us how to up our fruit garden game with her list of the most rewarding fruits



Garlic galore

We follow Ellen Mary as she forages for and grows wild garlic this spring

Jobs on the *Plot*

The evenings are getting lighter and there is a feeling in the air that spring isn't too far away. As things start to wake up again in the garden, it's time to get to work to give yourself a head start on the growing season ahead. There's sowing, digging, weeding and pruning to get done, so don't dawdle, or you'll only have to play catch-up later!



The Herb Garden

Potted herbs will be coming back into growth now. Give them a good water and a liquid feed to set them up for spring. Start off sowings of basil, under cover. Sow small pinches into modular cell trays, and place in a heated propagator. And finally, check your jars of herbs stored in the autumn. If fully dried they shouldn't go mouldy - remove any showing signs.

Container growing

- Plant early potato varieties in containers or potato bags. Use a generous amount of multi-purpose compost and place in a bright, frost-free location.
- Start off small batches of salad leaf sowings. Use hardy mixes of mizuna, rocket, lettuce and mustard, or sow individual varieties every fortnight.
- Sow some carrots in deep pots (the ones used to sell roses are ideal for small plots), choosing early varieties recommended for forcing.
- It's time to get clean! Scrub any pots or tubs destined for spring sowings using a stiff-bristled brush and hot, soapy water, to deter diseases.
- Top-dress fruit trees growing in containers, using a granular slow-release balanced fertiliser to ensure sustained, steady growth.



Seasonal tasks

The vegetable patch

- Make runner bean and celery trenches. Because these crops need rich, fertile soil it's a good idea to dig troughs (around 50cm wide, and 30cm deep) to fill with compost now. When your plants are ready to be moved here, the organic matter should have all rotted down.
- March is a great month to plant asparagus crowns. Choose a weed-free, well-drained site with little shade, and water well for their first summer. Weed and mulch established beds to set them up for the year.
- Keep some seeds in the tin! Delay sowing parsnips till April or May, as this makes them a little less vulnerable to canker disease infection.
- Top-dress overwintering onions with a high-nitrogen feed (chicken pellets are great). This encourages ample leaf growth which produces big bulbs.
- Plant shallot sets this month, leaving 15cm of space between each bulb and arranging them in rows 30cm apart to allow enough room for development.
- Spring clean your plot by removing spent autumn crops, before sowing new, related ones in spring. This helps to discourage overwintering pests and diseases.
- Start any early varieties of chitted potatoes. If you're in a cold part of the UK with heavy soil, you might want to wait till the end of the month to do this.

Seed Sowing Special



PROBLEM OF THE MONTH:

Weed infestations

When are weeds not a problem on the plot? But it's particularly crucial to stay on top of this task by making sure you're tackling weeds as soon as they spring up - you'll thank yourself later! The battle against these unwanted guests can seem never-ending but if you allow them to flourish they can crowd between your precious plants, depriving them of light, water and nutrients. Combat annuals like nettle, groundsel and chickweed by stopping them from setting seed and making sure to avoid putting in your compost heap, whereas perennials (bindweed, dandelion, knotweed) should be carefully removed from the root.



Under cover

- For those suffering from an infestation of mice, sow pea seeds in modules under the protection of a glass house before transplanting them outside.
- Got a propagator to hand? Sow some aubergine seeds in a tray filled with compost and keep them warm.
- Allow adequate spacings between edibles in your greenhouse. This will help to prevent fungal diseases as the humidity levels rise.
- Sow seeds thinly and use fresh water to irrigate to prevent damping off disease. Bring fresh tap water up to room temperature before watering.
- Sow perennial herbs such as lemon balm and oregano under cover to enjoy these flavoursome leaves year round.



Focus on this:

Making space for everything

It's time to carry out the annual juggling act in your propagating area, so how do you sow all you need in the limited space that you have? Only grow what you will eat (e.g. three tomato plants instead of 20), and stagger your sowings, choosing types that mature at different rates. Hold back on sowing quick-to-crop veg such as courgettes, and concentrate on those that take time to mature, such as hot chillies and melons. Set up a plant swapping circle with friends, and sow your crops into small pots, only pricking out into larger modules or pots as and when needed.

Fruits of your labour

- Pollinate any early blooms that appear on peaches, nectarines and their relatives, because pollinators are likely to be scarce at this time.
- It's your last chance to get bare-root fruit trees or bushes in the soil, as late spring plantings won't have time to settle in before the summer ensues.
- Gently run your hands over any open blooms on your forced strawberries. This will help to pollinate them, leading to uniform-sized and swollen fruits.
- Mulches help to insulate roots, lock in moisture and suppress weeds. Apply an 8cm layer of compost around trees and bushes, but only if the soil isn't frozen over.
- Cooking apples, plums and pears are all heavy feeders, so meet their needs by applying a top-dressing of a high-nitrogen feed this month.





GYO
says

**Chopped nettles
can be added
to the compost
heap in order
to speed up
decomposition –
but no roots!**



Useful Plants:

Urtica dioica

Notoriously nasty, nettles actually have a host of garden uses. **Nick Bailey** tells us more...

A gardener I once worked with told me if you hold your breath and grab a stinging nettle you won't get stung. I got him to demonstrate. Guess what? It's an old-wives tale he lived to regret! But despite their fearsome reputation, nettles or *Urtica dioica* are surprisingly useful plants with a host of applications in the garden and allotment. Now, before you think I've totally lost the plot, I'm not advocating growing and nurturing this native plant, which is usually referred to as a weed, in your carefully constructed raised beds. But what I'm suggesting is allowing a small (manageable) patch some space on your plot or harvesting it from other (less tended) gardens.

Nettles are part of the *Urticaceae* family of plants which is distributed across much of the planet and includes many useful

genera, along with a few which are utterly terrifying. One of the most commercially useful is *Boehmeria nivea*. In its native Asia it is used as a fibre plant for paper production along with its reputed medicinal uses in treating wounds, impetigo and haemorrhoids! Its less friendly cousin resides in the rainforest of Northern Australia where it sits awaiting a naive passer-by. It has similar spines to our native nettle, yet these little blighters pierce the skin and continue to travel into the body causing months of pain. Sadly, purveyors of D-list humiliation Messrs McPartlin and Donnelly appear yet to have encountered it. Like our native nettle, its poison-loaded spines are made from silica (basically glass) and by brushing against them we snap the glass tips off, effectively creating mini hypodermic needles.

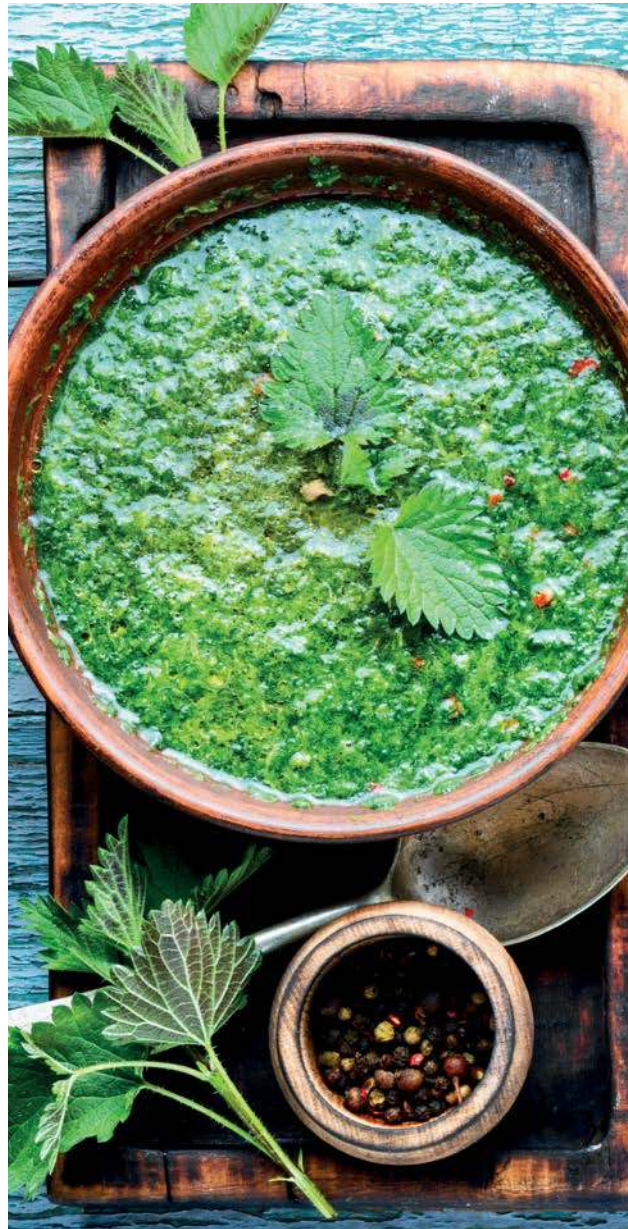
In spite of its occasional perils, *urtica* really is a good plant to have around. It makes for great eating, either steamed like spinach, souped or made into a tea. It's also the favoured food stuff of many a butterfly caterpillar and can even indicate the quality of your soil.

As a spreading perennial, however, it does need keeping in check. Do this either by plunging a root barrier around it or digging up chunks to reduce the patch each season. In terms of giving back to the garden you can treat nettle virtually like a crop, chopping it to the ground two to three times a year to produce fresh stems and leaves which are packed with nutrients. Try layering nettles into your compost heap in a thin strata before adding dryer matter above. Its high nitrogen levels are a great activator for the heap and keep the nutrient levels up.

It's also a highly successful source of liquid feed. Cut a big bunch of fresh leaves and weigh them down at the bottom of a barrel or bucket of water. The subsequent nitrogen- and phosphate-rich liquid feed can be diluted down x 10 and used on most crops. A managed patch of nettles has other benefits, too. Little else will grow in or among it and its acts as a great 'sacrificial species' which aphids are often attracted to more than our crops.

EAT IT!

Various novel foods I've tried over the years wind up consigned to the 'OK-done-that-don't-need-to-do-it-again' list, but nettle soup is not one of them. I confess I was inevitably sceptical 10 springs back as I gathered the leaves of my childhood foe because a telly chef had said it was a good idea. Nonetheless I persevered and gathered a good trug of fresh nettle tips (the first 5cm or so). They're normally not too sting-y at this stage but gloves are still advisable. Making a soup of them is as simple as creating a basic stock, adding potatoes for bulk and viscosity and bunging in a good few handfuls of steamed nettle tips. Then simply whizz the lot together into a smooth consistency, adding a dash of cream before serving. Alternatively treat the tips like spinach by steaming them and serving with butter. The taste is good, being slightly stronger than spinach with a good hint of iron. Nettle tea is also a cinch. Just drop a few leaves into boiling water, removing them after a couple of minutes to avoid a bitter taste. Nettle tea is said to have numerous health benefits including helping weary muscles and reducing hay fever but what is without doubt is the high nutrient levels of this humble plant. It has substantial doses of magnesium, calcium and perhaps most importantly, iron.



GOOD FOR WILDLIFE...

It goes without saying that the greater the diversity of wildlife on your plot the greater the chances you have of naturally balancing out the foes. Nettles are well known as an egg-laying plant for butterflies, but they are also the foodstuff for the subsequent caterpillars of small tortoise shell, red admiral, comma and painted ladies. They are also the favourite egg-laying plant of ladybirds and the more of these aphid-munching critters we can attract the better.

NB. Dead nettles i.e. those without a sting can also support wildlife. *Lamium album* for example is a food plant for the caterpillars of two UK moth species.



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HOW TO: Prop up plants, get the best from fruit bushes, introduce asparagus pea and grow tantalising tomatoes

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Plant supports Give your plants the best care possible with this guide to making wigwams and other plant supports

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Days out The top events taking place at the RHS gardens in March



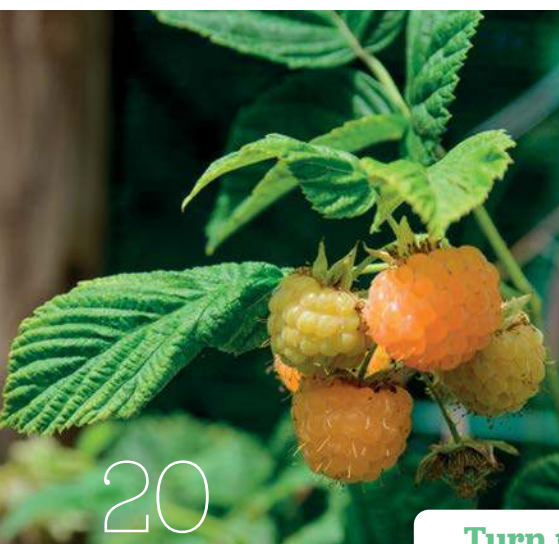
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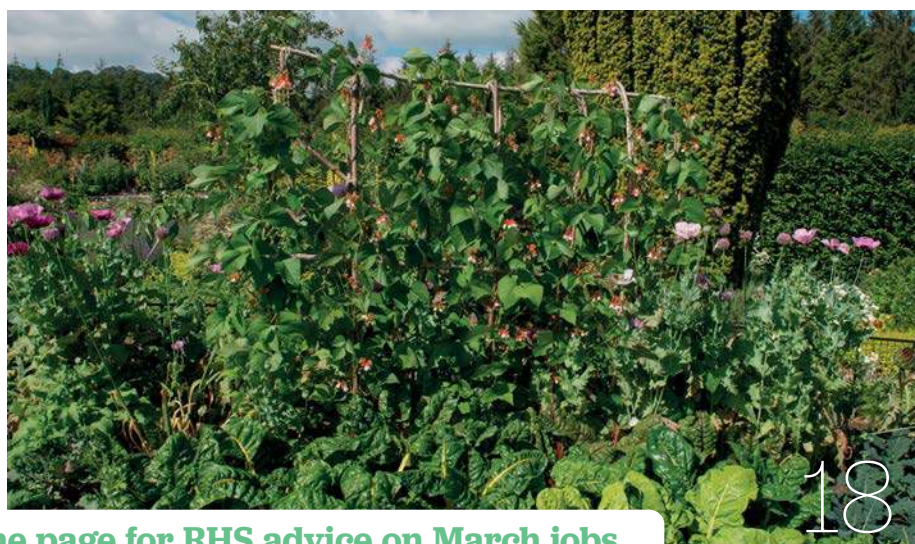
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Turn the page for RHS advice on March jobs

RHS TECHNIQUE: SUPPORTS FOR PLANTS



Francesco Ponziani, Horticulturist at RHS Harlow Carr Gardens, advises on the making of wigwams and other plant supports

Having the right plant support in the vegetable garden can significantly increase productivity and adds another aesthetic dimension to your growing space. Supports need not be expensive elaborate metal masterpieces, but can be made from natural and simple materials that can be acquired relatively cheaply and easily.

Hazel is a popular choice for plant supports due to it being strong, straight, long and sustainable, owing to the fact it can be coppiced. Coppicing is an ancient practice of cutting shoots down at the base of the plant to encourage young new shoots to grow. This process is repeated every couple of years so that a continuous supply of young material is made available.

Bamboo canes are also a popular choice for structure building as they offer similar structural qualities to hazel. However, they are often imported from China unless you can source your own.

Willow is another fantastic material that is often used for plant supports. Willow responds very well to being entirely coppiced each year producing four-six long stems or whips. These whips can be used for a host of structures and supports, however, willow roots very easily, so it

should be dried out then re-hydrated by soaking if you're planning on using it in close contact with the soil. Unless, of course, a living willow structure is intended. Willow is also very flexible and can be woven between more rigid materials such as bamboo and hazel, allowing you to make something quite artistic.

Hazel and bamboo offer excellent materials for making wigwams for growing peas, beans, ridge cucumbers and sweet peas. To make a simple wigwam, use at least 5 bamboo canes or hazel poles 2-2.5m tall. Willow can be used as long as it has been dried out. Arrange them so that the base forms a circle at least 1m in diameter by pushing them in the soil 20cm deep. Tie the tops together with strong twine about 20-30cm from the end. This is your wigwam frame. It can be made bigger and more elaborate by using more canes or poles. Once you have completed your frame, string should be wrapped around the frame to provide anchor points for your climbing plants. Alternatively, willow can be woven between the frame to create something very ornamental or tall twiggy material known as brash can be placed between each vertical. Another popular method for growing climbing crops

is to make a sloped double open A-frame structure with a fixing cane along the top for added strength. These frames often straddle paths so that you can walk underneath them. Bamboo or hazel is ideal and should be around 2.4m tall with pea netting fixed inside the frame. Alternatively, brash can be tied inside the frame for the peas to latch onto. The same can be done for climbing French beans and runner beans, however as beans don't produce tendrils, instead of the pea netting or brash, they require individual vertical supports to wrap themselves around and climb. Vertical supports should be spaced 15cm apart within the A-frame structure for each plant to climb.



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RASPBERRIES



RHS Harlow Carr Gardens
horticulturalist, **Francesco
Ponziani**, tells us how to get the
best from our fruit bushes



The European or Red Raspberry (*Rubus idaeas*) is a relatively short-lived deciduous perennial plant belonging to the *Rosaceae* family. They produce woody stems, referred to as canes, which can reach heights of up to 3m tall in one season and can be found growing wild in cool hillside climates from Scandinavia, throughout Europe to central Asia. The stems are biennial, in which they grow vegetatively in their first year, flower and fruit in the second, then die back. The root system is perennial and produces replacement canes each year. Yields can be eaten raw, made into amazing jams or cooked desserts.

Fruits can be red, yellow or black being up to 2.5cm long and provide good levels of vitamin C, niacin and riboflavin. They have been described by many as being the finest fruit, more so than strawberries; however because the fruits perish so rapidly their use isn't as common. Commercially only the toughest cultivars are sold which aren't nearly as delicious as the selection available for the home gardener. Raspberry cultivars can be either summer fruiting or autumn fruiting. Having both varieties can give you fruit from June through to October.

Summer fruiting

Summer-fruiting types produce fruit on canes from the previous year. In the first year after planting, the canes are simply tied into their supports and will not fruit. Popular

supports include horizontal wires at 60cm vertical intervals between two sturdy posts 5m apart. The following year these tied in canes will fruit, usually early to mid-summer, which are then cut to the ground as soon as cropping is finished. The current season's canes are tied-in to replace the old canes. In late winter, canes are cut to 15cm above the top wire. Once rows become established, only the strongest canes should be selected for tying in at about 10cm apart and weak or spindly shoots should be removed. Raspberries tend to sucker from the root system and stems can pop up away from the supports. These should be removed but can be used as new raspberry canes.

Autumn fruiting

Autumn-fruiting types fruit on the current season's canes. Canes are not tied into any supports but are simply fenced in by parallel wires between two sturdy posts. Short horizontal lengths of timber are attached to each post, one at the top, and one 60cm below with the wires attached to create a 60cm wide supportive enclosure around the canes. In late winter, all the canes should be cut to ground level.



A reliably good autumn cultivar to try is 'Autumn Bliss' AGM; which produces fruits that are firm, large and deep red with excellent flavour. Another tried-and-tested favourite is 'Joan J' an AGM producing high yields of well-balanced berries. 'Polka' is another one to try. Producing high yields of fruits from late summer until the first frost, the fruits are large and of excellent quality with an exceptional shelf life.

Cultivation

Before planting raspberries, the site needs to be well prepared by incorporating plenty





of organic matter such as a well-rotted manure. As raspberries like it slightly on the acidic side, with a pH of between 6.5-6.7, avoid using spent mushroom compost to prepare the beds as this may contain lime and increase the pH, reducing the plants capabilities to take up nutrients. Raspberries will benefit greatly with an application of blood fish and bone or growmore followed by a mulch of well-rotted manure every year in late winter.

The site should also be in full sun and sheltered if possible as the canes can be easily damaged in the wind. A sheltered spot will also aid with the pollination of the flowers by insects. Before you get started, perennial weeds should be cleared.

Bare rooted raspberry canes can be purchased from October up until February, usually by mail order, and should be planted as soon as they arrive. Space plants 45-60cm apart, and if planting more than one row, space the rows 1.8m apart, ideally running north to south, so as not to shade each other.

As raspberries are naturally shallow-rooted, avoid planting too deep. After planting, prune the canes to within 25cm of the ground. In spring, when the new canes appear, the old stumps can be cut down to ground level.

Alternatively, canes can be bought in pots as long canes (one year old) and should give you a crop, albeit a small one, in the first season. These long canes should not be pruned after planting but at the end of the cropping season.

Problems

Some common pests include birds and raspberry beetle. To protect from birds, the only real solution is a physical barrier such as a fruit cage. Raspberry beetle cause dry patches to develop at the stalk-end in midsummer and small white maggots can be found inside the fruit. Infected fruit can be picked off; however, this will not stop the spread. Pulling back thick mulches in winter to allow birds to eat the pupae may help or



alternatively stick to autumn raspberries as these are seldom affected.

