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 Hawkins Road, Colchester,
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NEWSTRADE SALES

Marketforce Tel: 0203 787 9101

Printed in the UK

Cover image: GAP

GET IN TOUCH

Post: Grow Your Own, 21 Phoenix
 Court, Hawkins Road, Colchester,
 Essex CO2 8JY

Forum: growfruitandveg.co.uk/
 grapevine

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WELCOME

to the January issue of *Grow Your Own*! Firstly, we would like to wish you a very happy New Year - one that will hopefully be packed full of delicious home-grown fruit, veg and herbs, and we will be here to help you every step of the way.

This issue is our gardening for wellbeing special, and we have plenty of tips and advice to get you started on your horticultural journey to wellness. Ellen Mary will be discussing the benefits of growing witch hazel (page 48), David Domoney is sharing his thoughts on gardening for mental and physical health (page 36), and we chat to Instagram superstar, Kirsty Ward, about her journey with horticultural therapy (page 68), as well as much more.

The new year is exciting in the garden - a time to wipe the slate clean and start afresh, and there is plenty of planning to do - and a bit of early sowing! RHS experts talk us through success with sweet peppers (page 22), growing microgreens (page 27) and getting the best from your swede and turnips (page 18). Team *GYO* runs down our favourite hot peppers to start this month (page 58), and we show you how to build a beautiful potager path (page 80).

Happy growing!

Laura

Editor Laura Hillier



Annabelle Padwick will be sharing her wellbeing tips throughout the mag - keep an eye out! Annabelle is the founder of Life at No.27, a gardening and wellbeing therapy organisation. She is also the founder of the National Growing for Wellbeing Week and a regular face at gardening events. Annabelle aims to change the way growing your own is viewed - bringing laughter, honesty and wheelbarrows full of empathy to the gardening world. Find out more at lifeatno27.com

Editor's Letter



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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



BBC Springwatch Gardenwatch results

In May 2019, BBC Springwatch launched the UK's biggest-ever garden audit - Gardenwatch. Viewers were asked to write down all of the features in their gardens that were made to help wildlife and the results are in! From 200,000 surveys, the following findings were revealed: 45 per cent of participants have a pond, log piles are still popular and gardens in central England have less wild spaces than other parts of the UK. As well as this, lawns make up around half the total area of participant's gardens, 30 per cent leave their grass to grow and 42 per cent make leaf piles. Wildlife-friendly climbing plants were found to be more common in gardens in the south compared to northern England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Results from the survey also revealed that we could do more to help bats and hedgehogs.

● The wet weather that we experienced at the end of 2019 has led to a multiplication of mushrooms. Gardeners up and down the country are reporting increased sightings of unusual and giant mushrooms and red and white-spotted toadstools. Gardeners are, however, being asked to watch out for honey fungus - a fungi that kills perennial plants and is hard to eradicate.

● The RHS is to expand its houseplant and cut flower range to include more sustainable floristry advice, improved show content, complementary courses, workshops and events after acknowledging the growing number of houseplant arrangements on social media and the health benefits of plants. The charity has pooled together a group of horticultural experts to serve on a Houseplant and Cut Flower Advisory Group.

WE LOVE

Perth In Bloom has been crowned "Champion of Champions" at the UK finals of Britain in Bloom. Beginning as an anti-litter group 30 years ago, the volunteers were commended for their National Heather Collection Garden which features more than 16,000 heather and heath plants plus their efforts in the environment and community. Castlecaulfield, Durham, Kingsbridge and St Helier all received gold awards in this category. For a full list of winners and runners up head over to rhs.org.uk



Our January highlights...



ROSE

"Transform your freshly harvested crops into warming winter dishes by following the recipes on page 104."



BLAKE

"Turn to page 68, as I discover the benefits of horticultural therapy first-hand from grower Kirsty Ward."



LAURA

"Giving wildlife a helping hand not only benefits garden critters, but you too! Find out more on page 100."

TOP EVENT THIS MONTH

From January 22, Chiswick House and Gardens will be treating their visitors to a winter light trail. Walk around the gardens and allow your senses to be dazzled by the lantern trail, 3D mapping projection and much more! Fun for all the family, for more information and to order tickets visit chiswickhouseandgardens.org.uk

39%

of people say that spending time outside makes them happier

Source: thejoyofplants.co.uk

HAVE YOUR *Say*

Get in touch with your growing stories & snaps



Shared space

"I can't really manage my whole plot any more, now that I'm getting older and less mobile, so I'm going to share it with my grandson this year. I'll be maintaining a small square to grow what I can, and he's going to look after the rest. Hopefully it'll mean I can pass on some of the skills I've learnt and we'll still get lots of veg!"

Elizabeth Bennison



Star Letter

Surprise squash

"I've never grown butternut squash before but a friend had a very small, spare seedling earlier in the year. Having checked out how much room they needed to grow, I thought the raised beds in our 9x6m garden definitely wouldn't be enough, so I took a chance

and planted it in the compost heap, thinking it might do something trailing. It covered the greenhouse and we've just harvested seven good-sized squashes with the largest measuring 15 inches long! Thanks for the tips."

Jill Palmer

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



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 which harvest is their favourite. Here's what they said:

"The first potatoes of the year are always special!"
@greensheddiaries

"My first ever garlic haul was epic, super easy but they were all so perfect!"
@the_essex_allotment

"Potatoes, pumpkins and tomatoes! First time grower this year and truly bitten by the bug, first time ever I have looked forward to January to start sowing seeds again."
@elissa_dossis

"My tomatoes. My parents have grown them for years but I've never grown them before. In a plastic greenhouse from Aldi and against a house wall and still eating them now!"
@shysarah101

Show us your growing pics!



"Look what mother nature has created on the top of an old dustbin in which I was creating a natural fertiliser for my broad beans." **William Taylor**



"Dug my first salsify today! I love it! Lots more to come so I'm going to have some with my Christmas dinner."
@matronsveggies



"The last of the tomatoes. Not bad for an unheated greenhouse with glass missing!"
@shrop_allotment

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If you feel you have a problem with gambling, please visit www.gambleaware.co.uk for help and advice, or contact the National Gambling Helpline on 0808 8020 133 (open 8am to midnight daily).

GambleAware

January's BEST CROPS!

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



Lettuce leaves

Anne Swithinbank reveals how to get success with your salads this season, and her favourite varieties to grow



Wonderful witch hazel

Welcome the colours, fragrance and medicinal properties of witch hazel to your plot for wellbeing



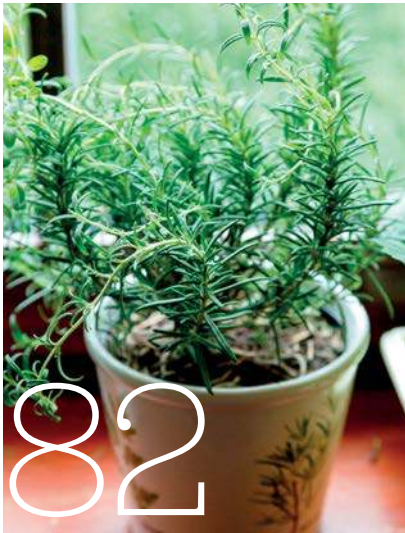
Annabelle says:

“You may know how powerful growing your own can be, but does a family member, friend or colleague? Have you seen them struggling or appearing withdrawn from usual activities? Sending them seeds, bulbs or plug plants could be a non-intrusive way of showing your support and giving them a pick-me-up.”



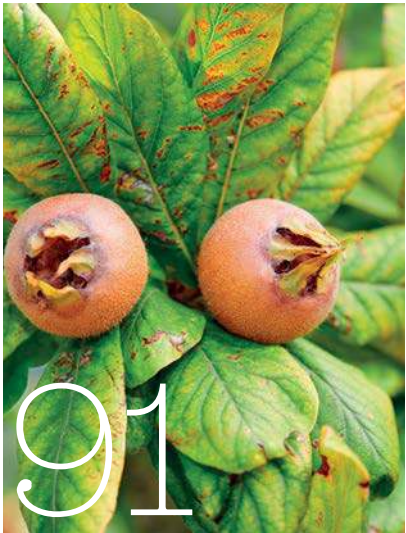
Feeling fruity

Horticultural expert Kay Maguire tells us how to grow citrus trees and wild strawberries



Herb heaven

We show you how to propagate rosemary from the plants you've already got - for free!



Unusual medlars

Re-discover these forgotten fruits with our simple grow-like-a-pro guide

Jobs *Plot* on the

Cold, dark and wet conditions continue to dominate this month, but despite the doom and gloom of January, the turn of the new year spells the start of a new season of growing and the promise of productive times ahead. Get your plot spring-ready by tidying up spent crops, harvesting remaining winter veg and starting off your chilli peppers in a heated propagator.



The Herb Garden

Group potted herbs together in a sheltered position during prolonged cold spells to protect roots from freezing. Mint propagates incredibly easily from root cuttings: bury 4cm long sections in a pot of gritty compost and place in a cold frame to keep the worst of the winter weather at bay.

Container growing

- Next month the kitchen garden really begins kicking into action. Buy growing bags and seed compost now, storing somewhere warm until needed
- Cold weather is bad news for clay pots which can be prone to cracking, stand them on pot feet and, if possible, transport them to a frost-free spot
- If you have a heated greenhouse, you can start off potatoes in pots at the latter part of the month. A tasty variety like 'Charlotte' will work well
- Use this month to get all pots ready for sowing, by giving a good scrub with warm, soapy water



Seasonal tasks

The vegetable patch

- If you have a heated greenhouse, start aubergines off now in a propagator. 'Black Beauty' is a reliable, flavoursome choice
- Compost heaps are susceptible to the cold, ensure the rotting process continues by cladding your heap with cardboard
- Check over stored potatoes often, as a rotting tuber can quickly spoil those surrounding it. Look out for a nasty smell, as this is usually the first sign of trouble!
- A thick covering of snow can actually help to insulate crops underneath the soil, so you don't need to clear this unless the weight is crushing produce
- Sprouting broccoli will keep cropping as long as you pick it. If you get gluts during mild weather, blanch and freeze them
- Gather soil around the stalks of cauliflower and cabbage up to the first set of leaves.
- Protect celery by placing straw or fleece around the plants - remove on sunny days
- The Brussels sprout harvesting season isn't just for Christmas, keep picking buttons regularly, starting from the base of the stem and working your way upwards.
- In milder regions, it's time to start chitting spuds! Place seed potatoes in egg boxes with the 'rose' end facing upwards to encourage sprouting



PROBLEM OF THE MONTH:

Windrock

With unpredictable weather, such as harsh winds, many plants can be at risk at this time of year. This is a particular problem for tall plants like Brussels sprouts. Strong gusts which cause crops to sway in the wind can damage the fine root hairs tasked with taking up vital nutrients, impacting yields. This can lead to buttons becoming loose rather than tight, known as 'blown sprouts'. To combat: earth up plants as they grow, stake securely and create a windbreak to prevent problems later on.



Under cover

- Prepare for the busy spring months by wiping down all major surfaces with a disinfectant and clean cloth and scrub pots and trays, too
- Make sure you've got everything you need to start sowing by re-stocking seeds, compost, trays and treating yourself to a new heated propagator if you're itching to get going this month
- Check the 'sow by' date on old packets of seeds and discard any that are out of date - parsnip seeds in particular don't keep well
- Chillies require a long-cropping season, so if you like to add a bit of a kick to your menu, sow chilli peppers in heated propagators now



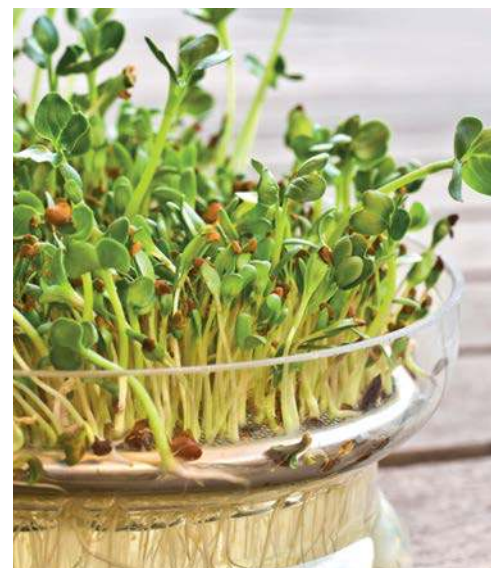
Fruits of your labour

- Citrus fruits like lemons, oranges and limes will be ripening up during winter. Keep a careful eye on fruit bushes so that you can harvest them in their prime
- Storms and gales can dislodge newly planted trees, so check that stakes and ties are firmly in place while you're able to see them
- Apples, pears, quinces, gooseberries, autumn raspberries can all be whipped into shape before spring with some winter pruning. Remove diseased or dying branches to give trees a boost and help it produce abundant harvests. Avoid pruning cherry, peach and plum trees until summer or they could suffer silver leaf disease
- Towards the end of the month, you can start to plant out a variety of soft fruit bushes

Focus on this:

Sprouting seeds

Now that the festive season is out of the way, if you're anything like us your green-fingers can't wait to start sowing. Scratch that gardening itch by starting some nutritious sprouted seeds - pea shoots, fenugreek, alfalfa, etc. Invest in a special container to grow in or use a jam jar with holes pierced in the lid. Soak your seeds overnight before placing in the container, some need light, others prefer dark - so have a thorough read to get tailored instructions. These speedy seeds will be ready to eat in just a few days, and for those of you on a new year health kick, they're rather healthy, too.