Common diseases include cane blight and spur blight. Both are fungal diseases that can reduce yields. To combat them, avoid overcrowding by thinning and ensure plants are well watered during the summer months.

Aphids can also be a problem on raspberries which suck the sap from the leaves, making them curl and die. Although it can weaken the plant, it seldom causes extensive damage. By the time the raspberry plant is mature, however, aphids are the main transport vector for transmitting viruses. Organic contact sprays can be used to help control populations.

Viruses are very common in raspberries. Infected plants lose vigour and have reduced yields over time. The only real solution is to replace crops, ideally in another location. Virus spread in raspberries is mainly through aphids but also through nematodes (microscopic eelworms) in the soil. Some symptoms of infected plants include; yellowing, blotching and flecking of leaves, general weak growth and crumbly fruit.

Always buy plants that are certified as virus-free and destroy plants as soon as yields start to fall and you suspect them having succumbed to viruses. Typically, canes should be replaced every seven-12 years, ideally in another location to minimise risk.

What are your favourite raspberry varieties? Let us know what you are growing, and don't forget to share pictures of your harvests with us on our social media platforms.

RHS TOP RASPBERRY VARIETIES

Early season:

- 'Malling Minerva'
- 'Glen Moy'
- 'Ruby Beauty'

Mid-season:

- 'Malling Admiral'
- 'Tulameen' AGM
- 'Glen Ample' AGM

Late-season:

- 'Leo' AGM
- 'Glen Magna'

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Raspberries are an excellent crop to grow as once established they will crop heavily, producing up to 1.5kg (over 3lbs) of fruit per cane for 10 years or more. They can be planted as close as 40cm apart with a gap of 1.5m between rows. When planting it is important to choose a well-drained, sunny or semi-shaded spot and to incorporate plenty of compost or well-rotted manure.



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RSP005	Raspberry 'Malling Admiral' (pack of 6)	£12.70		
RSP006	Raspberry 'Tulameen' (pack of 6)	£12.70		
RSP002	Raspberry 'Polka' (pack of 6)	£13.55		
GOS003	Gooseberry 'Invicta' (1 plant)	£8.90		
CUR001	Blackcurrant 'Ben Connan' (1 plant)	£8.45		
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Seed
Sowing
Special

Edible exotics: Asparagus pea



RHS Chief Horticultural Advisor, **Guy Barter**, reveals the information you need to grow these sprawling annuals

Asparagus pea is not a pea, although it is a legume. If the seedpods are eaten young, either lightly steamed or boiled, it has a fresh asparagus-like flavour. It has never been an important crop but it has been recorded in gardening literature for over 200 years.

Scientifically named *Lotus tetragonolobus* or in older books, *Tetragonolobus purpurea*, it is a Mediterranean annual plant that grows in poor, dry infertile soils, with a sprawling habit growing up to 20cm high. It has crimson-brown flowers and three leaved feathery clover type leaves, and is in fact well worth a place as a modest ornamental annual flower. Asparagus pea is a weedy plant in vineyards or disturbed ground in southern Europe and can fix nitrogen through its root nodules like other legumes. Since its close relatives, such as birdsfoot trefoil, fix nitrogen well, it is likely to do so in Britain. There are no named cultivars.

Sow seed 4cm deep from April indoors, and outdoors from May until July, allowing 25cm between plants and 40cm between rows. They will scramble up twigs if given the chance which keeps the pods away from dirt and slugs. Make sure to protect early sowings with fleece or cloches as asparagus peas are not frost hardy. Any garden soil in full sun suits them. They also thrive in containers, being particularly effective in

hanging baskets, and any good multipurpose peat-free growing medium will work well.

Gather the fluted or winged pods as soon as they can be handled and certainly before they reach 3cm in length. They become unpleasantly woody very quickly and harvesting every day in hot weather



might be necessary. Steam, microwave or lightly boil and eat warm with butter. Alternatively, fry in batter or add cooked to salads as you might snow peas where their delicate, green, fresh flavour can be fully appreciated. Pickling has also been recorded. The immature seeds can be shelled and cooked like garden peas. The yield is modest so patience is necessary.

Collecting mature seed to sow the following years is easy. Like many legumes, the dry seeds contain potentially harmful chemicals and are probably best consumed in moderation. Dried seeds have been ground into a coffee substitute.

Asparagus pea is free from significant pests or diseases, but watch out for slugs and greenfly.

Protect early sowings with fleece or cloches as asparagus pea is not frost hardy

Tomatoes



RHS horticulturalist **Charlotte Rodick** shows you how to produce plenty of juicy toms



It took Europeans a while to accept the edibility of the tomato, but their rich and juicy flavour is an essential part of many dishes. Once you've tasted homegrown tomatoes you will always have to grow them, it's addictive. My favourite way to eat a tomato is freshly picked from my garden, warmed by the sun then munched on as I potter.

What to grow

Tomatoes come in many colours, sizes and growing habits, spoiling you for choice and making selection perplexing. Start with selecting a growth habit that suits your growing space. Bush tomatoes are ideal for containers, as they usually grow to a height and spread of around 60cm. Tumbling toms are smaller still, bred with the hanging basket in mind. They are both a great selection for a small garden or patio.

Cordon/vine tomatoes are grown as one straight stem which needs to be supported



with wires or a cane. The flowers are formed on sideshoots (trusses) which grow at intervals from leaf axils. No longer restricted to red and round, the world of tomatoes has gone technicoloured (yellow, orange, maroon, green, stripy) with shapes and flavours to suit most culinary needs. Large beefsteaks are ideal for sandwiches and salads; plum, pear and oblong are suitable for sauce; cherry tomatoes perfect for salads, roasting, and eating on the spot in your garden. For a beginner, cherry tomatoes are more rewarding with an abundance of fruit and tend to suffer fewer cultural problems.

How to grow

Begin sowing in late winter to early spring. This varies depending on the final growing position. January for heated greenhouses; February for unheated but wait until March if they are going outdoors. Fill a seed tray or small pot with fresh multipurpose compost right to the top, then gently firm the compost. Space the seeds on the surface, allowing at least 1cm around each seed (this makes pricking out easier). Cover with a fine layer of compost or vermiculite, label clearly and water with tap water. Then place on a warm sunny windowsill or in a heated propagator.

For germination, tomatoes need a minimum of 18°C but 22°C is better for quicker germination. Once the two seed leaves have fully expanded the seedlings are ready to be pricked out into individual pots of 7-9cm filled with multipurpose compost. Seedlings grown on a windowsill or in poor light can become straggly and weak. Rotate the trays and pots on a daily basis to help encourage even growth. You may require another potting on if they become too pot bound. It takes about 12 weeks before tomato seedlings are big enough for transplanting into their final container or row. If you're struggling for time and growing space, you could always skip the seed growing stage and buy your plants from a garden centre or mail order.

Once the roots have filled the pot it's time to plant out the specimen into their



Aftercare

Cordon/vine tomatoes will require a cane or wire to grow up as this supports the weight of the plant as it develops. As the crop grows, it will start to produce trusses of yellow flowers, which will later become the fruit. To help the production and ripening of fruit only allow each indoor plant six trusses and outdoor plants four trusses. Do this by pinching out the top of the plant. Vegetative growths called side shoots are also produced that need to be kept on top of. Bush tomatoes generally don't require staking, but a central cane will help prevent the plant from collapsing.

Regularly water and feed for a healthy crop of tomatoes. With watering, consistency is the key, sometimes two to three times a day in hot weather. Use a high potassium feed after the first two trusses have formed or as per manufacturer's instructions. Outdoor-grown tomatoes are vulnerable to tomato blight. With luck the season will be kind and allow you to harvest yields before the blight strikes. There are blight-resistant cultivars that are worth considering.

How to harvest

Once the fruit has just reached its full colour and there is a wonderful fresh tomato smell, it's time to pick. Ripening will start in dribs and drabs and then all of a sudden you will get a glut of ripe fruit.

final destination. However, keep an eye on the weather as you don't want your young plants to catch a chill. By April it should be okay to plant out into an unheated greenhouse and safe to plant outside late May/early June. It all depends on those night temperatures. Tomatoes do like a large amount of root room so choose a container no smaller than 10 litres to provide stability and to help reduce water stress.

Grow bags are readily available and easy on the pocket, but they lack enough depth for three full-grown tomato plants. You can increase the compost capacity by topping the planting hole with a ring or bottomless pot and fill with compost, then plant into the ring. For open ground or a bed within your greenhouse improve the soil before planting by adding homemade compost or well-rotted manure, a 5cm covering, lightly forked in will give your plants the perfect start.





Your questions **ANSWERED!**



Guy Barter shares his knowledge to solve your gardening problems



Simple **guide**

March sowings are potentially achievable by building raised beds to enhance drainage

Sowing early

Q I live up north and conditions tend to remain steadfastly chilly. I don't have a greenhouse, but is there any way I can get involved with early sowings?

Jim Smith, via email

Guy says: "In wet cold districts, April is as early as it gets, but March sowings are potentially achievable by building raised beds to enhance drainage. Wet soils remain cold for longer than well-drained ones. Covering ground with cloches in late winter to shed rain and trap warmth is very effective, advancing the sowing season by two weeks or more. Covering with clear polythene does not allow evaporation so is less effective except on sandy soils. Alternatively, buy in plants raised commercially in greenhouses; lettuces, calabrese, cauliflowers, salad onions amongst others reliably give early crops. Onion and shallot sets are also reliable."



First-time pruner

Q I have heard that I may need to prune new fruit trees but I have never pruned anything before – help! What should I be looking for?

Katrina Cotton, via Facebook

Guy says: “New fruit trees usually come ready formed from the nursery with three to five strong branches forming an open-cup shape. Early pruning is all about developing that framework to form a goblet shaped cropping tree by shortening the main shoots in winter by about a third to induce growth in the right direction. Cut above an outward facing bud for outward rather than inward growth. Leave side shoots unless they cross or are crowded or growing within 15cm of each other. Any strong shoots growing into the centre of the tree or at the top must go.”

Hand pollination

Q How do I hand pollinate strawberries? Mine are under cover and I am concerned that pollinating insects can't get to them.

Lianne Bridge, via email

Guy says: “Lack of pollinators can reduce strawberry crops or lead to lopsided lumpy berries due to imperfect pollination. Strawberries have ‘perfect’ flowers containing both male and female parts. If necessary, use a small soft paintbrush or a teased out cotton bud to pick up pollen from the male stamens and transfer this to the female pistils in the centre of the flower. ‘Stroking’ the flowers is sufficient. Warm sunny afternoons when the pollen is readily released and germinates best is the time to pollinate. Strawberries flower over quite long periods so frequent hand pollination will be required.”



Feeding time?

Q Should I be giving my crops any sort of feed at this time of year? Or is this generally just done once they are fruiting?

Ian Brown, via email

Guy says: “Feed fruit trees and bushes in late winter annually using potassium-rich general fertiliser, or better with the fertiliser suggested by a laboratory soil analysis that is no more than five years old. For outdoor vegetables, use a balanced fertiliser before transplanting or sowing, remembering that too much fertiliser inhibits germination. Six weeks later, feed hungry crops such as beetroot and cabbages with a nitrogen-rich fertiliser. This should suffice until harvest time. Again, fertilising according to a recent soil analysis is ideal. Feed container-grown plants every week, initially with a general feed, switching to a potassium-rich one when flowers appear.”

Diary dates

March 2020 Events



2 March–1 May

**A Celebration of Wordsworth,
All RHS Gardens**

Dazzling displays of daffodils celebrate 250 years since the birth of the poet who inspired a nation with *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*.

**[rhs.org.uk/gardens/
whats-on-at-rhs-gardens](https://rhs.org.uk/gardens/whats-on-at-rhs-gardens)**

24 March

**Spring Community Free
Day, all RHS gardens**

A chance to visit all four RHS Gardens for free.

**[rhs.org.uk/gardens/
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28 March

**Early Spring Plant Fair,
East Lambrook Manor Gardens,
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Now firmly established as the best 'boutique' plant fair in Somerset, this intimate twenty-two nursery event is a great opportunity to kick start the gardening year. A huge choice of interesting and often unusual plants will be on offer, along with expert advice, from knowledgeable independent growers across the South West and beyond. Discounted entry for RHS Members.

eastlambrook.com

7–15 March

**Science Week,
RHS Garden Wisley**

Discover the weird and wonderful world of garden plants with a family trail, fascinating displays and interactive experiments to try.

rhs.org.uk/wisley

12 March

**Beginner's Propagation,
RHS Garden Wisley**

Join us behind the scenes in our brand new propagation facility in Wisley Village and learn how to save a fortune on plants by growing your own from seeds and cuttings. This full-day course will cover the basics of propagation and show you the best techniques to produce the most successful results.

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rhs.org.uk/wisley

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Beetroot Boltardy
Broad Bean Masterpiece
Broccoli Purple Sprouting
Brussels Sprout Brodie F1
Cabbage Caraflex F1
Cabbage Stonehead F1
Calabrese Marathon F1
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Broad Bean Masterpiece
Broccoli Purple Sprouting
Brussels Sprout Brodie F1
Cabbage Caraflex F1
Cabbage Stonehead F1
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Get involved with the new nationwide grow-along that you need to be a part of!

Now that spring is here, we can start to think about starting our 2020 crops, as well as taking a look at the next five brilliant varieties we will be growing from the RHS seed range. Added on to the five we started last month, we will also be sowing 'Hestia' runner bean, Kalettes, 'Defender' courgette, 'Vegetable Spaghetti' squash and 'Starlight' peas. We will be sharing our experiences sowing these on our brilliant forum, which can be found at growfruitandveg.co.uk/grapevine - and we'd

love to see how you've been getting on with your seed sowing, too! Make sure you tag us and the RHS using the handles on the next page

You will be able to get a fantastic 20% off of these seeds, and any others from the RHS range by using an exclusive #growwithgyo discount code which can be found on our newsletter, so make sure you sign up and don't miss out!

**Seed
Sowing
Special**



This month's top tips

- March is the perfect month to get started with your seed sowing, after what has probably felt like a long wait! However, we aren't in the clear from the risk of cold snaps, so make sure you can bring tender seedlings under cover if the weather turns. If not, it might be worth holding off until next month.
- This month offers your last chance to plant bare root fruit trees before the season really cranks up a gear, so if you need to get some in the ground, make sure this is on your to-do list. This also goes for container-grown crops.
- You will need to think about offering your early sowing protection from pests such as slugs, who will be looking for an easy meal. Biological controls such as nematodes can be a good option, as well as beer traps. You can find more information on slug control on page 56.

This month's discounts

Add some fantastic vegetable varieties to your garden this month, with 20 per cent off of the brilliant range of RHS seeds. You can use the discount (which can be found on the *Grow Your Own* newsletter) on anything in the seed range, but we will be growing 'Hestia' runner bean, Kalettes, 'Defender' courgette, 'Vegetable Spaghetti' squash and 'Starlight' peas, and we would love for you to grow along with us! Full terms and conditions can be found online at growfruitandveg.co.uk/grapevine

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**next
month:**

Look out for your top offers on cloches and plant protection gear - don't forget to spread the word and show us what you're growing!

Anne Swithinbank

How to grow potatoes

Anne delves into the growing requirements of this allotment favourite, and divulges her surefire tips for tantalising tatties

Lifting potatoes from the garden is among the most satisfying of harvests. In goes the flat-tined potato fork designed to avoid 'pronging' the tubers and out they tumble, like hidden treasure, their skins cream, pink or purple-hued.

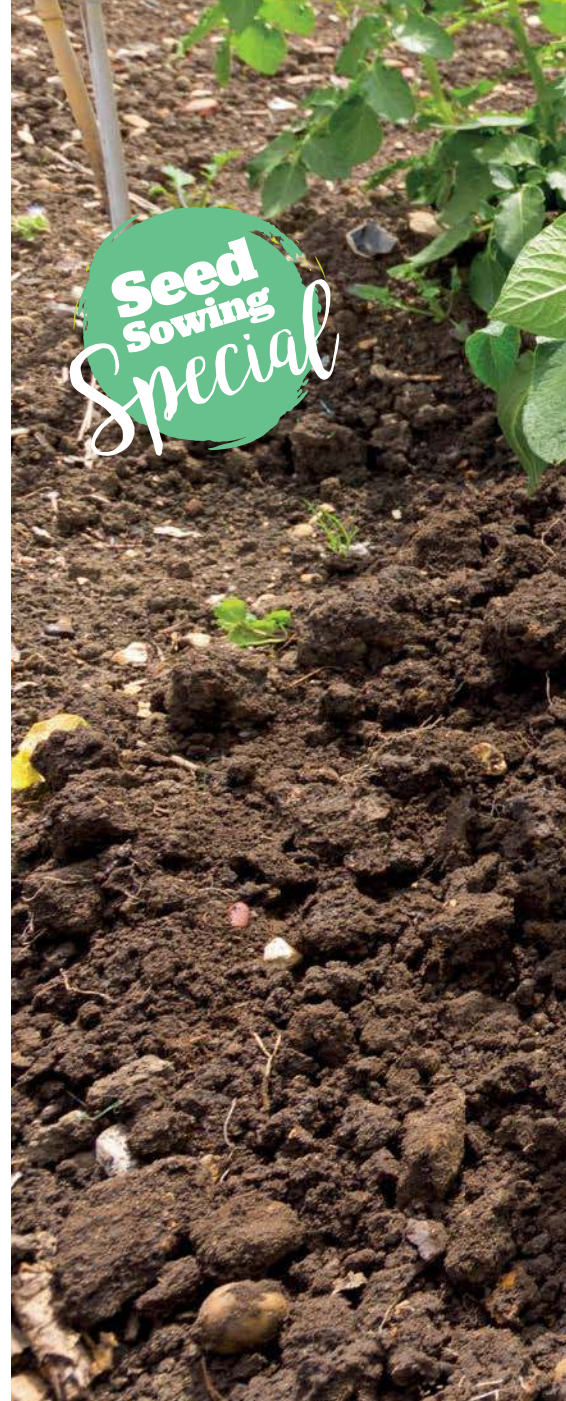
In an open, sunny position early varieties are generally planted by the end of March (30cm apart in rows 60cm apart), for lifting from June and July.

Second earlies and maincrops are planted in April (40cm apart in rows 70cm

apart) and ready from July and August.

From January many growers will have set seed tubers 'rose end' uppermost in a cool bright place to 'chit' or produce short, sturdy shoots prior to planting. While it speeds development, chitting does not necessarily increase crop weight and is not essential. Avoid planting tubers with long, drawn shoots.

Planting into good soil is as simple as marking a row, spacing tubers out and setting each 8-10cm deep using a trowel,



before pulling soil into a low ridge or mulching over the row with well-rotted compost. Where soil is rough and less well cultivated, dig out a trench one spit (spade blade depth) deep, fork the base and mix in well-rotted compost plus potato fertiliser, before spacing out and covering the tubers.

As potatoes grow, 'earthing them up' by drawing soil against their stems on either side increases the crop, keeps tubers covered, controls weeds and protects from drought. Water during dry spells.

In containers

For those short of space, wanting to start early under glass or use cover to grow winter potatoes from a late summer planting, grow in a container.

● Choose a large container such as a 40cm





diameter pot, or growing bag (large, rolled down compost sacks with drainage holes are useful).

- Half fill with peat-free compost or a mix of 50:50 compost and good garden soil.
- Add potato fertiliser and plant five tubers in, some more deeply than others. Top up with compost as they grow.
- Water carefully, allowing the top to dry out in between. Once growth is under way, water more confidently.
- Liquid feed fortnightly initially with a well-balanced fertiliser and then a high potash feed.

Avoiding blight

Potato blight can be an annual problem, especially in wetter areas. Avoid by planting early and second-early varieties on time. If blight appears, cut haulms down and the crop should be formed and saved. Alternatively, choose blight-resistant varieties such as the specially bred Sarpo range.

Anne's favourites

- **'Colleen'** An early variety, yielding uniformly oval-shaped, waxy, flavoursome tubers with some blight resistance. **Tamar Organics (01579 371087, tamarorganics.co.uk)**
- **'Charlotte'** A delicious second early salad potato whose long oval tubers have a creamy skin and yellow waxy-textured flesh. **Pennard Plants (01749 860039, pennardplants.com)**
- **'Kestrel'** This flavoursome, floury-textured second early is easy to identify by rich pinkish-blue colouring around the eyes, against a creamy background. **Pennard Plants (01749 860039, pennardplants.com)**
- **'Sarpo Axona'** A vigorous blight-resistant late main crop with red skins and floury flesh better for baking than boiling. **D.T.Brown (0333 003 0869, dtbrownseeds.co.uk)**

Expert advice

If you have... 15 minutes

Wake up French tarragon

This somewhat weedy herb imparts a deliciously unique flavour. Top growth usually dies back but as plants wake is the perfect time to knock roots out of their containers, check the thin rhizomes and divide up to freshen stock and make more plants. Start sections in smaller 9-10cm pots of well-drained, slightly gritty compost, watering carefully, preferably in the morning. When roots have colonised their space, move to larger containers and place in a warm, sunny spot.



If you have... 30 minutes

Start cucumbers for an unheated greenhouse

We all want the earliest possible home-grown cucumbers but started too soon they are vulnerable to rotting. An early sowing placed into a propagating case is worth the gamble, setting seeds into small individual pots or modules at a minimum of 18°C. Keep warm initially in a slightly cooler case or windowsill and grow on until plants have three proper leaves. Prepare the greenhouse bed or place growing bags inside to warm up but plant into 15cm wide bottomless pots of good potting compost stood on the growing medium.



If you have... 60 minutes

Sow leeks

For crops of good-sized leeks next winter, an early start is advisable. This can take place in an outdoor seedbed if your soil is workable and warming up but many of us on heavier soils and in wetter climates, or where sun is slow to reach soil, are better off starting indoors. Sow thinly and evenly across the top of wide, shallow pots 15cm across placed in a temperature of around 10-13°C. After germination, when leaves have straightened out of their 'u'-bend, transplant individually to long Root Trainer modules or set them 5cm apart in 15-17cm pots. Later, stand outdoors before planting in final positions come late May or early June.





David Domoney:

EDIBLE HOUSEPLANTS



You can still grow a range of crops, even in the smallest of spaces, says **David**

When the weather is still on the chilly side, get started with growing your crops inside. There are many things you can grow indoors that you can eat during the winter months. A lot of it is great fun and picking fresh from your own kitchen windowsill to sensationalise your dishes is wholesome and rewarding.

Veg on a ledge

Windowsill crops are growing in popularity because you can grow inside all year round and produce your own crops. Simple cress can germinate on a dampened piece of kitchen roll placed on a saucer with the seeds sprinkled on top. Another way to grow is to use potting soil. This has the advantage that the seeds get more nutrients, and thus obtain a much richer flavour, plus the yield per seed is much bigger. The germination time is just a few days and you also get three kicks;

preparing and sowing the seeds, the excitement as they germinate, and then you get the nutritious tasty harvests, too. Cress is jam-packed with Vitamin A, Vitamin C, and Vitamin K. It can also be worked into a number of tasty dishes; they work particularly well with freshly scrambled egg with a dash of salt and cracked pepper and some fresh crunchy cress sprinkled onto the top. But you can work cress into a whole load of recipes, even cress pesto can work nicely, so the sky's the limit.

Herbs to help

Herbs are a useful harvest to have around when it comes to enhancing your cooking at home, and some can be grown on the kitchen windowsill. Basil is perfect for use in most soups, salads and sandwiches to get that Italian taste to your food. Buy small basil plants from garden centres and then

sit them as a permanent container on your kitchen windowsill. The secret with most plants growing indoors is the fact that you want to keep them slightly cooler and crop them on a regular basis. The heat in the room tends to draw them up and get them to grow a bit leggy. So, aim to crop and use them regularly so that the plant can re-sprout. Of course, any plants in containers that you're cropping regularly need a little bit of feed. Dilute liquid fertiliser into a plastic bottle (one you've recycled works really well) and use these as little watering containers. By regularly feeding the plant, you're giving it the energy to grow more fresh foliage.

Much like the basil, you can grow parsley from seed or buy small plants. Parsley is a beautiful looking plant; those detailed, crinkly, deep-emerald leaves look perfect in dressing or grated on top of new potatoes with butter. I have a curled parsley variety in my seed range, and it gives a richly aromatic flavour to all manner of savoury dishes. Don't forget to feed and crop regularly too, of course.

You can cut them at any time of year and regular sowing will result in a plentiful succession of leaves for a small addition into your cooking that packs a punch in the nutrition area.

Store your score

Similar to cress, beans and peas can grow inside as houseplants! Dwarf broad beans and dwarf runner beans crop well indoors, and both dwarf and tall mangetout peas



will do well, as long as they're positioned in a cooler spot like a porch or unheated conservatory. Dwarf varieties of peas don't need much in the way of support. The easiest types to grow are mangetout and sugar snaps. An indoor pea plant needs eight to 10 hours of bright light a day, so you can either place it in the sunniest location of the home or use grow lights. There's nothing like the flavour of freshly picked peas, it's best to use them quickly once picked so they don't lose their sweetness. If you're hoping to store your harvests, these can go unwashed and unshelled in an air-tight container in the fridge, but make sure they're dry first. Else, blanch them and pop them in the freezer.

Salads to satisfy

Speedy salads are high yielding and an absolute doddle, very handy to keep food on the table. Many of the lettuces you

normally associate with growing outside earlier in the year work really nicely when grown indoors. You're not looking for these plants to get old, just to produce a lot of young fresh foliage that you can clip off and use in salads and sandwiches. Position a large pot in a light porch and, when the foliage has matured, you can crop them. Continue to water the pot as you'll get another flush of leaves before the plant tires out. Clear the old plants, add fresh compost, and use more of the seeds in the packet for another two crops.

Wildcard crops

There are many different types of mushroom kits out there and you can get them from most garden centres or online for a good price - they are really something. They often come with the mushroom compost and the pre-spawned substrate and you just situate them in a dark room or

cupboard. Some kits use the box that they come in for growing, and these will be pre-filled with a growing medium that has been seeded with spores. Others come with hand-cut logs that have pre-drilled holes which are filled with fungal spores and covered with cheese wax for protection from pests. No matter your preference, there's a mushroom kit out there for you; button, enoki, black oyster and shiitake varieties are all available to buy in kits and grow inside the home, so this can be a really fun project for the whole family.

It's not only the goodness of growing your own or the fact that it's saving you money but having freshly growing greenery in the house is uplifting and looks great. Filling your kitchen with homegrown produce provides sustenance to you and your family as well as top-quality nutrition you can rely on - whatever the weather is doing outside!



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Charles Dowding's

Monthly Tasks



Charles gets the early crops in his no-dig garden out of the starting gates this month



All the spring vegetables are good to sow under cover in March - broad beans, spinach, lettuce, peas for shoots, peas for pods, onion, salad onion, 'Boltardy' beetroot, early brassicas (cabbage, calabrese, kohlrabi, cauliflower, turnips), radish, parsley, coriander and dill.

● With warmth, aubergine, pepper, chilli now, then celery and celeriac mid month.

● From mid-March you can sow all of these outside in milder areas of the UK, and plant onion sets, too.

I wait until early April before sowing basil, and mid-April for cucumber and courgettes/squash, all under cover and on heat.

Heat for germination

Seeds need more warmth to germinate than seedlings need to grow.

Therefore windowsills in the house are great for the first seven to 14 days after sowing. You can even stack trays one on top of another for the first five to seven days as they don't need light to germinate - just be sure to unstack before leaves appear.

Hardy seedlings, mostly

All the veg we sow at this time are frost hardy, and survive a light freeze. This means less worries about seedlings which are outside

in unheated structures, including peas, sweet peas and 'Boltardy' beetroot.

Tomatoes are an exception and so are potatoes: don't chit them in a cold greenhouse where it may be frosty at night. I sow tomatoes in the third week of March, in a seed or module tray on a warm windowsill. They are to plant undercover in early May.

Parsnips and carrots

People ask, is it possible to transplant root veg? Well it depends on the type of vegetable, and there are two answers:

- Yes you can transplant all root vegetables and they grow fine, including beetroot, radish, turnips and swedes.
- However in the act of transplanting, unless seedlings are tiny, you break the taproot of carrots and parsnips, resulting in forked harvests.

Soil density and stability

It's often imagined that the firm soil of no dig is akin to 'compacted' soil, however it absolutely is not. Firmness is a natural condition of soil health, and plant roots can travel happily in the channels of soil with a stable structure.

Healthy soil has agglomerations of billions of organisms feeding and excreting. It's now realised that mycelial threads of soil fungi secrete glue-like substances which hold soil together in small lumps, rather than loose silt.

Feed your soil

Soil organisms need food at the surface, hence the success of mulching with compost, and simply leaving it there to be taken in.

Misleadingly, it's often said that adding compost to soil encourages root vegetables to fork. This is untrue unless you dig it in!

Sowing carrot and parsnip seeds

With no dig, you draw drills in the surface compost and sow as normal. Seeds start life in the soft and fibrous organic matter, then root into soil below. Sometimes when sowing carrots, I think 'well this compost is a bit sticky', but they all come up.

It's something of a myth that a seedbed has to be superfine, and with organic matter as in the seedbed you can have a few more lumps than normal. There is no rush to sow as early as you can - I wait until mid March, and later if temperatures are still on the colder side.



Your Plot ESSENTIALS

This month's jobs on the vegetable patch and patio

WORDS: Sally Nex

GROWING TECHNIQUE: REPOT MINT

Mint is one of those collector's plants. Once you've discovered the delights of growing refreshing peppermint for tea, or spicy spearmint for mint sauce, you just want more: perhaps downy-leaved apple mint, or fragrant eau de cologne mint to pop into sachets tied under the hot tap of your bath for a reviving soak.

Whichever mint you grow, though, you must keep them to a container or they'll spread rapidly and take over your garden - you can always bury the pot in the ground to include mint among other herbs. But mint is such a fast-growing plant it quickly exhausts the compost in a pot, so to keep it growing strongly, repot it each spring. Tip the plant out of its container and divide into two or three healthy chunks. Repot one chunk into fresh compost in the original container and pot up the rest separately to boost your collection or pass on to friends.

25%

In 2018, 18-34 year olds accounted for 25% of lawn and garden spending

Source: National Garden Association

DON'T FORGET: CLOCHE STRAWBERRIES

Pop individual cloches or glass barn-style row covers over strawberry plants now and you'll intensify the feeblest early spring sunshine, raising temperatures underneath to the positively summery and kidding your plants into thinking it's time to wake up and start flowering. Open the ends regularly for ventilation and to let pollinating insects in and remember to water regularly, especially in particularly sunny weather, to enjoy your first sweet fruits by late May - a good month earlier than usual!

Seed
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says

Seaweed can be used to make garden nutrient tea and added to compost



USE SEAWEED FOR MULCHING

After a long, stormy winter, seaweed lies thick on the beaches, washed up on the incoming tide. Seize your chance to collect it and you'll have the veg equivalent of a superfood on your hands. Seaweed is packed with trace minerals, plus growth-stimulating plant hormones; it breaks down easily and even repels slugs, which avoid crawling across its salty surface. Plus, it's completely free!

You should ask the local council, harbourmaster or owner if it's a private beach for permission before collecting large quantities of seaweed, but you'll rarely be refused. Collect unattached seaweed from halfway up the beach, and don't strip the beach as seaweed provides an important habitat for wildlife.

Spread your seaweed straight away, while it's still fresh, in a thick layer directly on the soil. Pull the mulch away from the stems of any plants. You don't have to rinse it first, as most of the salt dissolves with the first rainfalls, but if the weather is dry spread out the seaweed and hose it down with plenty of fresh water before mulching.

30 minute job:

Make new yacon plants for free

- A new spring is nudging its way through the frozen earth at last and all sorts of things are starting to sprout in anticipation of the growing season to come. Yacon tubers, kept carefully squirrelled away in boxes of just-damp compost in a frost-free shed over winter, respond quickly to the rising temperatures so check them weekly for signs of life.
- Once you see live buds swelling on the crowns, pot them up and bring them back into active growth. This is also your chance to bulk up your supplies by propagating new plants from the caudices - the cluster of smaller roots at the base of the stem.
- Take a knife and cut the crown up into several smaller pieces, following the 'seam' between each lumpy section and making sure each chunk has at least one sprouting bud. You should be able to create between five and 10 new plants from the original crown, depending on how big it was.
- Pot up each of these sections individually, with the buds sitting at or just below compost level. Water in and keep in a greenhouse while they grow into healthy young plants. In early summer, harden them off carefully and plant outside in a sunny, free-draining spot.



VARIETIES TO TRY

NEW VARIETY: Cucumber 'Chompers'

Outdoor, or ridge cucumbers, are a great alternative if you don't have a greenhouse, but the fruits themselves take some getting used to with their thick, warty skins and short, stubby shape. This new outdoor cuke is a step closer to the elegance of a long, smooth-skinned greenhouse fruit, though. It's enormous, for a start, up to 25cm long, with a thin, gently striped skin you don't have to remove before you slice. Give it your sunniest spot and some sturdy supports to scramble up to enjoy long, sweet cucumbers by summer, no greenhouse required.

(dobies.co.uk)



HERITAGE VARIETY: Lettuce 'Little Gem'

When you're growing in containers you're always on the lookout for good quality dwarf varieties of your favourite veg - and this little cos lettuce is one of the best. Bred in France, it's still popular in gardens on both sides of the Channel almost a century later, admired for its neat, upright heads, superb flavour and densely-packed, crunchy hearts. More recently, it's found a new role as a star plant for relatively restricted 21st century veg patches; grow plenty, as you'll need a couple of heads per salad, and re-sow monthly through the season for a continuous supply.



EXOTIC VARIETY: Amaranth

If we lived in a warmer corner of the world, amaranth would be as familiar to us as lettuce or spinach. Also known as callaloo, each stage of growth provides a different crop. Its seedlings are delicious snipped at 5-8cm tall as microgreens; or let it grow to about 30cm tall and harvest its young, tender leaves and stems. Wait till it flowers - spectacularly - and sets seed and you get a protein-packed and gluten-free grain, similar to quinoa. Rinse thoroughly to wash away the bitter saponins, then boil for 20 minutes and enjoy in tasty tabbouleh or pilafs.



HOW TO AVOID... ONION SETS POPPING OUT OF THE GROUND



Birds are often blamed for the curious phenomenon of just-planted onion sets popping out of the soil overnight. But there is little documented evidence of clandestine set-pulling raids; and onion sets still jump loose even when netted against birds.

It's more likely the problem lies in the soil. Ground can 'heave' after heavy rain, pushing unrooted sets above the

surface. Or the soil may be too firm for roots to punch through, so they raise the set upwards instead. Push the set directly into the ground when planting and you risk compacting the soil beneath. Instead, make a hole first with a trowel about 5cm deep, then drop the set in so the tip is just at the soil's surface. Firm in and with luck, it should stay put.

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SOW YOUR FREE SEEDS!

Grow a rainbow of colour with these staple veg varieties

Aubergine 'Black Beauty'

For a long time, this Mediterranean vegetable was thought to be too hard to grow in our cooler climate. It's true that the aubergine might need a little more TLC than hardier veggies, but stick with it and the end results are more than worth it. The large, dark-skinned fruits don't just look great growing in the greenhouse or in the garden, they taste great, too, and can be roasted, fried, or added to curries.

1 Soak the seeds in warm water for 24 hours before sowing as this will help to speed up germination. Sow seeds thinly from February to April on the surface of free-draining seed compost and cover with

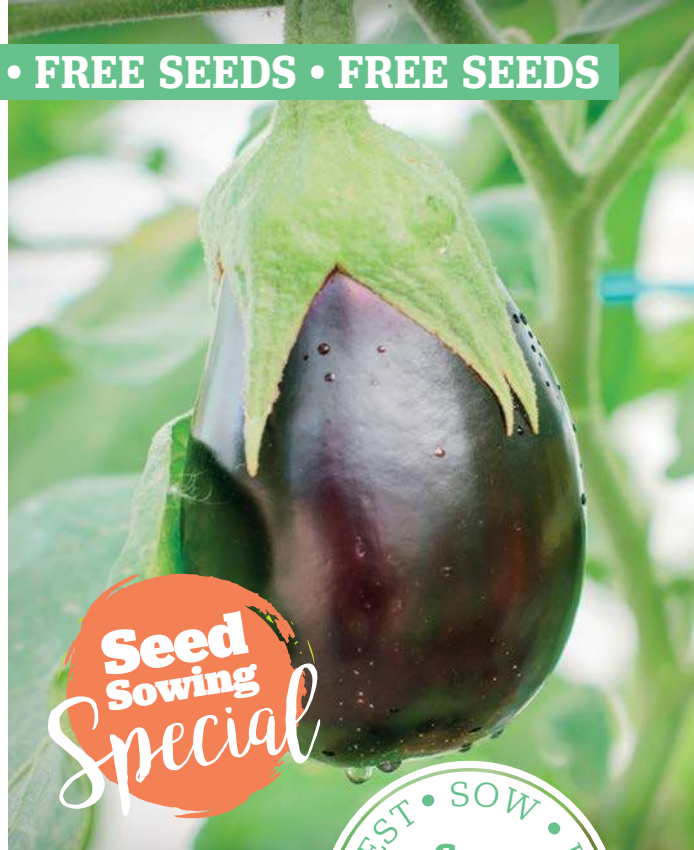
a 6mm layer of compost or vermiculite.

2 Place the container inside a propagator or seal inside a polythene bag and keep at a temperature of around 18-21°C until after germination.

3 When large enough to handle, transplant the seedlings into 7.5cm pots and grow on at a reduced temperature.

4 When all risk of frost has passed, plant outside 90cm apart and in rows 90-120cm apart. Alternatively, plant inside in larger containers or growbags.

5 Support plants with canes and remove sideshoots. Harvest when the fruits are 15cm long and the skin is shiny, usually from August to October.



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SOW • HARVEST
Sow
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Carrot

'Autumn King 2'

With its large, long roots and rich red centre, this carrot takes centre stage in summer sowings and autumn harvests. 'Autumn King 2' also does not split in cold temperatures, but make sure to protect it against bothersome carrot root fly attacks.

1 Sow seeds thinly outdoors from May to June where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Plant in a sunny, sheltered position and in

weed-free, well-drained soil.

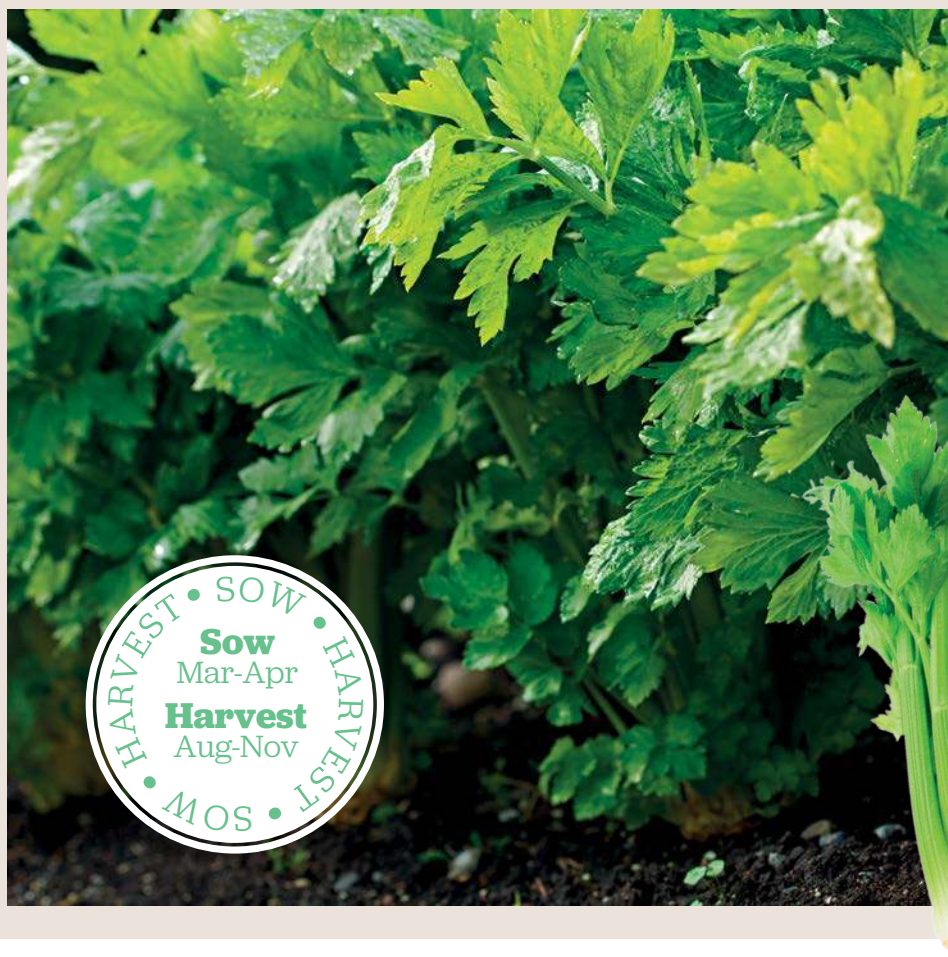
2 Carrots dislike freshly manured soil so prepare your seed beds in autumn to sow seeds in the following spring.

3 Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each. Keep well-watered and seedlings should appear within 10-20 days.

4 When large enough to handle, thin seedlings in each row to 5cm apart as this will reduce the risk of carrot root fly attack.