Flower Power

They look beautiful, help bees, and you can even eat some of them, too! Here are our pick of the best edible flowers to add to your plot

"I love nasturtiums. As well as looking great, the peppery leaves and bright flowers are edible. You can also use the pods (sometimes known as 'poor man's capers'). They are great for using as companion plants, too, so there are plenty of reasons to factor them into your 2020 growing space."

Blake, GYO deputy editor



"There is so much choice here, so little time, as under the herb umbrella grouping of plants lie a veritable booty of pretty edible opportunity. From basil, dill and punky-purple chive heads to fennel, mint, and rosemary, the array of colour and flavours is ample in itself and ripe for experimentation. Not forgetting delicate zesty coriander blooms or vibrant and fragrant thyme flowers which have many edible and decorative charms in themselves."

Kim Stoddart



"Most of us can list off lots of edible flowers, but there are a few slightly more surprising ones. Most dramatic is Hemerocallis or Day Lily. Picked just as the bud is about to pop or just after it has opened, these flowers can be dipped in tempura batter and fried as a novel complement to a meal. It's standard practice

in many parts of Asia but has not quite caught on here... yet! My other favourite feastable-flowers are Borago officinalis, Rosa and Chives. Borage flowers are commonly dropped into Pimms and the like, but work just as well as a garnish. Broken up chive flowers look pretty as a salad sprinkle and have the bonus of some of the flavour associated with their leaves." **Nick Bailey**

"This may be a cheat on the theme, as it isn't the flower you eat, but my favourite multi-purpose blooms to grow are dahlias - not only are they one of the most cheering sights to see in the garden, with their gorgeous blooms that make wonderful cut flowers, but you can also eat the tubers - so if, like me, you were wondering if you can justify squeezing in even more dahlias this year, the answer is yes!"

Laura, GYO editor



"Some of your veg crops will offer up edible flowers, as well as the eventual harvest. Courgettes, for example, have delicious, bright yellow flowers that are delicious stuffed with a soft cheese and fried. Try it and you will struggle to leave any to grow on as courgettes!"

Rose, GYO editorial assistant



"Pineapple guava is one of those wonderful plants which does double duty as an edible that's equally at home in an ornamental garden. It's an evergreen shrub, with spectacular, exotic-looking flowers.

In warmer parts of the UK these sometimes turn into guava-like fruit, about the size of a small hen's egg.

More often, the flowers are the main crop; the fleshy, pink-flushed petals taste of pineapple laced with cinnamon." **Sally Nex**

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Don't miss The Dirt, launching 5th December 2019



Grow Your Own magazine's podcast - 'The Dirt' - is launching with its first three episodes on the 5th December. Aiming to take the fear out of gardening, and showcasing that even the most successful of gardeners have failures and make mistakes, we will be dishing the dirt on a different gardener each week, as well as chatting about some topical news stories, and looking at the top jobs to do on the plot.

On

- The king of all things organic and no-dig, Charles Dowding!
- Social media sensation, and chicken lover Rachel Bull aka thegoodlifeainteasy!
- The man responsible for GYO ed Laura's love of all things growing-related - her Dad, Henry!

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Trevor Jones,
Head Gardener

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Alex Hankey
RHS Trials Team Leader

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Your RHS professionals



Rob Stirling



Guy Barter



Patricia George



Marcia Peacock



Lenka Cooke

HOW TO: Grow swedes and turnips, start sweet peppers, get plot problems sorted and find out how to grow microgreens

18 Beginner's guide

Swedes and turnips Guy Barter tells us how to get great results growing these versatile roots

20 Edible exotics

Horseradish Find out how to introduce this pungent perennial to your plot with Lenka Cooke's professional advice

22 Growing guide

Sweet peppers Crunchy, colourful and adaptable, follow these steps to start growing sweet peppers in containers, grow bags and the open ground

24 Your questions answered

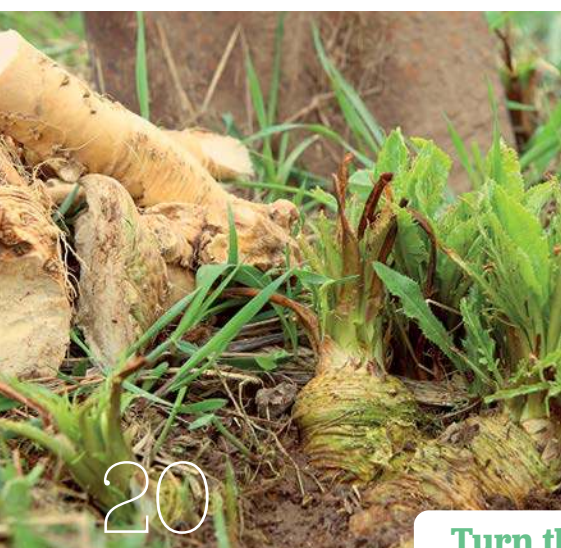
RHS experts Horticultural heroes are on hand to answer questions on growing fruit trees in pots, forcing rhubarb and pruning

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RHS technique Find out how to start making the most of small vegetable shoots

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



Turn the page for RHS advice on January jobs

SWEDES and TURNIPS



RHS Chief Horticultural Advisor,
Guy Barter, shares his expert tips on
growing these brilliant roots this year



Swedes and turnips are 'roots', strictly swollen hypocotyls, of two brassica species; *Brassica campestris* - turnips and also Chinese cabbage and rapeseed in Canada, and other oriental greens, *Brassica napus* - swedes and most oilseed rape grown in the UK.

Turnips were known by the Romans and probably arose from ancient oilseed crops in the Mediterranean. The Romans probably introduced turnips to Britain. Swedes (called neeps in Scotland and rutabaga in North America) appear to be the result of hybridisation between *Brassica oleracea* (cabbage, kale, cauliflowers) and turnips. It is unknown in the wild. The earliest records of swedes are from around 1620 in Switzerland but the swede arrived in Britain via Sweden after 1775.

Both turnips and swedes are highly variable with leafy forms, usually used to feed farm animals, and ones with tender, sweet roots used in the garden, but also

used for feeding livestock. These are called *Brassica campestris rapifera* and *Brassica napus* L. Var. *napobrassica*. Both are biennial in habit forming storage roots in the first year and flower in the second in response to warm spring weather.

Swedes are hardier, sweeter, milder flavoured and slower growing than turnips which are most palatable when young with no fibrous parts and a mild flavour. Turnips are grown to crop from early summer (or late spring in greenhouses), until the winter frosts, while swedes are at their best in winter, becoming unpalatable once flowering begins.

Successful cultivation

Turnips and swedes ideally go in the brassica part of crop rotations. However, turnips are quick-growing and useful for catch crops after early peas, for example.

Turnips are sown 12mm deep as soon as the soil is warm enough in spring, March outdoors and February in greenhouses or under cloches, sowing at three-week intervals until late August. Allow 30cm between rows and 15cm between plants. Cultivars with smaller leaves are used for



indoor growing and small gardens but leafier forms are useful for summer and autumn crops as their foliage suppresses weeds. Leafier forms need more space - leave 40cm between rows and 20cm between plants.

Turnips are sometimes sown for greens, either in summer - using less hairy cultivars - or in early autumn for cutting in spring.

Swedes tend to flower prematurely and succumb to powdery mildew if sown before mid-May, but being slow growing, they are unlikely to form sizeable roots if sown after mid-June. Allow swedes 40cm between rows and 20cm between plants. Sow seeds 12mm deep. Swedes are sometimes raised in modules and set out in June. Turnips can be module raised too but take less well to this. Neither crop responds well to bare-root transplanting but it can be successful if done



roots are a worthwhile size. They are less rewarding once they are larger than a tennis ball. Swedes are left in the ground until needed in winter, but in cold regions lifting and storing in boxes in a frost-proof shed is wise. Turnips rot if frosted and any left at the end of autumn can also be lifted and stored.

Surplus stored swedes and those remaining outdoors often sprout in spring. Some gardeners gather the young leaves and shoots for greens. Turnips grown for greens are gathered as required.

Pests and diseases

Cabbage root fly mines roots and can be fended off with fleece or insect-proof mesh, which also excludes the flea beetles that can harm seedlings, as well as stopping cabbage caterpillars.

However, turnips at least often outgrow pests and are usually worth risking growing them without covers.

Turnip sawfly is an uncommon pest in late summer easily washed or picked off. The same treatment can deal with aphids or greenfly but insecticides might be required in serious infestations.

Clubroot is very damaging in some gardens. Some resistant swedes are offered. Turnips often grow so quickly that they are not seriously damaged.



when seedlings are very small. This can be useful to 'gap up' rows.

Seeds, which is inexpensive, are usually sown a finger-width apart and then thinned gradually to the final spacings.

Any fertile garden soil that has been recently manured suits turnips and swedes. Fertiliser is usually worthwhile - 70g per square metre of growmore or dried poultry manure pellets is sufficient in most gardens. Swedes need full sun to give large roots, but turnips can tolerate light shade in summer.

Good weed control is essential for sizeable and quick growing roots. Watering every fortnight in dry spells might be required, particularly for swedes in drier regions. Turnips however have very deep roots and are a low priority for watering once established.

Turnips are gathered as soon as the

Cultivars holding the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM) and other recommended cultivars:

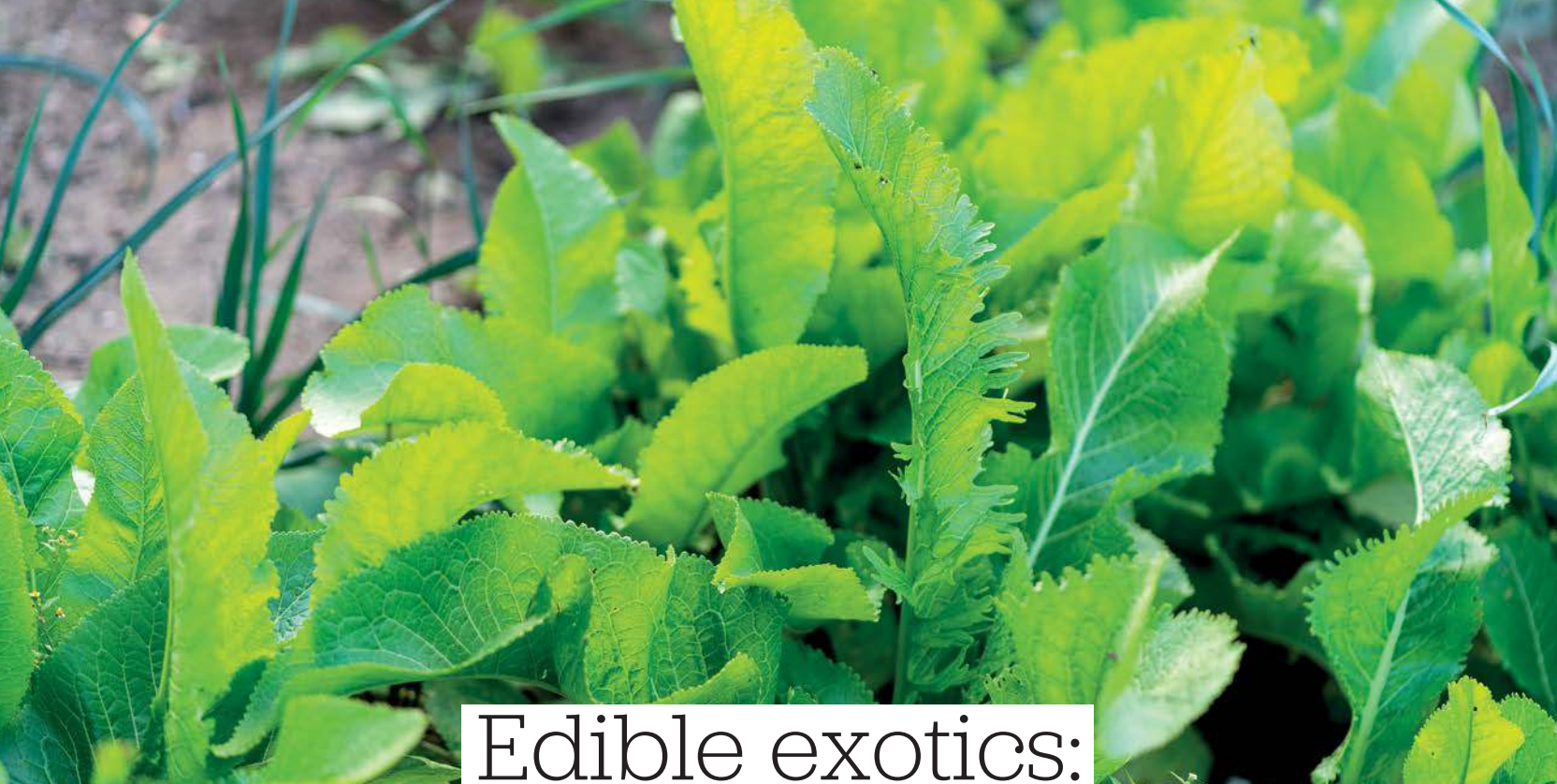
Swedes

- **'Brora'** AGM purple skin, yellow flesh, large roots with low dry matter, cooks faster than high dry matter swedes. Thompson & Morgan 0333 400 0033, thompson-morgan.com
- **'Gowrie'** AGM purple skin, yellow flesh, disease resistant, high dry matter, stores well. Simple Seed, simplyseed.co.uk
- **'Magres'** AGM purple skin, yellow flesh, disease resistant, low bitterness. Thompson & Morgan 0333 400 0033, thompson-morgan.com
- **'Tweed'** - hybrid swede, useful extra vigour for dry soils in southern regions, purple skin, cream flesh, clubroot resistant. Kings Seeds 01376 570 000, kingsseeds.com

Turnips

- **'Atlantic'** AGM Flat, red topped, white flat roots and flesh. Fast growing. Smaller tops. Nicky's Nursery 01843 600 972, nickys-nursery.co.uk
- **'Market Express'** AGM White round roots and flesh, Very fast growing, Smaller tops. More Veg 01823 681 302, moreveg.co.uk
- **'Oasis'** AGM White, conical roots, white flesh, very fast growing, smaller tops. Thompson & Morgan 0333 400 0033, thompson-morgan.com
- **'Tiny Pal'** AGM White skin and flesh, conical root, relatively slow growing but hardy and well suited to sowings for autumn and winter harvest. Marshalls 0844 557 6700, marshalls-seeds.co.uk
- **'Tokyo Cross'** AGM Hybrid. White skin and flesh, conical root. Very fast growing. Dobies 0344 967 0303, dobies.co.uk





Edible exotics: **Horseradish**

Lenka Cooke, Horticultural Advisor at the RHS, unearths the growing needs of these perennials that pack a flavour punch

Horseradish belongs to the cabbage family and is very hardy, originating in southeast Europe or western Asia. Horseradish has the hot flavours typical of mustards and other hot brassicas. It has nothing to do with horses, one possible origin for the name is that the word horse means strong in certain contexts and radish is a spicy root crop.

Horseradish is a perennial growing to about 1m tall and forming deep thick tap roots with dock-like foliage. The thin roots are brown and corky on the outside and white and fibrous within. Leaves die down for the winter.

Horseradish was widely used from the middle ages and might have been highly prized at a time when south Asian spices were rare and expensive and hot peppers could only be found in the Americas, (which of course were yet to be discovered by Europeans). However old records suggest that horseradish was mostly consumed by the poor perhaps to cover the poor quality of their food. Its former medicinal use is no longer important, but it remains a popular condiment for meats in northern Europe and North America. In Britain oysters and beef are commonly associated with horseradish. With the recent increase in interest in local native foods and growing herbs, nurseries have reported a shortage of plants to sell, so it seems there is a resurgence in interest in horseradish. It remains hard however to buy raw roots

from the greengrocer or supermarket.

The roots are rich in oil that has the well-known hot, pungent flavour typical of mustards and other hot brassicas derived from sulphur-rich compounds called isothiocyanates released when the plant tissues are crushed. This oil evaporates easily and the best sauce is made from freshly dug and processed roots.

Processing involves grating the roots and mixing with cream, mustard, mayonnaise or vinegar to make a sauce. As the potent oil evaporates easily pungency is quickly lost

Nothing could be easier to grow than horseradish: in spring simply plant a 17-25cm piece the right way up in fertile garden soil

on exposure to air. Vinegar halts the loss of pungency. By timing when vinegar is added after grating the pungency levels can be controlled.

Nothing could be easier to grow than horseradish: in spring simply plant a 17-25cm piece of root the right way up in

holes made with a dibber or trowel in fertile garden soil in full sun, so the root is barely covered by soil. The root can have a leafy crown, which is ideal, or not, which usually works well enough. If no roots are available potted plants can be bought. Allow about 30cm between roots or plants. Nothing more need be done, except weeding, until November. Then dig the roots, select some for replanting and use the rest in the kitchen, keeping them in a box of soil in the meantime outside or in the garden shed. They also grow very well in 45cm pots filled with good quality potting media. Horseradish however is often neglected and roots pulled at intervals as needed - this seldom produces the thick roots that are most useful in the kitchen.

In Britain only common horseradish is offered but in other countries there is a greater choice with different flavours being reported. Scope perhaps for an enterprising nursery?

Horseradish is, like its cabbage relatives, sometimes afflicted by pigeons and caterpillars. Insect proof mesh will exclude these.





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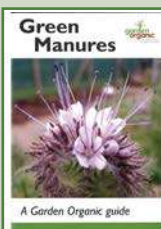
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Sweet peppers

Follow these simple steps from the RHS to grow this flavoursome fruit and harvest a bumper crop later in the year



With their glossy leaves and vibrant, shiny skins, peppers make for a colourful addition to your outdoor space, whatever its size. Greenhouses, veg plots, patios and balconies can all become home to this summer harvest staple. With only the need for a warm site and plenty of water, plus being relatively uninviting to pests, sweet peppers are a great choice for those getting to grips with gardening. Home growers can explore a wealth of options aside from the traditional red, yellow and green varieties, from light, creamy greens to deep purples and blacks. Plus, you can easily reap the nutritional rewards of this simple-to-grow fruit - vitamin-packed peppers can be grilled, roasted, barbecued, fried, stewed, steamed, or eaten raw for a sweet and bright addition to your plate.