5 Harvest from August to October. Pull up one root to assess the crop size.





Celery 'Tango F1'

Celery might not be everyone's cup of tea but for those it is, this vegetable has anti-inflammatory properties and is also believed to be good at lowering blood pressure. The long, apple-green stems surrounding a central heart have a bitter flavour and a crisp bite when eaten raw. Celery 'Tango' is also self-blanching and has good bolting resistance.

- 1 Sow seeds thinly indoors from March to April on the surface of good seed compost in trays or pots. Cover with a fine layer of vermiculite and keep at a temperature of 15-20°C.
- 2 Seedlings should appear within 21 days. When large enough to handle, transplant seedlings into modules or pots and keep at a temperature of 15°C.
- 3 Gradually acclimatise plants to colder conditions before planting outside in well-prepared soil 30cm apart.
- 4 It's recommended to plant in a grid formation to promote self-blanching.
- 5 Harvest when large enough, usually from August to November. To do so, cut them at the base with a sharp knife.

Leek

'Autumn Giant 2'

There's something quite striking about the sight of a leek growing in the garden with its thick white stems and giant green foliage sprouting out of the ground. Luckily for us, 'Autumn Giant 2' is one of the most showstopping leeks we can grow. It also performs well sown either early or late in the year so it's great for stretching out the cropping season.

- 1 Sow seeds thinly outside from March to May in a seedbed, at a depth of 1cm. Make sure to plant in soil that has been raked to a fine tilth.
- 2 Plant in rows, allowing 23cm between each to prevent overcrowding.
- 3 When large enough to handle, transplant seedlings from the seedbed into their final growing position.
- 4 Keep the ground well-watered, especially during dry periods.
- 5 Harvest from September to December, by levering the leeks out of the ground with a spade or fork. Leeks can also be left in the ground to overwinter.



Lettuce 'Little Gem'

Crispy, crunchy, succulent and sweet, lettuce 'Little Gem' is the go-to salad staple. This variety also grows well in the garden, too. Quick to mature, and with good root aphid resistance, it can be sheltered under cloches when started early in the season.

- 1** Sow seeds thinly outside from March to July where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Make sure to plant in soil that has been raked to a fine tilth.
- 2** Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each to prevent overcrowding.
- 3** Water regularly, especially during dry periods to prevent the plants from running to seed.
- 4** When large enough to handle, thin seedlings to 23cm apart.
- 5** Harvest on a cut-and-come-again basis as and when required.

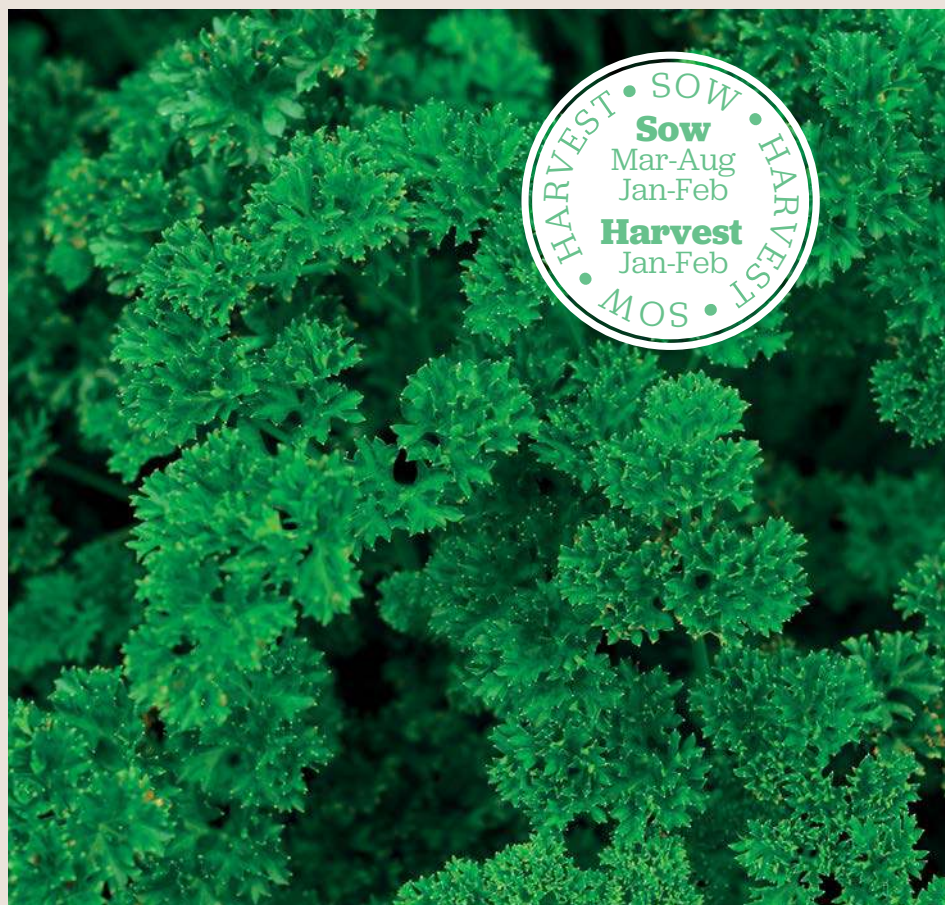


Onion 'Ailsa Craig'

'Ailsa Craig', the name derived from a small island rock off the coast of Scotland, is a globe-shaped, straw-coloured and mild-flavoured onion. Thanks to its reliable cropping and ability to grow to a giant size, onion 'Ailsa Craig' is a favourite amongst exhibition and kitchen growers alike.

- 1** Sow seeds thinly outside in March where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Make sure to plant in firm soil that has been drained in advance.
- 2** When large enough to handle, thin seedlings to 10cm apart. Seedlings should appear within 10-14 days.
- 3** Alternatively, sow seeds indoors from December to February in pots of compost, at a depth of 1cm. Place inside a propagator or seal inside a polythene bag and keep at a temperature of 20°C until after germination.
- 4** When large enough to handle, prick out seedlings and move to 7.5cm pots to grow on.
- 5** Harvest from August to September. You will know the onions are ready when the tops begin to brown.





Parsley

'Champion'

This champion of the herb world boasts fine, tightly curled, dark-green leaves that can be used as both an ingredient and a garnish. It can be grown as a low hedging plant for the herb garden or, alternatively, in a pot on the windowsill. Grow indoors, and you'll have the luxury of harvesting this herb all year round.

- 1 Sow seeds thinly outside from March to August where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Seedlings should appear in up to 28 days.
- 2 Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each to prevent overcrowding.
- 3 Alternatively, sow seeds thinly inside from January to February in 7.5cm pots of good seed compost. Place in a propagator or seal inside a polythene bag and keep at a temperature of 18-20°C until germination occurs.
- 4 When large enough to handle, thin seedlings to 23cm apart. Acclimatise to outdoor conditions before planting outside, in a pot or a container.
- 5 Harvest from January to February, as and when required.

Sweet pepper

'Etiuda'

This bright orange pepper is breathtakingly beautiful when grown in the greenhouse or in the kitchen garden. The fruits start out with a thick-green skin before ripening to their final golden colour and developing that characteristic sweet

flavour. Sweet pepper 'Etiuda' is relatively easy to grow, but don't let them get too cold.

- 1 Sow seeds on the surface of free-draining damp seed compost from March to April and cover with a fine layer of compost or vermiculite.
- 2 Place in a propagator or seal inside a polythene bag and keep a temperature of 20-25°C until germination occurs. Seedlings should appear in seven-14 days. When large enough to handle, transplant into 7.5cm pots.
- 3 Plant out into growbags or 20cm pots in the greenhouse and maintain a temperature of 16-24°C at night and 24°C in the day.
- 4 If growing outdoors, acclimatise to outdoor conditions for seven-10 days before planting in well-drained soil and in a sunny, sheltered spot. Plant in rows, allowing 50cm between each.
- 5 Pick peppers once they turn a deep orange colour, usually from July to October.



Swiss chard

'Fordhook Giant'

Introduced in the 1920s, 'Fordhook Giant' has been a Swiss chard trailblazer for almost 100 years. Characterised by its shiny, dark-green and crumpled leaves, and thick white veins and stalks, this plant can be harvested throughout the summer months. 'Fordhook Giant' is also

attractive as much as it is versatile, since the leaves can be steamed and eaten like spinach, and the stalks stir-fried.

- 1 Sow seed thinly from March to August where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm.
- 2 Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each to prevent overcrowding.
- 3 When large enough to handle, thin seedlings to 23cm apart for medium-sized plants or 30cm apart for mature plants.
- 4 Water summer sowings regularly to prevent the plants from running to seed.
- 5 Harvest from May to November as and when required, picking only a few leaves from each plant at a time.



Turnip 'Snowball'

Crunchy, crispy and a great source of vitamin C, there's little reason not to grow turnip 'Snowball'. You can maximise the taste of this root veg by adding to gratins, bakes and soups, and the greens can be stir-fried and eaten as a side dish.

- 1 Sow seed thinly from May to July where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Make sure to plant in soil that has been raked to a fine tilth.
- 2 Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each to prevent overcrowding. Seedlings should appear in seven-14 days.
- 3 Keep well watered to prevent the plants from running to seed and hoe regularly otherwise weeds will compete with your plants for vital resources.
- 4 Harvest before the roots become too large, from September to December.



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Digging tools

Unearth the best tools to break up, turn over and improve your soil this spring

Digging is a serious subject. For some, turning the soil is important for plant growth. These gardeners believe that digging is the sure-fire way to get organic matter into the ground so that fruits and veggies can make the most of the goodness. Others, on the other hand, don't see what all the fuss is about. The three most popular methods that gardeners use on either a regular or a one-off basis are single and double digging and no-dig. Single digging involves digging trenches to a spade's depth (known as a 'spit') and about 30cm wide and breaking up the soil in the process. Double digging is where you do the same as above but at a depth of two spades instead of one. As the name suggests, a no-dig gardener does not turn the soil, but does instead spread manure or compost over it. The method that is best for you will depend on your garden's conditions, lifestyle and preference. Whichever method you opt for, there will be some tools to help along the way.

Spades

No-dig and traditional gardeners alike would be lost without a garden spade. This is an all-purpose tool that is used for digging planting holes, reshaping beds,

cutting sod or sprinkling dirt. Some of the spades available include digging spades, drain spades and border spades. These have all been made to do different job and come with either U-shaped, T-shaped or straight handles. Try some different types out and see what best for you. It is also important to make sure they are the right height and weight for comfortable use.

Shovels

Often mistaken for a spade and vice-versa, shovels have a concave shape and a pointed tip. Whereas spades are designed for cutting rather than moving soil, the shovel's heavier handle, larger size and bowl-shape makes it better at digging, breaking up the ground and moving large quantities of soil in one go. No-dig gardener's will find shovels useful for spreading heavy soil over their garden.

Forks

The four to eight tines (prongs) of the garden fork is what makes this tool the best choice when help is needed to dig up, lift and aerate the soil. The prongs make it easier to push into the ground and is therefore great for gardeners who have compacted ground.

Hoes

From Dutch hoes, to draw hoes, to onion hoes, the hoe seems to have more variants than one gardener cares to imagine! To stop you from becoming overwhelmed, invest in a draw hoe, the most common of garden hoes, which is used for deep hoeing, earthing up and weeding. To use, slice into the ground and pull towards you. You can then expand your collection as your confidence in the garden improves, and you see what will be put to the best use on your plot.

Rakes

Raking over the lawn or isn't the most exciting job in the world but it is important nonetheless. Even though it's important to leave at least a few leaves for wildlife to call home, a wide covering of debris is also the perfect place for unwanted pests and diseases to hide. You can get the best of both worlds with either garden or lawn rakes depending on the leaf fall. While not digging tools per se, soil rakes are good for dragging through the top layers of earth to help create a fine tilth prior to planting.



Trenching hoe

Why make hard work of digging and cultivating your allotment plots with tools that make you bend and strain your backs? Try the Chillington Trenching Hoe, a perfectly designed, sturdy tool that makes light work of clearing overgrown ground. Dig up your stubborn roots and woody growth with ease, and then sit back and wonder how you ever managed without one. £26.20. Visit chillingtontoolsonline.co.uk

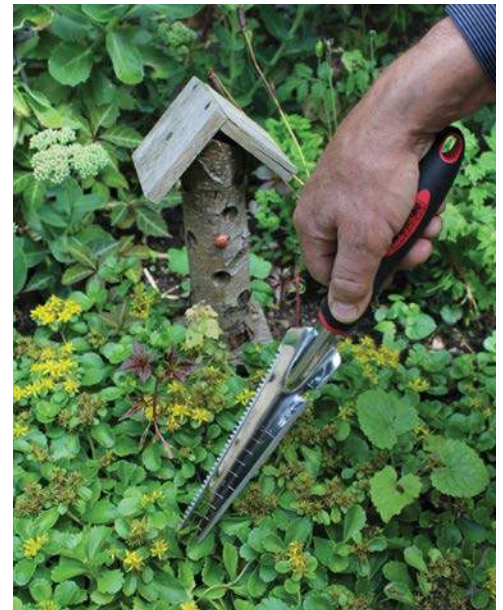


WOLF-Garten

WOLF-Garten's multi-change® Grubber features three pointed tines which break up tough ground, making light work of loosening the soil and preparing it for digging. The compact tool head is ideal for working between growing crops on the allotment or plants in beds and borders. This tool is designed to be used with your choice of lightweight, interchangeable multi-change® handles. WOLF-Garten tools are available from garden centres nationwide or online at wolfgarten-tools.co.uk

Multi trowel

If you're looking for the ultimate multi tool then the Multi Trowel is it! Perfect for digging, it features an accurate planting depth guide whilst its tapering stainless steel head fits into small spaces. Use its forked end to easily remove weeds whilst its honed edge will ease plants from pots. A serrated edge cuts through small roots whilst a cutting notch cuts through string with ease. All this for just £7.25! To order yours visit twowests.co.uk



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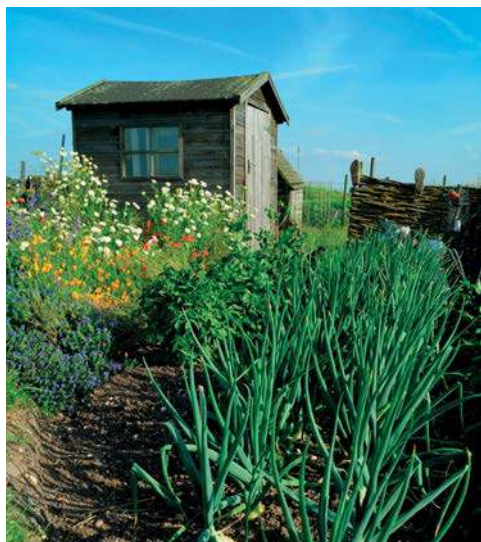


Dominica McKeivitt
is the head gardener at Ardgillan Park



Joseph Atkin
is the head gardener at Aberglasney Gardens

Got a niggling problem that you want one of our esteemed gardening experts to aid you with? Email your question to: blake.roberts@aceville.co.uk for the chance to see it featured on these pages.



Ask the experts

Get the best from your plot with advice from our garden pros

Crop rotation masterclass

Q Why does rotating crops help to produce better results?

Si Robinson, via Facebook

Blake says: "When you're growing your veg in the same place year after year this can lead to lessened nutrients in the soil which will result in lacklustre crops or it can result in disease taking hold in one spot. Different plants take and release various minerals and beneficial substances from the soil, and swapping around the final growing positions can help to preserve the quality of the earth. Split your crops into brassicas (Brussels sprouts, cabbages, broccoli, etc.), legumes (peas and beans), onions, potatoes and roots (beetroot, carrot, parsnips, etc.) and switch where you grow them. By using a three- or four-year routine this technique simply involves moving each group around in a circle in the order that has been listed above on an annual basis. Gardening with crop rotation in mind will allow you to get the very best from your edibles."

Q My friend's onions suffered from a bad case of white rot last year, how can I avoid this from happening on my plot?

Ray Smithson, via email

Blake says: "Onion white rot is a fungal disease that affects alliums (onions, garlic, leeks). It causes wilting of foliage and a fluffy white fungus to grow on bulbs. It prefers moist soils, but the fungus is inhibited in very hot spells. The resting spores can remain viable in the soil for 15 years. Because of this long life of spores, crop rotations can be impractical but if you've got a large enough plot then moving around may reduce the chance of problems developing. It's often best to take a very careful approach, and not move contaminated soil onto your plot via boots, plants or tools (especially if you're helping your friend on their plot at all). Grow vulnerable crops in land uncontaminated by the fungus, or in deep pots. If infection does strike, don't compost infected plants: throw them away instead."



Q Last year my celery went to flower, but I'm not sure where I went wrong. How can I avoid this next time? Should I do something differently?

Peter Talbot, via email

Dominica says: "In the natural sequence of events celery should grow vegetatively the first year and flower and set seed the second year (a biennial). But if there is a check in growth, a shock to the plant or a disruption to the continuous growth of the plant, it may flower the first year. This problem can arise as a result of the plants drying out at any time, or a shock to the plant during transplanting due to excessive damage to roots, or if the plants have not been hardened off properly. In the UK climate, celery needs to be germinated and grown indoors to produce plants ready to plant out in early June, when the risk of frost has passed."

Q I have a bad infestation of bindweed on my plot, but I'm reluctant to use chemicals. What organic tricks can you suggest to combat this?

Rachael Meadows, via email

Joshua says: "I have found over the years the best way to control bindweed, I say 'control' because you'll find it very hard to ever be totally free of it, is the no-dig gardening method. This is a method I use in both my ornamental garden and vegetable garden. The no-dig method controls bindweed and other weeds by suppressing their growth with a heavy layer of mulch and in return you feed the soil and have happy healthy plants. Hoe any weeds that poke their head above ground and soon they will get the hint that it is not the best place for them to grow!"



Q What are your top tips for the best flower companion plants to have in amongst veg on the plot?

Helen Lindsay, via Facebook

Kevin says: "Planting as a monoculture creates the ideal situation for pests to thrive. As well as deterring pests from crops, companion planting attracts beneficial predators. In addition to this our plots are enhanced with colour. Planting marrows and Rudbeckia species together just alone makes for wonderful flower and vegetable companions. Petunias look attractive planted with brassicas, lettuce, beans, and tomatoes, eradicating various

pests including bean beetles. Sunflowers (Helianthus), of varying heights, are a real winner along with candytuft, lavender, and echinacea, they attract ladybirds and lacewings to feed on aphids. Cosmos also looks stunning planted in the vegetable plots and draws in the lacewings. Basil looks attractive when set to flower and wards off whitefly from tomato plants. Nasturtiums are a magnet to attract aphids away from bean crops. Alliums planted will confuse the carrot fly away from this crop, also deterring slugs, too. Calendula (Pot Marigold) acts as an excellent catch crop and draws aphids away from crops such as peas, and are particularly good for repelling asparagus beetle."



Q I had bad peach leaf curl last year - how can I prevent this or what remedies to you recommend for clearing up the problem?

Roger Geake, via email

Joseph says: "Peach leaf curl is a nasty fungus that can cause real problems with productivity. Chemical controls are no use which is a good thing. However keeping the shoots dry over the winter with a tent or cover can be very successful; it needs to be there from November to mid-May. There are some varieties that claim to have higher levels of resistance but this is more of a help than a solution."

Q What is the best structure for growing my runner bean plants up? I've seen others on my allotment growing in different ways.

June Shipman, via email

Kevin says: "Bamboo canes are a popular feature tied into wigwams or a straight criss-cross framework. But let's get more creative. Coppiced hazel poles are tall, sturdy, and beautifully rustic looking, adding character to our plots. Again constructed as wigwams or a latticed screen construction. Runner beans find their way with a trained guiding hand. Varying shaped metal frameworks can

be purchased from garden centres with your budget in mind. Wooden trellis nailed to sturdy posts creates a stylish framework to train the runner beans. Cut some willow stems, strip the leaves and insert into the ground, tie the stems together to create varying creative shapes for the beans to wander. Spring pruning of Cornus stems (Dogwoods) reds and yellows, the flexible stems can be used to create attractive woven screens pushed into the soil, tie together. Train your runners at angles through these lower but attractive frameworks. Old apple trees are a challenge to grow and train your runners up, too!"



PROBLEMS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN MARCH

Aphids

With aphid season on its way, it's worth thinking about how you're going to mitigate the threat from this persistent pest. Squashing by hand will keep numbers down, or you can try wrapping sellotape around your hand and dab infected foliage to pick up larger numbers



Grey mould

Caused by the fungus *Botrytis cinerea* this disease often infects plants under stress through wounds in the stem or leaves. Humid conditions can help it to thrive, so it's a particular concern when growing under cover

Allium leaf miner

Female flies lay their eggs around this time of year, with maggots boring into foliage, stems and bulbs of leeks, onions, shallots, garlies, and other allium. Protect plants by covering in some insect-proof netting





PEST FOCUS:

Slugs

Most veg gardeners' arch nemesis, if you have ever noticed slime-covered holes on the leaves of your edibles, slugs are mostly likely to be the cause of the damage. They target a wide range of crops, such as peas, beans, potato tubers and lettuce, so it's vitally important to keep them away from your harvests.