THE BEST START

Start sowing sweet pepper seeds now through to early April. As the fruits originally



hail from warm, tropical climes, they thrive in a spot kept between 18 and 21°C. Scatter seeds in pots or trays filled with compost and leave to germinate in a propagator or on a warm windowsill, covering with plastic bags to lock in heat and moisture.

Not only versatile on your plate, peppers are adaptable when it comes to growing, too - containers, growing bags, or open ground sites all work well. If placing directly in your garden, prepare their final position about a month before planting out. Opt for a sunny, sheltered spot - at the base of a south or west-facing brick wall is ideal. Dig over the soil and enrich with a generous measure of compost or well-rotted manure. Place cold frames over the site about two weeks before planting out to prime the ground further.

Seedlings are ready to be planted out once two leaves have formed, or when they have reached between 5 and 6cm tall. Fill 7-9cm pots with compost, level off and tap to settle. To remove the seedling, carefully



after the first fruits have set. While sweet peppers can often reach harvest time unscathed from pest damage, keep an eye out for glasshouse red spider or two-spotted mites. Infestations lead to pale, mottled leaves coated in webbing that can drop early. The insects thrive in dry, hot environments, so regularly mist plants with sprays comprising of plant oils and extracts or soft soap. Also look for colonies of aphids which sit on the shoot tips of the plant. For the non-squeamish, you can squash them with a finger and thumb, but spraying with plant or fish oils can also help.

TO THE TABLE

Sweet peppers usually yield between three and eight fruits per plant and are ready to harvest between July and October when they're green, swollen and the skins have a shine. If you've sown red, yellow, purple or orange peppers, the key is to be patient. It may take a while for them to transform into their final colours, but the intense, sweet flavour will be well worth the wait. Bear in mind, however, that while leaving the fruits to ripen on the plant will increase taste, it will reduce yield.

Avoid pulling the peppers from the plant by hand as this can cause whole branches to snap and break - instead use a sharp knife or scissors, making sure to leave a short stem attached. This minimises damage to the plant. The peppers should then be stored in a fridge, but if you've experienced a glut, they can be frozen, pickled or dried very successfully.



loosen the compost, gently take hold of a leaf and lift. Use a dibber beneath the roots to give you some leverage. Lower the seedling into a hole in the middle of the prepared pot until the leaves sit just above the soil. Once the roots have filled this pot, transplant to a 30cm one in late April if growing in a heated greenhouse, mid-May in an unheated under cover space, and late May outside.

CARING FOR YOUR PLANTS

Once they are 20-30cm tall, pinch out the growing tips to encourage a fuller plant. You can do the same to the sideshoots to yield an abundance of smaller fruits when it comes to harvest. At this stage of growth, plants may need supporting with garden canes or peasticks. Peppers are typically thirsty plants, so regular watering is essential. Make sure to water twice a day in hot weather as dry compost will hamper growth, but ensure pots don't become waterlogged. Feed with a high potash liquid fertiliser once a week



MEET OUR PANEL



Rob Stirling
is a horticultural
advisor at the
RHS



Guy Barter
is chief
horticultural
advisor at the
RHS



Patricia George
is a horticultural
advisor at the
RHS



Marcia Peacock
is a horticultural
advisor at the
RHS



Your questions **ANSWERED!**

Our esteemed experts share their knowledge
to solve your gardening problems

Container fruits

Q Can fruit trees be successfully grown
in airpots? Paula Marshall-Snaith

Rob says: "Airpots are highly suitable for fruit trees. The aeration provided by the porous air pot material prevents root congestion at the edges of the pot and promotes an aerated healthy root environment. Potted trees are best re-planted every few years to remain healthy either into a larger pot or the same pot after replacing about 25 per cent of the roots and compost with fresh potting media. Trees are much more easily extracted from airpots than from ordinary pots. Trees grown in airpots avoid getting congested roots and are therefore in good condition to plant into the soil where that is intended."

Simple guide



*The rhubarb crown
can be covered with
a little straw and then
a bucket or similar
container, to gently
raise the temperature*



Pruning problems

Q Pruning is a bit of a mystery to me, what advice do you have for pruning raspberries or blackcurrants?

Jen Wright, via Facebook

Patricia says: "Remove a third of blackcurrant shoots to near ground level each winter choosing the thickest and oldest. This promotes vigorous fruitful shoots. For autumn-fruiting raspberries all canes are cut to soil level in winter to promote new shoots that crop from late summer. All spent summer raspberry canes and any weak canes are removed by late summer leaving a strong young cane about every 15cm, to crop the following summer. The cane is tied in, looping the top to the top wire. In late winter the loop is released and the top shortened to 10cm above the wire."

Forcing rhubarb

Q I'm growing rhubarb over winter, and have heard about forcing with an upturned bucket, does this make them taste better?

Mary Smith, via email

Guy says: "Leafless winter rhubarb needs a cold spell to release the buds to grow once the weather warms. By late winter the cold should have done its work and the rhubarb crown can be covered with a little straw and then a bucket or similar container, to gently raise the temperature and promote the buds to shoot. The shoots are tender, pale and delicately flavoured and prized as a delicacy particularly acceptable in the bare spring months. After forcing, the crown should be left to recover for the rest of the year and no further crop taken."



Edible dahlias

Q I've heard dahlias can be edible, so would like to try them, is there anything I should know about growing these to be eaten? Are all varieties edible?

Ian White, via Facebook

Marcia says: "Some dahlias are said to be better than others, but all are safe to eat - just bake, boil or microwave them until soft. There is no special growing regime. It is unlikely that dead heading will make much difference to tuber size. Any well-grown dahlia should give useful roots but they may not be as palatable as those occasionally sold to grow as vegetables. Bon appetit!"



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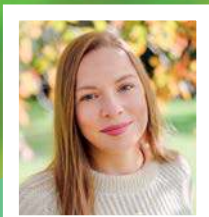
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Annabelle says:

"Microgreens are brilliant if you have minimal space, or want fast-growing goodness! They don't need soil, just water and room on a windowsill, and are ready in a couple of weeks. They're fantastic year-round – if you struggle with winter and not being able to get outside, give microgreens a go – it could help."