There are several colour variations, ranging from brown, to grey to black.

They are also active after dusk - why not try going out to your plot with a flashlight and collecting these gastropods in a container? They can be left out for birds to feed on them, but make sure this is far away from your edibles. Beer traps are another option - recycle a yoghurt pot by cleaning it out thoroughly, filling it to around 1cm before the top with beer and partially burying it in the ground.

Egg shells are also said to deter these slimy gastropods from reaching your prized plants. Simply crush the shells and scatter the pieces all around your most vulnerable edibles. Copper rings can be purchased for the protection of individual crops. If the problem becomes severe there are organic slug pellets available, but be careful when using them around pets and children.

Another solution would be to use nematodes to combat the issue. There are products available that contain these microscopic creatures - mix them with water to activate their pest-control qualities and irrigate the soil with the solution. Remember to read packet instructions for further information.



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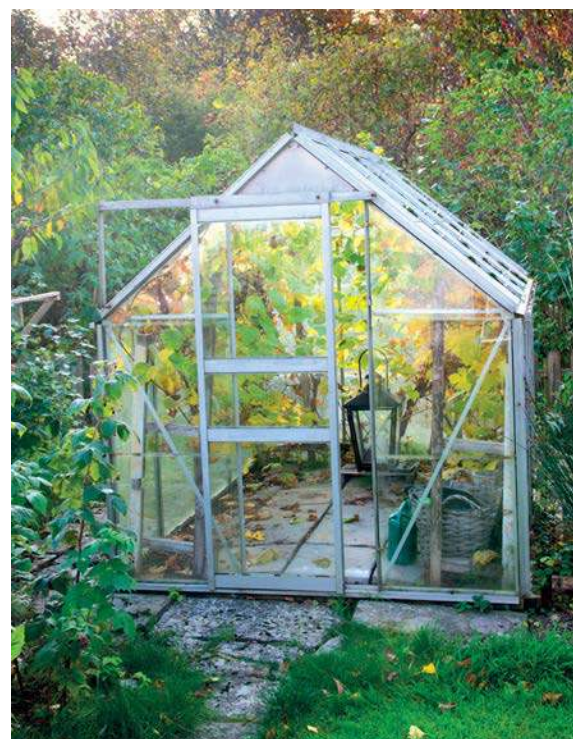


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Make sure your horticulture heroes don't miss out on bagging one of our accolades - simply fill in the form below and return to Events Department, 21-23 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Road, Colchester, CO2 8JY or head to growfruitandveg.co.uk/awards

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TERMS AND CONDITIONS This competition is open to all UK residents aged 18 or over, excluding employees or agents of the associated companies and their families. One entry per person (duplicates will be void). The prizes detailed in each competition cannot be exchanged for goods, or towards the purchase of goods at any retail outlet and are subject to availability. Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash, or replaced if lost or damaged. Automated entries are disqualified. Illegible entries and those that do not abide by these terms and conditions will be disqualified. The decision of the judge is final and no correspondence will be entered into. No responsibility held for entries lost, delayed or damaged in the post, proof of posting is not proof of delivery. Winners will be notified within 28 days of the closing date, a list of winners will be available in writing on request from Events Department, 21/23 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Road, Colchester, Essex, CO2 8JY. By entering you agree to Aceville Publications contacting you regarding the Great British Growing Awards. The Promoter will use entrants' personal details in accordance with the Aceville Privacy Policy. This is a limited offer and may be withdrawn at any time and subject to change. **CLOSING DATE** February 26, 2020

PLUS!

Best influencer (editor's choice shortlist)

Sponsored by: Harrod Horticultural



This year we are excited to announce that we will be introducing a brand new category looking for the best gardening influencer. We will provide a shortlist when voting opens, so keep your eyes out to see if your favourite inspirational online grower is featured, and make sure you give them your votes!

SMART NEWS

The only pages modern gardeners need for brilliant growing ideas

GYO Spotlight

Popular faces heading to RHS Malvern

As the gardening calendar heats up, this year's RHS Malvern Spring Festival looks set to be a crowd-pleaser once again. With a stellar lineup of popular gardening faces, including Alan Titchmarsh, Carol Klein, Joe Swift, Chris Beardshaw, Sarah Raven and Jo Whiley, the four-day festival, which runs from 7th-10th May, is expected to attract around 100,000 visitors. Speaking about attending the show, Alan Titchmarsh commented: "I'm delighted to be returning to RHS Malvern Spring Festival. It's held at such an exciting time of the year, when gardens are really starting to come to life, and the show itself is the perfect place for people to come and be inspired. Being at the foot of the Malvern Hills, it's a truly wonderful setting which shows the Great British countryside off at its very best."



LET US INTRODUCE YOU TO...

Chilli 'Armageddon'

One of the hottest chillies in the world, chilli 'Armageddon' is a UK bred hybrid super hot red chilli, and has been developed over five years. It is ideal for UK growing conditions. A high-yielding super hot chilli, it also offers a wonderful fruity taste with a heat level of 1.3 million Scoville Units that'll spice up any dish.

nickys-nursery.co.uk



Falstaff apple

Trees are beneficial to the planet and are a fruitful addition to your garden.

Tuck into plump and tantalising fruits - Falstaff is a heavy cropping apple variety, highly recommended for every home garden.

The flesh is crisp and juicy and has a very good flavour. Falstaff is a frost resistant type. **kenmuir.co.uk**



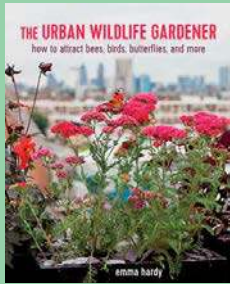
Starting up

...AN UNDER-COVER GROWING AREA

At this time of year, many growers are looking for ways to start sowing seeds but not everyone has the benefit of a greenhouse or a large cold frame. So, what can you do? The truth is that there are lots of options for small-space growers - and it doesn't necessarily mean having to pile your windowsill high with trays.

- Use propagators inside: Propagators are essentially a tray with a lid. They protect seeds from losing too much moisture and keep them slightly warmer than the outside temperature. A variety of options are available - so whether you're looking for a relatively cheap unheated propagator or an all-singing, all-dancing heated model, there's something for you (turn to page 104 for some tried-and-tested options).
- Invest in some mini cloches: These small dome-like products are ideal for protecting young crops outside and are a good way of starting off seeds that need to be sown direct.
- Make your own bespoke cold frame: only got a small outside space? Try making a bespoke cold frame to fit in whatever gap you have. Create the base and frame with brick and top with some robust transparent material.





Buy the book!

The Urban Wildlife Gardener contains 100s of easy-to-follow tips and techniques, simple projects, and essential plant know-how to attract birds, bees, butterflies, bugs and more to your outside space. Find out which plants to grow, how to provide nesting areas, when to prune shrubs or mow the grass and when to leave well alone, how to deal with weeds, how to create a pond for tadpoles and frogs and more. (£14.99, CICO books)

Spearheading spring

Asparagus is on the menu in the new Pomona Fruits catalogue, with three new varieties launching in the Spring 2020 range, thanks to the growing demand to grow these nutrient-packed spears. British-grown asparagus is traditionally harvested from the end of April (St. George's Day) until summer solstice (21st June), with the temperate climate proving optimum growing conditions. The three new types from Pomona include the hardy 'Guelph Eclipse', heavy-yielding 'Vittorio', and the sweet and salad-friendly purple 'Burgundine'. Asparagus plants may require a bit of patience initially, but can be productive for up to 25 years, so offer a worthy long-term investment. Order a copy of the catalogue on 01255 440410 or visit pomonafruits.co.uk.



HOT NEWS Branching out

The much-loved team behind *The Plant Based Podcast*, Michael Perry and Ellen Mary, are continuing on their mission to spread the love for all things plants with their brand-new YouTube channel: *Plant Based Podcast TV*. With a variety of videos on offer, the online show is aiming to further engage and educate their internet-savvy audience with the green-fingered pairs' renowned wit and charm. Speaking about the launch, Michael Perry commented: "We had a total ball making this series - it's our usual blend of knowledge and fun! It's no secret we both love plants, so being able to create a show that is educational and celebrates plants in all their glory has been super cool - from our allotment workout to plant based news, move over Moira Stewart!" Find out more at theplantbasedpodcast.net



GYO advertorial

Grow using a frame

The Harrod A Frame Growing Panels are heavy-duty wire trellis, perfect for supporting cucumbers, squash, peas or beans. With a 10-year framework guarantee, the panels are UK manufactured from zinc plated steel wire, exclusive to Harrod Horticultural. Each panel measures 68cm x 139cm and includes cable ties to join together and ground pegs. ARC-707 10 per cent off quote TYADGY6 from £95 harrodhorticultural.com, 0333 400 1500



Get smart with irrigation

This handy Electronic Water Timer connects to your tap and hose to enable you to water your garden or allotment without needing be on site to turn on/off the tap yourself. The timer can be programmed to run as frequently as every hour, or as infrequently as once a week, with a run time of between 1 and 120 minutes. Priced at £15.95 with free home delivery. Order online at gardenoasis.co.uk or call 01543 889900



Combat slugs and snails

If you are seeking environmentally-sustainable, alternative solutions to garden pests then Grazers will work for you. Wildlife-friendly Grazers G2 helps your garden plants to help themselves against slugs and snails, leaving hedgehogs and songbirds with their healthy food sources. Available from garden centres and online at grazers.co.uk or call 01768 800555



Collect water with a wall mounted butt

The Original Prestige Wall Mounted Water Butt is a novel, simple, British designed and manufactured water butt, perfect for the garden. It provides an elegant and neat solution to watering outdoor plants with softwater which is better for plants. Space-saving, slimline design to compliment and fit any style of house, flat or balcony. Sturdy and easy to install, supplied with everything you need. Child safe and pet proof. Visit: freeflush.co.uk



Smart step-by-step:

GROW MUSHROOMS

Forage for fungi from the comfort of your own home, say **Dick and James Strawbridge**

One of the biggest worries about foraging for mushrooms in the wild is identifying the edible ones. Growing your own eliminates the risk - you can confidently sample lots of different types without needing to be an expert mycologist. They'll be cheaper than shop-bought ones and whichever of these two methods you try, you'll be reusing a waste product.

A fun and easy way to grow mushrooms uses an old paperback book. We tried pearl oyster mushrooms. In the wild they grow on dead or dying hardwood trees but we grew them on our windowsill at home. The other method uses logs and dates back to China a thousand years ago. Back then, they

simply placed freshly felled logs next to ones that had mushrooms growing on them and waited for them to spread. These days we can buy spawn plugs - small lengths of grooved dowel that contain the mushroom's root system, or mycelium - to insert in a log. Look out for shiitake, pearl oyster, or chicken of the woods spawn plugs.

Book method

YOU WILL NEED:

- Paperback book with 200-400 pages
- Mushroom spawn (order online)
- Reused plastic bag and elastic bands
- Mister spray bottle



1 Soak the book in warm water for 20 minutes. Squeeze the bubbles out of the book while it is underwater to get rid of most of the air. Take out of the water and squeeze again, so it is wet not saturated.



3 Press the pages together. Repeat this process every 50 pages or so throughout the book, until you have used all the spawn.



2 Break up the mushroom spawn and gently spread some on the pages.

GROWING TIPS

- Maintaining high moisture levels is very important as mushrooms are mostly water. Growing them in a book means they need a bit of attention, but no more so than any indoor houseplant, and you can expect a harvest much faster than with the log method.
- You can get as many as three crops from your book. There's no need to put it back in the fridge - the mushrooms should just continue to grow as you harvest them.



4 Put a few elastic bands around the book and place it spine down in a see-through bag. Seal the bag and label it with the date. Keep in a warm place away from strong, direct sunlight and draughts - about 20°C (68°F) is ideal. In winter, keep it near a radiator or heat source. After 24 hours the spawn will begin to activate. In about two weeks the paper will be covered in white fuzz - the mycelium, or mushrooms' roots. When the edges of the book look white, place the bag in the fridge for two days.



5 Remove from the fridge and open the bag, folding it down to just above the top of the book. Put it in a light position (indirect sunlight) and water regularly with a plant mister.



6 Harvest oyster mushrooms when they are about 10cm (4in) across.



Log method

YOU WILL NEED:

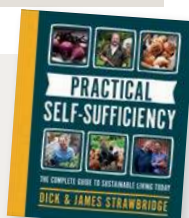
- Axe
- Gorilla bar
- Narrow spade
- Post-hole digger
- Hand drill and 8mm (5/16 in) drill bit
- Hammer
- Logs that have been felled within the last six months, about 1.2m (4ft) long and 15-18cm (6-7in) in diameter
- About 50 mushroom spawn plugs per log (order online)
- Metal pot

TRY THIS

- Tree stumps are ideal for growing mushrooms, as their roots still draw up plenty of moisture from the soil, but you must inoculate the stumps within several months of the tree being cut down. Drill only the outer ring of sapwood on the face of the stump, then insert spawn plugs.
- The north side of a building can be an ideal location for your logs. The wall will keep the logs a bit warmer, but don't position them too close to the building or they won't get any rain.
- Tray culture gets great results with button mushrooms. The trays should be about 20cm (8in) deep and filled with well-rotted horse manure. Sow dry mushroom spawn on the surface and cover with damp newspaper. Store the trays in a garage or shed. Remove the newspaper after about two weeks when the mycelium has grown. Cover the surface with 5cm (2in) of normal topsoil and water well. You should be picking mushrooms in two weeks.

Read more

Practical Self Sufficiency by Dick and James Strawbridge, £25, DK, new edition published January 2020



1 Choose a disease-free hardwood log and trim off any side branches and twigs. Remove any lichen or moss. Try not to damage the bark: it will help to retain moisture when the mushrooms start growing. Moisture is top priority for mushroom cultivation. Choose a damp, shady site, sheltered from strong winds, and dig a hole. Use a gorilla bar to get started.



3 Stand the log in the hole and secure it firmly by back-filling with rubble and soil. The log will draw up water from the earth.



5 Push the spawn plugs into the holes immediately after drilling - make sure your hands are clean. Then tap them in place. Water the log thoroughly. Place a metal pot over the top of the log. This will help to limit moisture loss by evaporation. Continue to water in hot weather. If the log gets too dry, the bark will flake off; if it sprouts mould you have overdone watering.



2 Finish the hole with a post-hole digger: the hole should be about half as deep as the log's total length.



4 Drill holes at right angles into the log. Make them half as deep again as the length of the spawn plugs. Stagger the holes at 10-15cm (4-6in) intervals in a diamond pattern, going all around the log.



6 Repeat with more logs if you have space. In 12 to 18 months your crop will be ready. Pick mushrooms when they form clumps of about 15cm (6in) across. Use a sharp, short knife, and cut close to the bark.

Smart guide to: EASY PLANT BREEDING



Kim Stoddart explains how to take your seed saving that step further for perfectly adapted homegrown resilience

The idea of breeding your own plants might seem a tad complicated but really it's not. Actually, it's often rather easy and in these incredibly turbulent, extreme, weather-battered times with climate change, the idea of producing your own plants becomes an ever more attractive prospect. It means you can create produce that is both perfectly adapted to your individual growing space and which boasts attractive plant traits which you have yourself selected. How cool is that?

Plants that don't cross with others are the best to start with as that way you can focus on selecting seed from those which have displayed the best traits compared to others of the same variety. For example, an individual pea plant that has been extra productive during a drought, or which has kept producing for longer than its peers. These are all characteristics you can hone and continue through the saving of the genetic qualities of such a plant.

It gets more complicated with biennial plants (which flower and set seed in their second year) so with only annuals in mind, here's how to get started breeding some of your own extra resilient plants for 2020. Do be buoyed by the knowledge that such seed saving used to be a firm part of the gardening calendar before we all got used to buying everything in, so they are not new skills, just incredibly useful ones that we would all benefit from tapping into again.

● Step 1: Get planning

Choose which plant(s) you'd like to have a go at breeding this year. To make it simpler, here's a selection of the easiest with which to work with: Pea, lettuce, rocket, chilli pepper, radish, tomato, nasturtium, calendula, French bean and coriander.

● Step 2: Select your best performers

You only want to save seed from the plants which have performed the best as that way you can carry on those excellent genetic traits to the benefit of your produce in years



to come. The more you save over the years, the better adapted to your own growing environment such home-saved seed can become – so it has real benefits.

Attractive traits to select include:

- Resistance to early bolting
- Low-maintenance or resilience attributes (keeps growing throughout heatwaves, or in low temperatures)
- Shows resistance to pest attack or disease (if others have been damaged)
- Attractive flavour
- Healthy, productive plants
- Keeps producing for longer
- Good-sized produce

If you want to take it a stage further, you can even put a test selection of your plants under greater pressure to see how they perform in order to see which comes out top, e.g. not watering them as much.

● Step 3: Save the seed

It varies from plant to plant but you want to collect seed once it has had a chance to fully form and plump up, as this affords it more energy for its growing life ahead. If you are growing inside, or in a dryer spell,



Listen, free, to Kim on GYO's brand-new podcast – search 'The Dirt from Grow Your Own' wherever you enjoy podcasts!



MORE ADVANCED BREEDING: CREATING YOUR OWN PLANT

You've probably done it already at some point without even realising it as many varieties of the same type of annual produce will readily cross with each other given half the opportunity. Take the hardy veg patch staple, runner beans, for example, the plant will produce flowers which require pollination to create produce. When your valiant bee (fly, wasp or butterfly) comes along, it will move from plant to plant across your patch which means varieties can be crossed through the resulting runner bean seed that is produced. If you are growing, say, two types of runner beans with traits you find attractive, then you are helping to guide what is produced, you are effectively breeding your own.

It's fun to experiment in this way and although not everything will necessarily work exactly as you intended, you could develop a real gem of a plant which you get to name, as it's your homegrown breed. A few years back I accidentally developed a celeriac/celery cross which is super resilient to whatever is thrown at it and which has tender leaves that are excellent in soups and salads.

you can also leave seed on plants to dry in situ.

● Step 4: Safe storage

The seed needs to be fully dry before storage so leave it in a warm and dry spot to help ensure it dries out properly. Then paper (old seed packets or envelopes) work best for safe keeping. Only save undamaged seed and it's best to date and label any packages so you can follow the progress next growing season. Then you can look forward to sowing your very own home-collected seeds!

LEARN MORE ON PLANT BREEDING

Kim runs climate change gardening courses at her training gardens in West Wales which includes seed saving. She is offering a special 15 per cent discount off for any bookings made before the end of March. See greenrocketcourses.com/courses and quote **GYO20** for the special offer. Her book, *The Climate Change Garden*, can also be purchased at the reduced price of £12 using the same code (**GYO20**) including UK P&P (RRP £16.99) climatechangegarden.uk



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Rose's top 5 for MARCH

GYO editorial assistant **Rose** shares her tasks and resources to improve your plot

Read this

Former *GYO* editor Lucy Chamberlain's updated edition of *Step-By-Step Veg Patch* is no regular book. In fact, it's a bit more like a bible on building a fruit and vegetable garden from scratch. Lucy has spared no expense when it comes to the number of crops she's managed to fit in. Fancy growing kohlrabi or gooseberries? You're covered! Plus, there's even a problem-solver section that focuses on common pests, diseases and dilemmas.



Plant this

If there's one thing that makes the month of March a little bit better, besides it being the start of spring, is the planting of asparagus crowns. These are one-year-old dormant plants that are much easier to work with than seed. You'll need to pick a sunny spot and prepare the ground beforehand by removing perennial weeds and digging in a bucketful of organic matter.



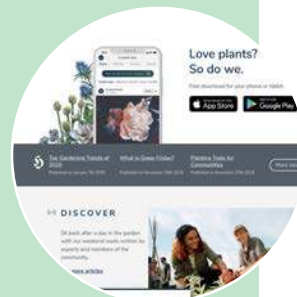
Insta this

It's important to celebrate first-time growers all year round but March is as great a time as any to do so, particularly whilst New Year's resolutions are still usually going strong. I've therefore been searching for some inspiring beginner gardeners on Instagram, and self-confessed "January 2018 allotment newbie" @pegsplot from Oxfordshire fits the bill. Claire shares her allotment adventures on the app which includes close-up shots of her dog Mia helping her to clear garden beds, harvest seasonal veg and planting.



Download this

I've been trying out a new app this month and I think it's rather great! Candide is a photo-sharing app for gardeners that functions a bit like Instagram but with more stuff. You can upload photos, ask questions, identify plants using the clever Plant ID finder, see what other gardeners are up to in your area and even check the weather! The knowledge base also holds a whole host of info, from videos on sowing seeds to the top 10 plants of the week.



Protect this

Your freshly planted spring seedlings will be under attack this month from pesky slugs hoping to grab a bite. Slugs are, unfortunately, so abundant in the garden that some damage is inevitable but that doesn't mean all your efforts should be in vain. Biological controls such as nematodes, or non-chemical ones such as torchlight searches and traps, should help to keep the problem under control.





MARCH

UNDER COVER

Make the most of your greenhouse and polytunnel with these top tips and growing advice

WORDS: Sally Nex

Dos & Don'ts

- **DO** keep an eye out for self-sown seedlings popping up near where annual herbs like dill, coriander and chervil ran to seed last year. They rarely sow themselves where you want them, so lift as many as you need with a trowel and transplant them into their veg bed now, about 10cm apart in rows or patches. Water in well, and this year's supplies are sorted – and for free!
- **DON'T** sow seeds straight into cold compost – seedlings are programmed to germinate only once temperatures rise above a certain level (usually at least 10-12°C), so a sudden chilling will set them back. Keep potting compost in the greenhouse, or bring it under cover at least 24 hours before sowing. Even better, pop filled pots into a heated propagator for an hour first, to pre-warm to the right temperature.

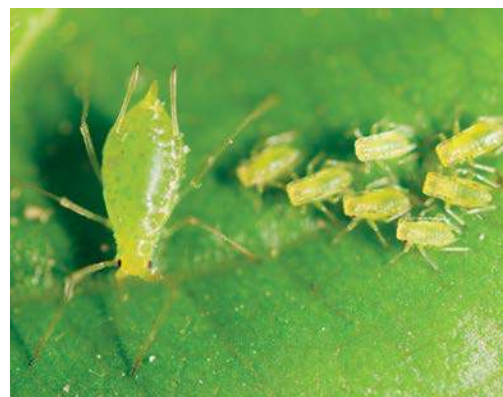


Start sorting through seed packets to check expiry dates in preparation for spring sowings

How to avoid: Aphids

Milder winters are forcing us to get used to pest invasions much earlier in the year nowadays, as bugs which would normally die out in frosty winters simply tuck themselves into a convenient nook and wait out the chill till spring comes round again. Aphids begin to emerge as early as March, when there are rich pickings to be found in vulnerable

new seedlings and tender young shoots. Patrol at-risk plants daily and squash small outbreaks between your finger and thumb. And enlist natural predators like ladybirds and lacewings – also out and about earlier in the year because of climate change. Entice them into your greenhouse by opening up ventilation and leaving doors ajar on sunny days and they'll hunt down your greenfly for you.



Sow now: Mangetout peas

It's hard to imagine a veg patch without fresh peas. They're easy-peasy (sorry) to grow, and you get inducted into one of the secret pleasures only grow-your-own enthusiasts know: the illicit luxury of popping open a pod straight from the plant and eating the peas raw, so sweet and full of flavour they dance on your tongue.

But producing the quantities of shelling peas you need to supply a family with regular portions through summer can be difficult. Many 'early' varieties like 'Feltham First' are quick to mature but have relatively low yields. Even heavy-cropping maincrop varieties like 'Telephone' only produce about 1.5kg – or a bag and a half of supermarket frozen peas – per three-metre row.

Since shelling peas freeze so well, it's more satisfying to reserve your podded crop for winter stores instead. For summer supplies, switch to mangetouts, offering much better value, and higher yields per square metre. Grow them just like podding peas but harvest the pods while they're flat, at about 6-8cm long. The more you pick, the more pods they produce, so you can pile them on your plate every day all summer long.



3 VARIETIES TO TRY:

- **'Oregon Sugarpod'** is one of the heaviest cropping mangetouts of all; pick over your plants every couple of days and they just keep producing more (marshalls-seeds.co.uk)
- **'Golden Sweet'** offers something a little different, with vigorous plants scrambling up to 1.8m tall bursting into pretty purple flowers followed by sweet, lemon-yellow pods (realseeds.co.uk)
- **'Shiraz'** looks just as good in the ornamental garden as in the veg plot, with gorgeous bi-coloured flowers followed by sultry deep purple mangetouts (nickys-nursery.co.uk)

Step by step: Buying and caring for plug plants

Plug plants are an ideal option when time and space are in short supply, and it's peak buying time right now. But once you get them home they still need a little TLC before you plant them out.

1



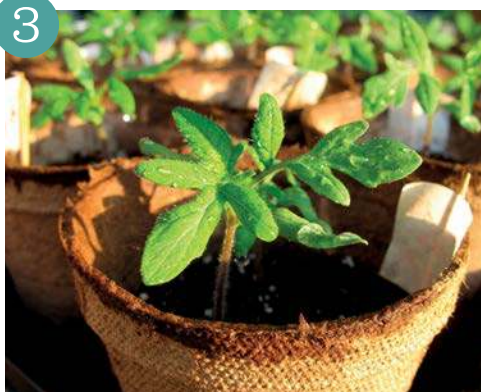
Most seed merchants supply plug plants mail order, but try to find companies which avoid using environmentally-damaging single-use plastic packaging: Rocket Gardens, for example, pack their plugs in cardboard and straw. Garden centres offer a more limited range but in smaller quantities.

2



Unpack mail order plants as soon as they arrive. Put loose plugs into a mug of water to soak for half an hour, or if they're in module trays, water them well. Then fill 10cm pots with peat-free multipurpose compost, make a hole with your finger and drop the plug plant in so the rootball lies just below the surface.

3



Water your plugs in, then transfer them to the shelter of a greenhouse or cold frame to grow on. Frost-tender plugs, such as tomatoes or aubergines, need a little extra warmth - a propagator set to 15-18°C is ideal, but they'll be fine on a sunny windowsill as long as you bring them into the room on cold nights.

4



Grow on for two or three weeks until they're sturdy young plants. Once the roots have filled their pots, they're big enough to plant outside: look for roots emerging from the side of biodegradable pots, or in plastic tip the plants out carefully and once you see roots at the edge of the compost, they're good to go.

METHOD



Grow your own companion plants

Your veg plants don't exist in isolation: they're part of a wider community, rubbing shoulders with other edibles plus weeds, flowers, herbs and whatever else is growing nearby. Plants often form relationships, protecting one another from pests and diseases, drought and weeds.

This year, whenever you sow a vegetable, sow its best friend too and you'll have fewer pests to deal with as well as healthier plants. So for each potful of tomato seedlings, sow French marigolds (*Tagetes*) to plant around their feet, repelling whitefly. A trayful of nasturtiums planted alongside your broad beans lures blackfly away too (they find nasturtiums even more irresistible than beans).

In the open garden, scatter clover under just-planted cabbages to confuse cabbage white butterflies and cabbage rootfly so they're less likely to lay their eggs on your brassicas. Underplanting bean wigwams with pot marigolds (*Calendula officinalis*) and alyssum brings in clouds of pollinating insects.

Weekend Project: Make a pot store from pallets

Pallets are like gold dust for thrifty veg gardeners as they convert easily into dozens of useful items, from decking, storage boxes and seed trays to raised beds, cold frames and potting benches. Store up several at once and you can make a stack of custom-built shelves for storing pots, seed trays and module trays, keeping them within easy reach for this most busy time of year.

Cut four to six pallets in half (depending on how large a shelf unit you can accommodate). Then stack them on top of each other to make shelves about 15cm intervals, about right for smaller (10cm or less) containers.

For larger pots and trays, remove the central slats from every other pallet, leaving just the sides for extra height. You can use the same method to create larger spaces four or five pallets high if you want to use your shelves to store compost sacks, too.

Once you're happy with the design, use pallet slats, staggering them for added strength, to clad the back and sides of your shelving unit, screwing them securely in place and locking each shelf in position. Finish it off with a lick of paint and a few handy hooks for tools, string and other bits and bobs.





A love letter from your **Vitavia GREENHOUSE**

To those considering buying a new greenhouse
this year, Vitavia has something to say...

Hello You! Happy New Year and Happy New Decade! I hope you had a good break and are ready and raring to smash 2020! You may not have realised it yet, but I would really like to be part of your next lifestyle chapter. You're already off to a great start with this magazine and now, with my support, you can do so much more to make this year a healthy and happy one. Sound good? Right, so here's where I see this going...

I have a feeling that this year is going to be a very big one for you. And when I say big, I mean a freshly grown, marrow sized, big one! No more pricking the top of the cellophane as you put the microwave on for three minutes. No more burning your hands as you remove a bowl of boiling hot stodge of blandness. No, I will not have you eating food that lacks punch.

But wait - there's more? Where did you get this food from? A supermarket. A large warehouse of packaged goods. Some you need, some that force their way into your trolley like an uninvited neighbour asking to see your new extension (which looks fab by the way). You pick up the things you know you need for convenience and speed but often forget the fresh stuff. However, that was the old you. Yes, I liked the way you did some things but now it's time to tackle some new things - Vitavia Greenhouse things. OMG. I know you're excited! Growing things in a house. A new house. Yes, you want your new house to be green (or black or silver), you get where I am going here, a GREENhouse if you will. Let me tell you a secret... Vitavia has lots of them. I come in all shapes and sizes. Big ones, small ones. Ones that lean.

Who knew you could buy something that leans? I thought leaning was for tired people. But you are not tired. You are eating the most nutritionally balanced food of your life, and you feel great. Oh and those curves - those luxurious on the Saturn spill out like a rainbow on a rainy day. I haven't even told you the best bit yet... what I am made of! Anodised aluminium. Yes, I am a greenhouse with a double A - so basically, I am AA*.

The other big shift in our lives is the word that will probably evoke a Marmite reaction in 2020... veganism. For every Lewis Hamilton and Novak Djokovic extolling the virtues of a plant-based lifestyle, we have a Piers Morgan and Donald Trump bemoaning a society of floppy haired teenagers devouring broccoli. Regardless of which food path



*I come in
all shapes and
sizes. Big ones,
small ones, ones
that lean*

you choose, surely we can all agree that food really is at the heart of all the best experiences in life. If you put me in your garden, we could grow the most amazing food to enrich your life. The flavours, the nutrition and colours could be sensational. And believe me - eating a freshly picked tomato is one of life's greatest pleasures. Sorry supermarkets - but you just can't compete with a homegrown tomato.

So, what do you say? I can see that you're tempted by the idea of creating a wonderful super food future together. So come on, let's get growing!

For more information on Vitavia greenhouses, visit **vitavia.co.uk**





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Growing in GREENHOUSES

Discover why you should be thinking about adding an under-cover structure to your plot this year

Growing under cover can open a whole new world of opportunity in the veg garden, and greenhouses have become a hugely popular addition for gardeners, whether beginner or experienced. They allow you to start the season earlier and continue growing into autumn, as the glass structure offers protection from the weather. Look through the fantastic products on the next page to find the one that suits your growing space – and decide once you’ve got your structure, the accessories you might want inside.

Greenhouse uses

Greenhouses are perfect for protecting seedlings as they develop, due to the warmer temperature and sheltered environment – tomatoes and cucumbers crop well when grown in these structures and produce abundant yields. Greenhouses

also give you the opportunity to start sowing earlier in the year, as well as grow crops later in the season. Plants which are overwintering in containers can also be moved under cover in the greenhouse to give them a little more protection from frosts and winter storms.

Choosing the right area

Placing your newly-bought greenhouse in an area that receives the sunlight during most of the day is important. Shielding plants from the outside weather means that they can develop in a nice warm environment, and won’t be weakened by unfavourable weather. If you live in a southerly area of the UK you may be concerned that your greenhouse might overheat during the summer. In this case you can put up shades on the glass and open the doors and the vents to lower inside temperatures.

Structure

Greenhouses come in a huge variety of shapes and sizes. Choosing the right structure for your garden can be a little confusing, so it is important to consider the space you have available but also what you want the greenhouse to be made of. Aluminium-framed greenhouses are common, and the thin bars used to make the structure do not cause a huge amount of shade, so you can grow a variety of crops in the under cover structure. Alternatively you can purchase one made out of wooden beams. This material adds an aesthetically pleasing style to these useful products, but they can take up more space and may need occasional maintenance, so it is worth considering which you prefer before purchasing.



Growhouse

Ideal where space is limited, we offer a wide range of lengths and heights to fit every space. Designed to over-winter plants and protect tender plants in the spring, this versatile Growhouse won't blow away like its plastic competitors! Sliding door panels allow easy access and provide excellent ventilation. Seed tray shelves can be adjusted for height and removed in summer. Learn more at garden-products.co.uk

Shading Paint

Peelable greenhouse shading paint - paint it on, peel it off! Thorndown's revolutionary Peelable Glass Paint is the perfect shading paint for greenhouses. This ready-to-use water-based paint is made with recycled plastic and available in 24 opaque and 14 translucent including the traditional white options. Unlike old shading paints Peelable Glass Paint is attractive and easy to use and remove. Apply with a roller then peel off to remove! thorndown.co.uk



Vale Victorian Greenhouse

The magnificent Vale Greenhouse features all the qualities that you'd expect from a Victorian-style timber growing space. Entered through double doors you'll immediately realise that your growing space is exceptionally spacious with potting shelves for workspace and opening windows for ventilation. The exterior has a lovely natural finish while sunlight streams through the toughened glass, creating an ideal growing environment. Visit gardensite.co.uk or call **0121 355 7701**



Garden Oasis

Get your plants and crops off to an early start this spring with a Palram Greenhouse from Garden Oasis. Palram greenhouses use rustproof aluminium frames with virtually indestructible polycarbonate glazing, making them safe for gardens with children and more resistant to vandal damage. Prices start at under £250 with free home delivery available. View the full range online at gardenoasis.co.uk or call **01543 889900** for details.

Vitavia Orion

The Orion greenhouse has attractive curved eaves for optimum growing height and is available in two sizes, each 1.93m (6'4") wide. The two models have a smooth action sliding door, one roof vent and the Vitavia integral standard gutters. As well as precisely cut glass, the Orion is supplied with UV-protected acrylic panels for the curved eave sections. Vitavia have a greenhouse style to suit every gardener. For more information and to browse the full collection visit vitavia.co.uk



Rhino Greenhouses

If you're considering investing in a greenhouse this spring, you'll have lots of questions: Where should I position it? How much sun should it get? Do I need planning permission? What model suits my garden? At Rhino Greenhouses, we'll guide you through the decision-making process, in person, over the phone or via live chat, so you get the perfect growing environment for your garden. rhinogreenhouses.co.uk



Elite Greenhouses

From starter models right through to buildings large enough to handle any enthusiast's demands, why not grow your own this year with an aluminium greenhouse made in the UK, with a 10-year guarantee, by the leading brand trusted for over 65 years. To find your nearest stockist and display check out our website at elite-greenhouses.co.uk



Quadgrow Planter

The award-winning Quadgrow self-watering planter produces up to 2x bigger harvests compared with grow bags or pots because it automatically waters your plants for 14 days at a time. Even better, it does it all without electricity or timers! Ideal for growing in greenhouses, polytunnels or patios. Grow tomatoes, aubergines, sweet peppers, beans, cucumbers and other tall cropping plants. For more information visit greenhousesensation.co.uk



Victorian Feature Greenhouse

Robinsons Greenhouses, long famous for high quality, launched its Victorian porch model, as well as a new range of pastel colours, last year. Robinsons arguably have the broadest choice of UK-made greenhouses of any manufacturer, ranging from 1.5m wide to 6.4m wide. For more information and to find local dealers go to robinsonsgreenhouses.co.uk



The Elegance Tool Rack

This rack makes a delightful and practical addition to any greenhouse. At 95cm long and featuring eight hooks, it will easily accommodate a selection of garden tools, coats, bags, hats, clothing, extension leads and other useful bits and bobs. Made from solid steel, it is strong and hard-wearing. Order yours at agriframes.co.uk

Evika

Strength, safety and style are the three main characteristics when it comes to Evika greenhouses. With three durable and long-lasting colour finishes to choose from, you can perfectly match your new greenhouse to its surroundings. Manufactured in the UK. We offer the full Evika greenhouse range to buy online, with inclusive mainland UK delivery within 5-7 days. Visit our site: evika.co.uk



Bayliss Autovents

Bayliss Autovents of Ashbourne manufacture a range of quality automatic window openers to fit virtually any style of greenhouse. The MK7 model pictured is available in a choice of colours with two temperature ranges for standard plants, or more exotic types such as orchids. Call 01335 342 981 or find details at baylissautovents.co.uk





Huw Richards:

A SIMPLE WEEDING STRATEGY



This month, **Huw** shares his top tips for keeping on top of unwanted plants, easily

Weeding may be the least popular chore on any gardener's to-do list, but if approached with the right mentality it can be a surprisingly therapeutic process.

If I ever (unintentionally) let the weeds get out of control, I take the opportunity to turn the chore into something more useful such as having the chance to slow down and listen to a podcast or audiobook. Alternatively, you could always get up just before first light and weed amongst the melodies of the dawn chorus if you are after an electronic-free approach.

Before I go over a very simple strategy to always be in control of your weeding, I believe it is vital that you know why weeds

appear in the first place. Put simply, growing weeds is nature's way of protecting bare ground from eroding and losing moisture as well as protecting damaged soil. When you have a whole raised bed full of weeds and you dig it over, this stresses the ground and within a couple of weeks you will only come back to find twice as many weeds now growing in the area you just 'cleared'. This is why no-dig and low-dig methods help save so much time because they cause minimal damage to the ground and this translates to minimal weeds.

If you have very weedy garden beds, the best option is to either cover them with some thick layers of cardboard for a couple of months and then pull out what plant matter

is left, or use a fork to gently loosen the soil, remove the weeds and then hoe the bed twice a week for a month before planting. Every winter I like to cover some raised beds with cardboard or landscape fabric as this keeps them completely clear until it comes to planting. There is nothing more demoralising than returning to the garden in early spring with passion, only to be met by an army of weeds which have popped up since Christmas.

The best strategy when it comes to staying on top of the weeds is by using a 'little but often approach'. Doing a quick sweep around the garden once or twice a week will save so much more time in comparison to once a month. This is

Expert advice



because if a germinated weed has a week at most to grow roots, it is going to be easy to hoe or pull out with your fingers. If you compare the root system between a one-week and a four-week weed you will see how much stronger the older plant is and usually it means you must give it a hefty pull or resort to using a trowel. It also means that there will be weeds at other growth stages which only adds to the time needed to rectify the problem and chips away at the time you want to spend doing the more enjoyable tasks such as transplanting. Think of it this way, for every week you don't weed, the weeds will take at least twice as long to remove.

I can understand the appeal of wanting to do a bulk weed once a month, but we all know how easy it is to get side-tracked with other tasks, especially when you are in the heart of the growing season. This is why I believe that setting the habit of a regular check once a week is the best strategy because if you happen to miss a week, it still won't be nearly as bad as missing an

extra week after a month of no weeding! For a successful and stress-free growing season this year you must not let weeds put

The best strategy when it comes to staying on top of the weeds is by using a 'little-and-often' approach'

a dampener on things. At the start of each week, add a reminder to your calendar to help keep you accountable about the next

weeding session - you will thank yourself later in the season when your garden feels a lot more manageable!

To put it into perspective, I have over 30 large raised beds and it takes me around 15 minutes a week during spring and summer to keep on top of the weeds using a hoe. A single bed can take 15 minutes to weed if you have abandoned it for a couple of months! A method I use which helps slash the time needed is by hoeing the weeds during the midday sun and leaving them to wilt and break down on the surface of the raised bed, instead of collecting and placing them on a compost bin.

Remember, to stay ahead of the game, simply use the little-and-often approach, which keeps things as stress-free as possible. If you have a spare five minutes here or there, it is the ideal moment to do a quick check - it will only benefit you and your productivity. Next month, I will be covering a few strategies to better deal with slugs, which are another bane of gardeners' existence!





Professional compost (£14.99)

Want to get just as good results as growers from the horticultural trade? Made from a top-secret formulation and the highest-quality ingredients, this compost will help your plants to reach their full potential

You Garden



Garden labeller (£34.99)

Sort your seedlings into organised rows this spring with this garden labeller. Punch in a name and print out a label and you'll never have to guess where your veg is planted again

Labels 'N' Things



Half log raised bed kit (£70.95)

Providing 21cm of depth for homegrown veg, this raised bed is easy to build and makes it even easier to tend to your plants. The timber is also pressure treated and carries a 15-year guarantee against rot

Garden Oasis



Heavy duty weeder (£22.75)

Make light work of removing stubborn weeds with this heavy duty garden weeder.

The robust spike has been designed to remove the weed at its roots and it can even be used as a handy bulb planter

Two Wests & Elliot

PICK OF THE CROP

Spring essentials

Get all set for spring sowings with these super garden products



Fruit and vegetable cage (from £96.00)

These 2m-high fruit cages and low vegetable cages are available in a variety of sizes or can be custom made to suit you. All netting is rot proof, long lasting and UV stabilised. Buy online at wmjames.co.uk and receive 10 per cent off using the code **BIGYORD**

William James



Montreux nest box (£16.99)

This stylish nest box is the perfect focal point for any spring garden. Designed to attract house sparrows and nuthatches, it will provide much-needed nesting opportunities and will encourage more wildlife into the garden

CJ Wildlife



Wooden raised bed (from £27.50)

Treat yourself to a bespoke raised bed this spring. The wide range of raised beds consist of interlocking wooden boards and posts without the need for nails or screws - so it's even easier for you!