RHS TECHNIQUE:

HOW TO GROW MICROGREENS

RHS Horticultural Advisor, **Lenka Cooke**, tells us how to grow these delicious little crops, simply

Microgreens are seedlings, more than a sprouted seed, but not quite a young plant, of a wide variety of plants, herbs, salads, vegetables and even flowers. They produce colourful, tasty, often aromatic, and nutritious seedlings. Chiefly used for garnishes to enhance dishes and to enliven salads microgreens are also rich in nutrients and antioxidants that promote health. They can be grown in bright small spaces, windowsills for example, and during winter, very helpfully providing fresh greenery at any season.

Seed for microgreens should be inexpensive as a lot of it is needed. It should germinate evenly for attractive uniform, waste-free produce. As microgreens are eaten raw it is important that seed should be clean without dirt or other contamination. Happily, seeds specifically sold for microgreens are widely available

and should be used in preference to seeds sold to be sown on the soil. Seeds sold for sprouting can also be used as they too germinate together and are free from contamination issues.

To grow microgreens, line the base of food containers or similar clean boxes with kitchen towel or felt. Moisten the lining so it is damp but not soggy with clean tap water. Seeds are sprinkled evenly but close together, ideally not touching, over the wet lining. The seeds will imbibe water and swell. Germination will follow if the boxes are kept in a warm room, at about 18-22°C. The seedlings will need water but not too much – just enough to keep the lining moist but not enough to drown the roots. Plenty of light, a bright windowsill for example, will prevent seedlings getting drawn and collapsing. Once the seedlings are big enough to gather experiment by cutting

at different stages to find the size that gives the best flavour and texture. Cut microgreens with scissors. Paper linings can be composted and felt washed and used again.

Seeds that are a safe to use and flavoursome include; red and green amaranths, anise (aniseed), red, green, lemon and Thai types of basil, borage, broccoli, buckwheat, cabbage, celery, chervil, chickpea, chives, chop suey greens, coriander, cress, dill, fennel, fenugreek, garlic and ordinary chives, kales, kohlrabi, leek, lemon balm, lovage, marjoram, mint, mizuna, mustard, nasturtiums, orach, pak choi, parsley, perilla, purslane, quinoa, radish (hairless leaves), rockets of all sorts, sage, sorrel, sunflower, chards and leaf beets of all sorts, thyme and watercress – there is plenty of choice!



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Keder greenhouses were recently described by a customer as 'a super strong duvet for plants' - exactly what they need at this time of year! Customers have reported an increase in crop production, extended by at least one month either side of the standard growing seasons, due to the numerous benefits of the Keder cladding. The steel used in construction is sourced from British manufacturers. It is high tensile and is galvanised inside and out to provide a tough rust-free structure for many years.

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Diary dates

January 2020 Events

Learning Opportunities

- Applications for RHS Apprenticeships at all gardens and Level 3 and 4 work-based Diploma at RHS Wisley will be open from December 2019 – March 2020.
 - RHS Apprenticeships are a great opportunity for people to learn alongside our experts at the RHS – and to get paid, too! Apprentices embark on a two-year programme at one of the RHS Gardens. In 2020 there will even be the chance to work as an apprentice at the brand new RHS Garden Bridgewater.
 - Applications for apprenticeships open on 1 December and close on 11 March for an August start of the same year.
- rhs.org.uk/education-learning/qualifications-and-training/work-based-training/rhs-apprenticeships

6 January – 29 February Embroidering Harlow Carr – The Four Seasons, RHS Garden Harlow Carr

Head to Harlow Carr's Library to see four bespoke embroidery panels depicting garden scenes from each season. Each piece has been produced by talented members of the Richmond & Leyburn branch of the Embroiderers' Guild and this is the first time visitors can see all four seasonal panels together. Normal garden admission.

rhs.org.uk/harlow-carr

17 January – 29 March Snowdrop Festival, The Garden House, Devon (RHS Partner Garden)

Discover the Matt Bishop Snowdrop Collection, labelled and displayed in herbaceous borders and naturalised with early-flowering bulbs throughout this 10-acre sheltered garden on the edge of Dartmoor. In the tearooms there will be an exhibition of Diane Fifield's Snowdrop Photography and on Saturday 1st February there is an added attraction of an Avon Bulbs snowdrop sale open to all.

thegardenhouse.org.uk

4 January – 13 February Japanese Art Exhibition & Pop Up Shop, RHS Garden Harlow Carr

Browse and buy stunning landscape prints made in Japan using traditional Japanese woodblock printing techniques as Harlow Carr hosts its second Japanese Art Exhibition in the historic Bath House. This year a unique collection of authentic Japanese woodblock prints are featured, by Master Katsushika Hokusai (1760 to 1849), known for best-known for his series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji. The show will also feature a 'pop up shop' selling a variety of authentic Japanese gifts.

rhs.org.uk/harlow-carr

25 January – 1 March Giant Houseplant Takeover in the Glasshouse, RHS Garden Wisley

Step into a house reclaimed by its plants long after its human inhabitants have left. A banana has pushed through the roof, carnivorous plants feast in the dining room and cacti play chess. A few plants have grown rather too large and tower over their relatives.

rhs.org.uk/wisley

1 January

New Year's Day Guided Walk, Fairhaven Woodland and Water Garden, Norwich (RHS Partner Garden)

Guided tour of Fairhaven Woodland and Water Garden. Learn about the history of Fairhaven, the collection of plants introduced by the 2nd Lord Fairhaven and the organic working methods still used today by the gardening team. Finish your walk with a complimentary mince pie and hot mulled wine.

fairhavengarden.co.uk



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these staple veg varieties

Beetroot 'Solo F1'

Don't get us wrong, it's a relief to see that your seeds have germinated but thinning them out can take up a lot of time. Time-strapped gardeners are in luck, as beetroot 'Solo F1' is a monogerm variety, meaning it only produces one strong seedling per cluster – eliminating the need to thin out all together. This beet also has a high sugar content so it's great to grow as a 'baby beet' and also has good resistance to bolting, leaf spot, downy and powdery mildew.

1 Sow seeds thinly outside from March to July where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Make sure to sow seeds in a sunny, sheltered

spot and in fertile, light and free-draining soil.

2 Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each to prevent overcrowding.

3 Seedlings should appear within 10-14 days. If necessary, thin seedlings to 5cm apart for 'baby beets' or 7cm apart for larger beets once large enough to handle.

4 Keep plants well-watered, especially during dry spells. This is to stop the soil from drying and the plants from running to seed.