Gardening Works



Vegepod (from £129.00)

Vegepods are self-contained raised garden beds that grant full protection from the elements and allow veg harvests to be protected and grow all year round. Designed especially for the colder months, Vegepod has a winter cover which instantly transforms the pod to a raised greenhouse

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STEP-BY-STEP GARDEN MAKES:

TIN CAN TRELLIS

Add this simple and novel planter to your growing area, and utilise the space you have

Making the most of whatever space available to grow in is key when planning out your veg garden. Whether you have a large garden or simply a balcony or patio, this project will add a beautiful and productive focal point - and it is easily customisable to your own garden. Simply decide on the size and shape you would like your planter to be, and use whichever colour of wood stain that will best suit your space and tastes - if you are artistic, you could always customise this further! We'd love to see pictures of your own garden DIY projects, so do get in touch and show us what you have made!



1 Work out what size you want your tin can trellis to be, and mark out the measurements on the pieces of wood that will make up the frame



2 Saw the wood along the marked lines so you have the correctly sized pieces to make up the trellis frame



3 Paint the pieces of wood making up the trellis. You could either go for a nice, bright focal point in the garden, or a more natural feature to blend in with your plants - whatever suits your tastes



4 Using a hammer and nail, make holes in the sides of your cans for the wire handles to go through, and also a hole in the bottom for drainage



5 Use pliers, or the side of the tins, to bend the wire handles into shape and attach them to the tin cans, through the holes you have just made



6 Measure out where the wooden parts of the trellis will need to sit. Using a screwdriver, screw these parts together, making sure the paint has dried. Add nails from which the cans will hang



7 Hang the cans from the nails on the planter. Add your chosen plants to the tins, removing them from their small pots and potting them on into the cans



8 Carefully water the plants, using the fine rose on a watering can so they aren't sitting in too much water. Check that the drainage holes are working



9 Label your tins to make sure you can keep track of the type of plant in each tin - this will help you keep up with their individual care needs. The labels can also be personalised and decorative

YOU WILL NEED:



- Wood
- Tin cans
- Saw
- Hammer
- Nails
- Screwdriver
- Screws
- Measuring
- tape
- Wire
- Pliers
- Pencil
- Labels
- Pen
- Compost
- Plants

Top crops to grow in tins

- Mint
- Thyme
- Sage
- Basil
- Oregano
- Lemon balm
- Sorrel
- Rocket
- Lettuce
- Spinach

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SIMPLE STEP-BY-STEP

Hanging basket *with* CHERRY TOMATOES

Get tomatoes off to a soaring start with this extract from *Small Summer Gardens*

This is a great summer container if you are short of outdoor space. Suspend the basket using a metal wall bracket or hook by your door for a handy supply of tomatoes throughout the summer. Alternatively, make a tripod like the one shown here, firmly securing the ends of the branches in the ground, as the basket will become quite heavy, especially when it is watered.

YOU WILL NEED

- Hanging basket and liner
- Potting mix
- Moisture-retaining granules (optional)
- Metal wall bracket or hook, for suspending the basket (optional)
- Three sturdy branches and garden twine, to make a supporting tripod (optional)
- Metal butcher's hook, for suspending the basket from the tripod (optional)

Plants:

- Six *Solanum lycopersicum* (tomato plant), such as 'Losetto', 'Tumbling Tiger', and 'Tumbling Tom Red'
- *Tropaeolum majus* (nasturtium) seeds

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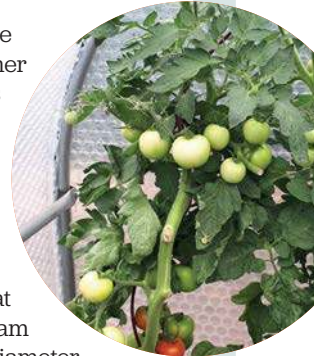
Extracted from *Small Summer Gardens* by Emma Hardy, published by CICO Books (£12.99) Photography by Debbie Patterson © CICO Books On sale February 11th





Tomato supports

Tumbling tomatoes do not need supporting but cordon tomatoes do, so if you're thinking of growing other varieties alongside this hanging basket, you'll need plant supports. These Spiral Twist Sticks (set of three) from **plantsupports.co.uk** can either be used singly or jointed at the top to form a wigwam structure with a 5cm diameter loop to assist fixing it together. The spiral bar supports the natural growth of the plant.



Feeding time

As soon as tomatoes start to flower the plants will need feeding. As we all know, tomatoes are hungry plants, so it's a good idea to give them a boost from the get go. Empathy Tomato Starter biscuits with rootgrow provide tomatoes and other container vegetables with all the nutrients and moisture they need to thrive throughout the growing season in just one application.



Banish pests

Unfortunately, slugs will eat pretty much anything, including tomato plants. You can get rid of garden slugs with safe, natural nematodes. Nematodes are one of the most effective slug control products on the market. To use, mix with water and water one: within days, the slugs will start to die. Nematodes are harmless to pets, children and wildlife. Available from **gardening-naturally.com** or call **01285 760505**



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1 Soak the rootballs of all the tomato plants in water for about 10 minutes, or until they are completely wet through. Place the liner in the hanging basket and press it firmly into place.



3 Remove a tomato plant from its plastic pot, scoop out a little of the potting mix from the basket, and plant the tomato in the hole. Make sure the top of the plant's rootball is level with the surface of the mix.



5 If you wish, plant three nasturtium seeds in the basket; they will add further colour to the display when they flower. Hang the basket in a warm, sunny spot, either against a wall, using a metal bracket or hook, or from a simple tripod.



2 Fill the basket with potting mix. If you wish, add some moisture-retaining granules, following the manufacturer's instructions. Level off the surface.



4 Continue to plant the remaining tomatoes in the basket, using five or six plants in one hanging basket. If necessary, fill any gaps between the plants with a little more potting mix and firm in.



6 To make a tripod, tie three sturdy branches together securely with garden twine, then suspend the basket from the tripod by hooking a butcher's hook over the twine and branches. Water the basket and let drain.



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Let's get FRUITY!



Kim Stoddart outlines the easiest and most rewarding fruit to grow and explains how to weave plants into your plot no matter the size

There is a sheer, unadulterated pleasure to be had from picking your own luscious, sweet sun-ripened berries or currants. Just see if you can manage to get them back to the kitchen first. They are bursting with so much more flavour than any you could buy from the shops. There really is no comparison at all and the great thing is that they are very straightforward to grow. Many can prosper in containers or hanging baskets, or be used in and around other veg patch fare. They are also the plants that just keep on giving, year after year, with minimal attention and care (just an annual mulch of compost in spring).

Here's my pick of the most fabulous, low-maintenance best:

Blackcurrants (and redcurrants)

I grow some of these at the top of my veg plot as they provide a barrier against wind and can help soak up an excess of rain while providing me with an ample haul of produce without fuss each summer. There are a wide range of varieties to choose from, with compact bush cultivars most suitable to smaller space growing.

They are incredibly easy and reliable to grow. Just place them in a sunny spot and make sure you get to the fruits before the birds do. If you have a glut then they freeze well, and make excellent jam.

Tip for container growing: They can dry out more readily so a mulch of compost is beneficial during a hot spell. You could also



try growing some light ground cover like lettuce around the stem to maximise the space and stop soil drying out so quickly.

Thrifty Tip: If you have a friend with some plants, there is still time now to take some cuttings while the bush lies dormant, giving you currants for free! Simply use a pair of sharp secateurs to snip a number of roughly hand-sized cuttings, which then can be planted in soil to enable them to root and grow - simple!



Strawberries

You can choose from many early or later fruiting varieties or stagger them for a longer growing season. These plants will sit in situ for up to four years before requiring a fresh stock of plants, which can be garnered from last season's fresh runners.

They also lend themselves well to hanging basket or pot growing and make a good fruity material for novel savaged containers like old wellington boots (a good project for little and big kids alike).

Although I don't net my currants, as there are always some to spare, I feel altogether more protective of my strawberries and some protection is often recommended to improve the quality of the harvest. Slugs can be an issue, and like hiding under the straw, so do ensure the ground is clear before you add this protective layer. You could also try adding a layer of weed-suppressing membrane instead but I think the straw looks more attractive personally, and slugs will hide

under anything. Netting can also be used over the top so the blackbirds don't eat all of your harvest.

Rhubarb

This often underrated perennial fruit is a delight and can be put to many uses in the kitchen. Aside from an annual mulch of compost you just need to divide the root ball after about four years so it doesn't get compacted, this means your patch just keeps on growing, for more rhubarb all round.

Raspberries

Again very straight forward to care for. Just grow them in a container unless you want them to take over your plot entirely - you have been warned!

Take a walk on the wilder side

Leave even a small patch of your plot untouched and wild blackberries will quite possibly muscle their way in. This is because birds love munching on these delectable fruits with gusto, dispersing the seed readily through their excrement as they fly on by.

Although a patch of brambles can look a tad overgrown it can provide valuable shelter for many creatures. Small birds, such as wrens, favour it for nesting and mammals like hedgehogs use the sprawling plant for protection from predators.

However, cultivated blackberry plants tend to be a lot more productive fruiting wise, so if you love the taste of this fruit, and would like consistently large berries then this is a more controlled option.

I personally favour both. In smaller spaces however there are many dwarf varieties that will grow happily in containers and hanging baskets.



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Thrive client gardener Emma working on her raised bed with a volunteer at the charity's Reading centre. **Photo:** Charlie Garner/Thrive

GARDENING HEROES:

THRIVE

We chat with **Jan Broady**, Senior Horticultural Therapist at Thrive Reading, to find out more about the important work the charity is doing using the therapeutic power of horticulture



Client gardener Ellie at work at Thrive Birmingham's gardens in Kings Heath Park. **Photo:** Freddie Watson-Stubbs/Thrive

What do you do at Thrive?

At Thrive, we're all about helping more people experience the health benefits of gardening and we do this in several ways. We run therapeutic gardening programmes at three centres in Birmingham, London and near Reading which attract hundreds of people every year. I work as the Senior Horticultural Therapist at Thrive Reading helping to run programmes and manage our team of horticultural therapists who work with client gardeners. Another way we help people is by offering an information service

to make gardening easier for those facing barriers due to ageing, illness or disability. Lots of practical tips are online and in publications, some of which are free.

We're also ultimately helping more and more people benefit from horticultural therapy by using our expertise to train individuals and organisations to run programmes across the country.

How did the organisation start?

Thrive started 40 years ago after a young horticulturalist called Chris Underhill



Senior Horticultural Therapist Jan Broady discussing plants with client gardeners Carly and Charley. Photo: Mark Lang/Thrive

returned to the UK inspired by working with people with disabilities in Africa. Chris saw what gardening can offer people and was keen to explore the potential of bridging the worlds of horticulture and health, so he formed the Society for Horticultural Therapy and Rural Training, which later became known as Thrive.

In the early days, the focus was on supporting people looking to set up horticultural therapy projects but over the years that changed to providing programmes ourselves as well as training others. Although Chris doesn't work with us now, he's still a big supporter and is justifiably proud that Thrive has helped thousands of people over the last four decades.

The approach you use is social and therapeutic horticulture – what does this mean?

At its most basic Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH) is all about using gardens and plants to help people holistically. Our horticultural therapists will work with our clients to discuss their needs and which areas of their lives they want to address whether it's physical health, mental health, social or communication skills.

One of the beauties of gardening is that it's a very flexible medium where activities can be tailored to most needs and abilities, and the skill of the horticultural therapist is in creating meaningful activities that help clients work on the goals they want to achieve.

People coming to Thrive's STH programmes have a really wide range of needs, such as autism, visual impairment, learning disabilities and mental ill health, to name a few. The garden provides a safe space for them to develop and take steps to more independent living, regardless of age or ability.

One of the reasons I'm so enthusiastic about STH is that over the years I've seen how much difference it can make to client gardeners in all manner of situations.

One woman I've worked with had some real anger issues when she came to us, but the physicality of certain gardening tasks really helped her. Her character has blossomed and she's much calmer and very outgoing.



Working in the borders at Thrive Reading. Photo: Charlie Garner/Thrive

Do you focus on a specific type of gardening – such as wildlife gardening, grow your own – or does it vary?

At Thrive Reading, we're blessed with a three-acre site that has many different gardening opportunities. The 70 client gardeners who attend every week each have a raised bed where they can grow veg, flowers or a mixture, it's their choice and that's an important consideration.

For one client with autism, making decisions could be tricky but his enthusiasm for growing vegetables and his keenness to plant the best performers has really helped him make progress on his decision-making abilities, which in turn will benefit other areas of his life. It was fantastic to see his sense of achievement when he dug up a cracking crop of new potatoes in time for Christmas.

The best bit about working with our clients is seeing how good gardening makes them feel and how their confidence grows as a result. It's wonderful!

We have an allotment field too, where clients work together to grow crops all year round. This teamwork, supported by horticultural therapists, builds social and communication skills, as well as lasting friendships which is great.



Client gardener Imogen chatting to Thrive Horticultural Therapist Richard in the glasshouse at Thrive London in Battersea Park. Photo: Mark Lang/Thrive

Flower borders, a woodland garden, a herb garden, a large glasshouse and specially designed and adapted gardens also feature, so there's a big variety of gardening experiences on offer for our client gardeners.

Why should everyone be gardening to boost both mental and physical health?

Two reasons – gardening makes a difference and it's so accessible.

Gardening can reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression and at a time when as many as one-in-six adults experience mental health problems, that is an important message to get across.

All gardeners know that getting into a garden makes them feel better, while the physical side can increase fitness, muscle strength, dexterity, and improve sleep, there are plenty of other benefits, too. For example, sunlight lowers blood pressure as well as increasing vitamin D levels, while producing vegetables and fruit helps our diet.

And if you're lonely, or don't have a garden of your own, joining a community garden scheme is a great way to meet other like-minded people and get these health and wellbeing benefits, so all together gardening is a powerful package for good.

In what ways do you reach the people who require support from Thrive?

People join our programmes in various ways. Some are referred by local authorities and social services, while others may get in touch directly or via their families. We're hoping that social prescribing will be another route.

We also run therapeutic gardening programmes in the community. In the past we have partnered with other charities, such as the British Lung Foundation, where we helped people suffering with lung conditions.

What's the most rewarding part of the work being done at Thrive?

I love celebrating people's successes. It is a privilege to be a part of something that has such a positive impact on people's lives. The sense of achievement and pride that is often expressed by our client gardeners is heart-warming.

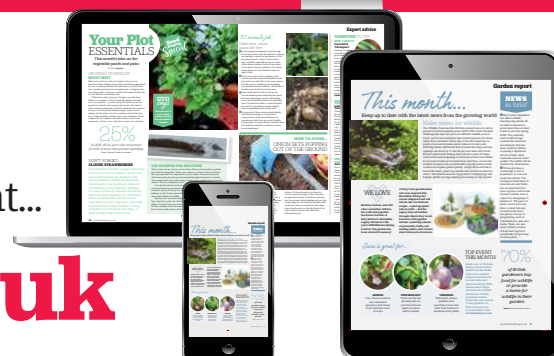
Even when changes are small, they are always profound.

● To find out more about Thrive and the brilliant work they do, visit the website, which can be found at thrive.org.uk

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Making your own potting compost gives you control over what goes into your plants – give it a try!



Garden Organic masterclass:

Why it's important – and easy – to go peat free

Sarah Brown encourages us to cut this non-sustainable medium from our growing repertoire

This is the year of peat – at a time when gardeners and growers across the UK should be celebrating the protection of our rare peat bogs, and using only peat-free compost. Except we are not. The government target, in line with climate emergency measures, to reduce and stop using peat in bagged composts and growing mediums by this year has worryingly slipped. Go to any retailer (except an enlightened handful) and you are still offered plants in peat-filled pots and bags of peat mix for sowing and potting.

Why should we be peat free? Peat bogs are very special ecosystems, a wildlife haven to rare birdlife, plants and insects. Peat is also the largest and most efficient land-based store of carbon, one of the planet's damaging greenhouse gases. Peat bogs store on average 10 times more carbon per hectare than any other ecosystem, including forests. We have already destroyed or degraded 95 per cent of the UK's peat bogs, and the industry is now sourcing over two-thirds of its peat from Eastern Europe.

So how can you go peat free? It's easy to make your own potting composts (see next page). They will work for seed sowing, potting on and planting up.

Make sure you ask your local retailer if they stock peat-free compost. The industry says there is no demand – let's prove them wrong! Alternative growing mediums use anything from coir, to green waste, composted wood chip, sheep's wool and bracken. There are specialist mixes for seedlings, ericaceous, and growbags. It's true that the cheaper versions perform poorly. So it's worth spending a little more, and you get excellent results. If you are short on money, it's seed compost that you should invest in. You need much smaller amounts than for potting on, so it will go a long way, and it is so important for plants to get a good start.

The RHS, National Trust, Garden Organic and other leaders are all campaigning for peat-free growing. Why not join them, and banish precious peat from your garden. The curlew, dragon fly and timid hare will thank you.

Garden Organic brings together thousands of people who share a common belief – that organic growing is essential for a sustainable world. Visit gardenorganic.org.uk to find out more.



HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN POTTING COMPOSTS

1 Seed compost doesn't need high nutrients, the seeds carry their own for the germination period. Mix in equal parts your own garden soil (loam) and well-rotted leafmould. If you don't have any of the latter, mix three-quarters loam and one-quarter horticultural sand. Make sure the mix is well sieved and firm before sowing into it

2 For seedlings, you need a slightly richer mix (not too rich, or they will become leggy and weak.) Use equal parts loam, garden compost and leafmould. If your loam is very heavy, add some grit to help drainage

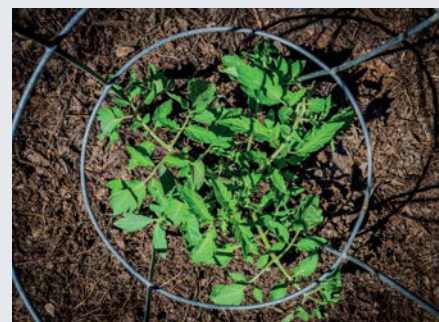
3 For mature plants growing in containers, use three-parts loam, one-part manure, one-part leafmould. This is a rich mix, and ideal for greedy, fast growing plants like tomatoes, aubergines and peppers in pots

4 Using these mixes, you will provide the

correct nutrients for the plant. A mixture that retains moisture, but drains well; retains air, yet holds plant roots firmly. You can also add specialist fertilisers to mature potted plants such as lime chippings (for fruit trees), worm casts (useful in hanging baskets), dried bracken (for ericaceous) and an all-round comfrey or seaweed feed.

Top tips!

- Decide to go peat free in your growing area. Ask your local retailer if they have peat-free compost and if their plants are grown in peat-free medium
- Make your own potting composts. It's not difficult, you can make just as much as you need. And it's free
- Help us save the peat bogs and reduce carbon emissions by joining the peat-free campaigns: For Peat's Sake at Garden Organic or #peatfreeapril



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MY TASKS THIS MONTH

Seed Sowing Special

Katie Lane is dedicating time in the garden now, to make sure she's ready for the busy months ahead



"The growing year really starts to get busy in March, the days are getting warmer and therefore us gardeners are eager to get outside to sow seeds and to finally feel the sun on our faces.

"Daffodils are in bloom and the first signs of spring are giving us hope and excitement for the year ahead.

"This is the time I usually start picking my purple sprouting broccoli, a long growing season crop but well worth it in my opinion. Nothing can beat those delicious harvests from March until April after a long and harsh winter. There's also leeks still left in the ground ready for

harvesting and the good old hardy crop of Swiss chard are starting to put on another growth spurt of rainbow colours.

"As I patiently wait for the soil to warm up you'll no doubt find me in the greenhouse preparing for the next three months of sowing and potting on. Around late March I sow my sweetcorn, squash, courgette, red cabbage and purple sprouting broccoli.

"I also like to grow flowers and herbs amongst my vegetables so I'll be busy sowing scabious, zinnias, sunflowers, calendula, borage, chives, lady's mantle and chamomile in the greenhouse, too.

"The use of cloches are perfect for this

time of year and I use them a lot on my allotment. They help to warm the soil ready for planting as well as giving much needed heat to help boost the germination of hardier seeds and small seedlings.

"I like to sow my first row of radishes in March in a large container with the help of a cloche and then I sow successional throughout the spring, summer and autumn to get a continuous tasty crop!

"The onions that I planted into module trays a month ago are also planted out now and suddenly the allotment is starting to come alive again."



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Ellen Mary is
foraging for wild
garlic as spring
arrives this March



Gardening gives us hope and has us looking forward to the spring time after the wintery, colder months of the year. Watching bulbs popping up through the soil, preparing to flower, and seeing those first daffodils is enough to make anyone smile. Thinking about how bulbs bloom after being hidden away under the soil for a period of time, maybe even with a covering of snow, shows just how taking a rest is needed before bursting back into bloom again. A process we can all think about for our own wellbeing. Preparing for spring and summer is not only a time to nurture the garden but also ourselves for a time of growth. As you start to prepare your garden for the fruit, vegetables and flowers which will bloom throughout the year, remember to nurture yourself as well and be prepared to flourish.

Wild garlic

It's the perfect time of year to forage for wild garlic, so grab your trug, enjoy the spring in your step and head down to the woods for a walk full of dappled sunlight shooting through the tree canopy. Don't forget to look up as well as down and take in all of the rays as you forest bathe. Wild garlic is a perennial plant which you will find growing in damp woodland and is also known as ransoms, devils garlic and stinking Jenny, although its botanical name is *Allium ursinum*. You might find it by the aroma if the sun has warmed the gorgeously glossy green leaves. The plant does look similar to other poisonous plants, one being Lily of the Valley, so make sure you know what you are picking by rubbing the leaves and releasing the garlicky aroma. In

days gone by, wild garlic has been planted to deter rabbits and often planted outside Irish cottages to deter fairies and rumour has it that eating this plant related to chives, may transform you into a strong bear!

The benefits of growing wild garlic

Wild garlic receives a big A+ as it's packed full of 'A' benefits including being antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antimicrobial,

and it's also antioxidant. It can help digestion, known to help reduce blood pressure and cholesterol plus great for keeping the spring colds away. It's an important plant for pollinating insects, especially early in the year and will be enjoyed by hoverflies, butterflies and longhorn beetles.

How to grow wild garlic

If you would like to grow your own wild garlic, it's very easy to grow but if you don't





Expert advice

HOW TO MAKE WILD GARLIC PUREE

The leaves can be steamed or chopped fresh, the flower buds can be pickled, or a flavoursome oil is a great option, so it really is a great plant to easily use in cooking and be rewarded with the benefits. I am always using quick and easy recipes in the kitchen so this simple wild garlic puree is a hit with everyone, simple to make and adds the most delicious aroma and taste to many dishes if served on the side.

Ingredients

- A small handful of chopped homegrown shallots
- 500ml of cashew milk
- Two handfuls of washed wild garlic
- Pinch of pine nuts
- Dash of lemon
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Step-by-step

- 1.** Heat the milk gently in a saucepan
- 2.** Add in the finely chopped shallots and wild garlic cooking in the milk until soft
- 3.** Allow to cool just a little before mixing until smooth in a food mixer
- 4.** Add in a dash of lemon juice and mix
- 5.** Serve with a pinch of pine nuts
- 6.** After you have served or if you are keeping the puree in a bowl, give it a pinch of salt and pepper

Serve with a dish of vegetables or dot along the side for a touch of al la carte

Stay up to date with Ellen Mary!
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and follow her on instagram
[@ellenmarygardening](https://www.instagram.com/ellenmarygardening)

want it to completely take over your kitchen garden, planting the bulbs in a pot is a great way to keep it contained. Preferring moist and slightly acidic soil, it even grows in shade so it can be great for a tricky spot. You'll be enjoying it from mid-to-late winter proving interest in the garden and after it has flowered in spring it will die back during summer time. Growing from seed is easy as well, just sprinkle in autumn, cover with soil and you should see them germinate the following spring.

Making the most of the crop

The great thing about foraging for wild garlic is that you can use every part of the plant. The bulb, leaves and flowers can all be eaten both cooked or raw and used in many

dishes from salads to stews, while gaining all of the benefits of not just being outside in spring but all of the 'A' properties we can all do with a burst of at this time of year. If garlic is too strong for you or you are looking to use the flavour but with a lighter touch, this is just the plant for you. It can be a perfectly delicate addition of garlic flavour and not overpowering at all. The leaves can be cooked in many ways, and the pretty white flowers can be popped into a salad for a gentle touch of spring nature.





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SIMON AKEROYD

Create a flavour garden

Simon's latest venture is creating a small garden full of plants to make alcoholic beverages and soft drinks

There is a plethora of exciting flavoured drinks out there that are easy to make using ingredients grown in your own garden or on your allotment. Many of these plants can be cultivated in the tiniest of spaces and make attractive features in their own right. Over the next few months I'm going to be telling you about my new venture; a flavour garden which I'm setting up in my back and front gardens at home in Devon to grow crops that can be converted into delicious soft drinks or alcoholic beverages. I will be looking at not just how to grow the plants, but also a range of techniques on how to convert them into drinks in the kitchen.

My plans range from how to plant a mini vineyard in just a few square metres of space to produce homemade wine, to creating a beer patch full of hops and barley. My garden will also include growing specialist cider apples such as bittersweets and bittersharps in small spaces and training them as espaliers and cordons on

fences or growing them in containers. In addition I intend to create a mini juniper patch using dwarf, prostrate varieties to make gin. I'm planning a mini tea plantation full of camellias, and an "ericaceous", peat-free bed to grow plants such as cranberries, bilberries and blueberries to make delicious healthy juice.

At the back of my plot, I plan to plant a mixed, native hedgerow which will not only attract wildlife, but provide me with harvests of elderflowers and berries, rose petals and hips, sloes and hawthorns to make wild wines and cordials. In another area of my garden I will be encouraging weeds to make nettle tea and dandelion or blackberry wine. I'm also planning on dedicating a small patch to growing wormwood, to have a go at making that most bohemian of drinks, absinthe. I have a small greenhouse too, so I'll be growing a few citrus plants in pots to make fresh orange juice and lemonade, and of course provide a slice of lime for my homemade gin and tonic. Finally, I'm

going to be setting up a beehive so that I can produce that most ancient of all drinks from the honey, mead.

I will be looking at the various techniques of making drinks in my kitchen such as fermentation, distilling, brewing, back-sweetening and pasteurising. It will include how to create a sparkle in your drink, and tips on how to bottle and age your own various concoctions. Finally, there will be information on the type of equipment needed to make these delicious drinks, thankfully much of which can probably already be found in your kitchen.

I look forward to sharing the development of my flavour garden this year, and hopefully inspire you to get out there and try growing and making home-grown drinks for yourself.

Simon Akeroyd is a garden writer and owner of drinks business Yarde in Devon. yardecider.co.uk

March's ALLOTMENT INSPIRATIONS

On the plot news and advice for the month ahead



Cultivating your allotment community

**Di Appleyard is mentor co-ordinator
for the National Allotment Society**

Allotment sites bring together diverse groups of people with a common interest: growing and eating their own fruit and vegetables. Where the site is managed by an allotment association there is a ready-made structure that should encourage social contact and the sharing of knowledge. On sites that are directly managed by the council, social engagement is less structured, but it does still happen and enriches the lives of the plot-holders.

Volunteer committees who manage sites on behalf of the council often organise social events that encourage plot-holders to join work parties undertaking site maintenance - the lure of a bacon butty can

increase volunteer numbers significantly! Seasonal events and National Allotments Week Open Days also help to promote a feeling of community and ownership of the site. Communication with plot-holders is vital and social media can be a great way of doing this. Social media is also a useful tool to engender a sense of community for sites directly managed by the council; a Facebook group, for example, can give plot-holders a place to pass on tips, ask questions and make links that spill out into the real world.

These social links offered by gardening in an allotment help to combat loneliness: a condition which has the equivalent risk to health as consuming 15 cigarettes a day and is twice as harmful as obesity - so there's even more reason to get involved!



Plant to Plate campaign

Schools across the East Anglian region are being asked to sign up to the East Anglian Daily Times's Plant to Plate campaign, in partnership with Enjoy Gardening More. The campaign, which will give schools the chance to win a share of gardening equipment worth £10,000, will help local schools to create gardens in order to teach children how food is grown. Local residents can get involved by collecting tokens from the newspaper.

Q&As

This month we asked you...

Q What is your favourite dish to make with your homegrown produce?



MARCH JOBS

- With spring arriving in mid-March, it's time to start preparing seed beds for the season ahead. If it's not too frozen, dig up the top 5cm of soil and work in organic matter to give the earth a nutritional boost. Before planting, no-dig gardener's might want to rake or hand weed the earth
- Ready, set, sow! It's time to make outdoor sowings of cold-hardy

vegetables (if soil temperatures are warm enough) such as carrots, leeks and broad beans. Aubergines, peppers, tomatoes and cucumbers can all be started in a propagator and placed either in the greenhouse or on a windowsill

- Plant shallot and onion sets 5-10cm apart in rows 25-30cm apart from mid-March until April. The sets should be planted so that the tips are just visible and the soil then firmed gently around them



"Autumn soup made with homegrown roasted 'Uchiki Kuri' squash, onion, garlic and sage. I haven't been able to grow decent carrots so far but I'm working on it!"

Rhathaway, via Twitter

"Onions, garlic, basil, tomatoes, courgettes, aubergines and peppers freshly harvested and bunged into a ratatouille."

LondonWorms&Garden, via Twitter

"Spiced parsnip tatin is one of my favourites from my allotment: sweet, buttery, spicy – it ticks many boxes."

Philip_friend, via Instagram



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GROWING THE COMMUNITY



The Wonky Garden, Cheshire

Back in 2017, three women met at a wellbeing event during their cancer treatment. They pooled together their business knowledge, love of nature and the great outdoors and together, with their quest for something fun and engaging, they set up The Wonky Garden. Their garden focuses on creating beautiful outdoor health and wellness spaces designed by, and for, the community. Their need for such a supportive environment became even more apparent when sadly, they lost their third founder Amanda to her battle with cancer.

Their focus is simple: it's all about physical and mental health, wellness and learning life skills. At the core of their success, is the simple goal of wanting each person to enjoy their time on the plot as they nurture nature with a light heart. Engaging with all generations, ages, abilities, they connect the gardens and individuals through regular and focused activities. The result is a magical mix of individuals and groups engaging with the gardens and the beautiful spaces.

The project now looks after five locations; two busy community centres, a hospital rehabilitation ward, a local hospice for people facing life limiting illnesses, and a rugby club. Features found across the gardens include herbaceous borders, sensory spaces, bird/bat boxes, accessible beds, greenhouses, cut flower and kitchen gardens.

For more information or to register for Cultivation Street 2020, sponsored by Miracle-Gro, visit **cultivationstreet.com**



TRIED & TESTED:



Propagators and heat mats

Simon Akeroyd road tests these brilliant early-season essentials



Value ★★★★★
Durability ★★★★★
Practicality ★★★★★

Root!T heat mat (Two Wests & Elliott) £24.99

This heat mat is ideal for people with a limited budget who are wanting to speed up the germination of seedlings and provide extra warmth for cuttings. Designed to be used indoors or in a greenhouse, this small mat is perfect for those people with limited space. It can be slotted onto a window ledge or mantelpiece. If there is enough light they can even be used on the kitchen table or work surface. The top surface of the heat mat is shiny silver helping to increase the light.



Value ★★★★★
Durability ★★★★★
Practicality ★★★★★

Deluxe Vitopod propagator (Greenhouse Sensation) £235

If you plan on growing lots of plants this spring, then this propagator is the one for you. You'll need some space, as it is 111cm in length and 50cm wide (although there is a smaller version). There are three height extensions you can add, up to 54cm. When the plants are smaller, you can just use one extension, saving money on heating the full capacity. Then you just add extensions as the plants grow. There is a thermostat, giving you complete control over the temperature.



Value ★★★★★
Durability ★★★★★
Practicality ★★★★★

Fab4 electric propagator (Kings Seeds) £27.50

For gardeners on a budget, but wanting a flexible and practical propagator, this Fab4 provides the perfect solution. Taking up hardly any space (38cm x 24cm), it is ideal for gardeners with a limited growing area. If you live in a flat and have an allotment, you could propagate your seeds at home, and take the seedlings down to the plot when they're ready. There are four quarter seed trays, with individual covers, providing real flexibility - as soon as one seed tray is ready and has been planted out, you can sow another batch.



Value ★★★★★
Durability ★★★★★
Practicality ★★★★★

One Top Electric Propagator (Dobies) £26.99

This electric propagator is perfect for germinating your veg, herbs and cut flowers. One of my favourite aspects of it is the price, which is very competitive. It is also economical in terms of electricity, using just a 10-watt heat bed base, consuming just one-sixth of the energy of a standard light bulb. The propagator is fairly small and therefore takes up hardly any space. It has a clear, domed cover for optimum conditions, and there is an adjustable vent to reduce humidity. Included in the price are free fibre pots.

WHERE TO BUY

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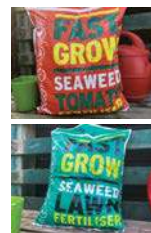
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March's Giveaways

Get your hands on some great garden goodies this month

HOW TO ENTER...

If you fancy getting your hands on one of the amazing prizes this month, follow the simple instructions on **page 113** or enter via our website which can be found at growfruitandveg.co.uk/competitions *Good luck!*



WIN! £200 voucher and private glasshouse tour from Chrysanthemums Direct



Multi award-winning nursery, Chrysanthemums Direct, will offer one lucky winner vouchers for £200 worth of blooms and plants as well as a private tour of the glasshouses where the stunning flowers are grown. Boasting 60 years of expert experience and

more than 420 varieties, Chrysanthemums Direct offers the widest range of chrysanthemums available to the UK market for both growing in the garden and exhibition. The family-run nursery in Knutsford, Cheshire, grows specialities including Incurved, Spray, Anemone and Reflexed chrysanthemum, as well as hardy garden (Korean) varieties. Chrysanthemums Direct was formed in 2008, to supply demand for those looking to grow flowers at home, fuelled by a nostalgia for plants that remind many of chrysanthemums their grandparents or parents used to grow. Visit chrysanthemumsdirect.co.uk for more information.

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Whether you're building a small cloche or are revitalising your shed, you'll find the ideal material for virtually any project at Roofing Megastore. As a *Grow Your Own* reader, you're in with a chance of winning a massive £250 voucher to spend on any of their garden and roofing materials. Including tough bitumen sheets, gorgeous composite decking, and lightweight polycarbonate panels to name but a few. All delivered straight to the doorsteps of avid veg and fruit growers across the UK. T&Cs: Please note that this prize cannot be used in conjunction with any other voucher. Prize entitles you to £250 off your total order value. Order must be placed by phone within 12 months of the winner being selected. Delivery may not be available to Ireland, the Scottish Highlands or other areas outside of the UK mainland. Full terms of purchase can be viewed at roofingmegastore.co.uk



WIN! A pair of children's Peter Rabbit themed garden clogs



Children will love wearing Treadstone's Peter Rabbit themed garden clogs! To celebrate the launch of Treadstone Products' new Peter Rabbit themed collection of garden clogs, the company is giving away a pair to 27 lucky winners. Just in time to mark a sequel to the 2018 Peter Rabbit movie arriving in cinemas for Easter. Available from retailers in both boys' and girls' styles, the new EVA clogs feature both Peter Rabbit and Lily Bobtail designs, and have a foldaway ankle strap, which can be removed if not required. They are easy to clean and are offered in children's shoe sizes from six to 11 in a choice of mint and pink or navy and khaki colour combinations. Other items in Treadstone's Peter Rabbit range include hat, glove and scarf sets, wellies, raincoats, backpacks, hoods, umbrellas and gardening items. For more information visit treadstoneproducts.com



WIN! A selection of essential GARDENA tools this spring

We've teamed up with GARDENA to offer one lucky reader the chance to win a selection of useful gardening tools this spring including its Combisystem Starter Set, Bypass secateurs and gardening and soil gloves. Remove unwanted dead growth and winter debris from the lawn with the Combisystem Starter Set's useful rake, its patio weeder will clear up any stubborn weeds hiding in-between paving stones and the set's grubber will get rid of unwanted weeds nestled inside flowerbeds. Better yet, the set also comes with a 130cm FSC certified Ashwood wooden handle. Tackle pruning tasks with the GARDENA Bypass secateurs featuring a stainless-steel lower blade, reinforced ergonomic handle and two handle opening widths - perfect for powerful cutting or quick snips. Protect your hands the GARDENA Gardening and soil gloves. With a water resistant inner and fingertips, these quality, comfortable gloves will offer ideal protection when planting up this season's crop. Visit gardena.com/uk for more information on GARDENA and the product range. **Terms & Conditions:** There will be one winner only. No cash alternative. Subject to availability, non-transferable or refundable



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To find out more about these prizes, or anything in the fantastic Forest Garden range, visit the website **forestgarden.co.uk**

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One photocopied or handwritten form per person is acceptable. Alternatively, you can enter online at growfruitandveg.co.uk

Which crop features on page 32 of the March issue of Grow Your Own?

☐ Tomatoes ☐ Potatoes ☐ Strawberries (Please tick)

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This competition is open to all UK residents aged 18 or over, excluding employees or agents of the associated companies and their families. One entry per person. The prizes detailed in each competition cannot be exchanged for goods, or towards the purchase of goods at any retail outlet. Entries must be on the coupon provided or online at growfruitandveg.co.uk/competitions. It cannot be exchanged for cash, or replaced if lost or damaged. Illegible entries and those that do not abide by these terms and conditions will be disqualified. Prizes must be taken as stated and cannot be deferred. The decision of the judge is final and no correspondence will be entered into. CLOSING DATE: 12th March, 2020. Winners will be notified by post, a list of winners will be available in writing on request from Sophie Whitcomb, 21/23 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Road, Colchester, Essex. CO2 8JY



**Behind
the
scenes**

KERRY GODLIMAN

When she's not making people laugh on stages across the UK, comic **Kerry Godliman** finds her happy place growing veg on her London plot, just don't talk to her about the science of compost

WORDS: **Blake Roberts**

Change the channel to any TV panel show or comedy programme and there's a high chance you'll encounter London-born comic and critically-acclaimed actor Kerry Godliman. She's become a much-loved regular on the UK comedy circuit – thanks to her straight-talking approach and quick wit – and is currently gearing up for her latest nationwide stand-up tour this spring.

But, it's not all cracking jokes and being hilarious in the Godliman household. In fact, Kerry is just as happy spending time alone with herself and her thoughts in the garden. She's quick to note that she's not a "true gardener" (whatever that means) but as soon as she begins talking about her plot

it's clear she's got as much expertise in the garden as you or I.

Kerry's allotment life began after a four-year wait for a space, which handily coincided with her son starting school, meaning she was ready and raring to start a new hobby to fill her newly-acquired free time. "It couldn't have been better planned," she explains in her characteristically warm East End accent. "The truth is, I couldn't have done it until he started school. But you feel a little bit bereft when a kid starts at school, so it was good timing."

She shares her allotment plot with her friend whom she describes as her "gardening guru" and confesses that she leaves most of the heavy lifting to her

– especially since getting a big garden at home to work on. In fact, going to the allotment has become as much a part of her social calendar as anything else ("I just go up there to have the odd barbecue now and pick all the lovely things my friend has grown," she quips.)

In her own garden, she wants crops that look good and taste good. "There's no point in growing things that I'm not a big fan of eating," she comments. "I mostly grow things that I know will work, because there are some things that I don't seem to get on with."

"I like chard and leafy things, they're the gifts that keep giving because you can just keep going back for more, whereas carrots you just get one harvest. Brassicas are a must because they're so pleasing to look at, and beans, too, for the height. I like having the bean canes up, though when they come down at the end of the season it does suddenly make the garden look really bare."

She continues: "I've got the Alys Fowler books and I really love that permaculture stuff; I like to grow veg next to flowers and have it all looking a bit higgledy-piggledy. Nothing overly ordered."

Essentially, her message is that you don't need to strive for horticultural perfection. "That's why I love her books, because it isn't about being super perfect, it's a lot more about having fun with it. If I just think of it like painting or playing, then I'm much happier. But if I think of it like science, I completely unravel. That doesn't appeal to me."

"Even my dad will try and explain to me the nitrogen content in my compost bin and I'm like: 'Please stop talking!' I really can't listen to it. It's like white noise, so mind-bendingly boring."

Before we conclude our conversation, Kerry talks excitedly about how giddy she gets at this time of year when new seeds start to germinate, but caveats it with a word of caution about trying to rein it in a little; to prevent becoming too overwhelmed with seedlings that need planting on.

And her final piece of advice to newbies? "Don't be over-ambitious and don't beat yourself up for little failings. If you plant something and it doesn't work out, it's not the end of the world, try again next year."

"I always say there's a lot of heartbreak with gardening, and it's just about being free with it. It's kind of a nice metaphor for life, really, some things work and some things don't."

● Find Kerry on her UK stand-up tour this spring. **BOSH!** opens on March 7th, visit **kerrygodliman.com** for more information and to buy tickets.



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