5 Harvest beetroot when it reaches 4cm in diameter or more, usually from June to October. Lift up the roots, twist off the tops and store in boxes of lightly damp sand and in frost-free conditions until needed.



Broccoli 'Romanesco'

With lime-green florets and a fascinating fractal pattern, you might be led to believe that this vegetable is something from space, but you'd be wrong, as it has in fact been cultivated in Italy since the 16th century. Striking a balance between broccoli and cauliflower on the taste scale, broccoli 'Romanesco' is known for being slightly sweeter and nuttier than these two other brassicas, making it popular with children and to eat raw with dips.

1 Sow seeds thinly outside from May to June where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm.

2 Plant in rows, allowing 23cm between each to prevent overcrowding. Make sure to sow seeds in soil that has been raked to a fine tilth.

3 Seedlings should appear within seven-14 days. Thin seedlings when large enough to handle and then transplant to 60cm apart five weeks after sowing.

4 Keep the plants well watered until they are established.

5 Harvest from September to October by snapping off the individual heads. Steam and serve with butter or use raw as crudites for dips.

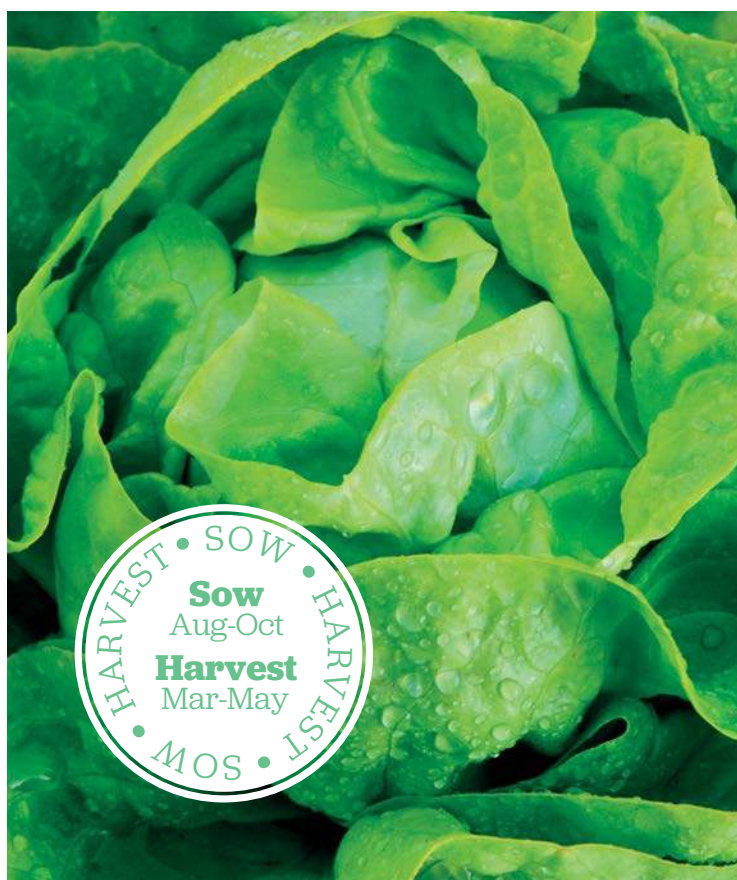




Dill

A family favourite as well as a staple in Scandinavian cuisine, have a go at growing this herb's fern-like fronds in the garden border. Its aniseed and fennel-like flavour compliments rather than overpowers more subtle-flavoured foods such as salmon, cucumbers and boiled potatoes.

- 1 Sow seeds thinly outside from April to July where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Make sure to plant in full sun and in soil that has been raked to a fine tilth.
- 2 Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each to prevent overcrowding.
- 3 When large enough to handle, thin seedlings to 30cm apart. For seed production, ensure plants are sown as early as possible in spring.
- 4 Keep well-watered to prevent the plants from running to seed.
- 5 The leaves are ready to harvest six weeks after sowing, usually from June to September. Sprinkle over salmon and roast or add to jars of pickled gherkins.



Lettuce 'Arctic King'

Crisp, crunchy and a sure-fire source of beta-carotene and vitamin A, lettuce 'Arctic King' is as cool as the cold weather it's well-renowned for resisting. With compact, light-green heads and crinkled leaves, it's one of the best butterhead lettuces you can grow in the garden this autumn and winter. Just remember, it might require cloche protection during particularly chilly spells.

- 1 Sow seeds thinly outdoors from August to October 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 When large enough to handle, thin seedlings to 23-30cm apart.
- 4 In colder areas, plants might require cloche protection.
- 5 Harvest lettuces from March to May, when the heads feel firm when gently pressed.

Squash 'Pattison Gagat'

You might not have heard of 'Pattison Gagat' before but it is in fact a patty pan squash – otherwise known as a custard squash. Looking like flying saucers with their flat round shape and scalloped edges, these can be harvested throughout the season at several sizes. Baby squashes are tender enough to eat raw or wait until they're around 15-20cm before steaming, stir-frying, stuffing or baking.

- 1 Sow seeds thinly indoors in 7.5cm pots of free-draining seed compost.
- 2 Place in a propagator or a warm place and keep at a temperature of 20-25C until after germination. Keep soil moist but not waterlogged.
- 3 Seedlings should appear within five-seven days. When plants have two true leaves, transplant into 13cm pots of compost for two weeks.
- 4 Plant out into a sunny, sheltered spot and in fertile soil. Plant in rows, allowing 75cm between each.
- 5 Harvest Your 'Pattison Gagat' from June to September regularly and at various different sizes to encourage continuous cropping.



Sow
Mar-Aug
Harvest
Jun-Sep



Annabelle says:

You can't beat sowing seeds! Every time these inconspicuous treasures transform in to seedlings, it's a sign of hope, new life and a beautiful creation. It really is an incredible and addictive feeling - I get excited every time! Nurture your plants until they turn into delicious veg and flowers, then think what would happen if you gave yourself the same care. We all need the right amount of support, love, food and water to really thrive."



Sow
Feb-Apr
Harvest
Jun-Sep

Marigold 'Tomato Growing Secret'

Most gardeners are well-acquainted with the magic of marigolds (also called tagetes) in repelling worrisome whitefly from their plants. Whiteflies, sap-sucking bugs that drain the life out of its host plant, turn away from your toms after smelling the

chemical marigolds release - limonene - allowing your plants to grow bigger and bear much more plump, juicy fruit.

- 1 Sow seed on the surface of good free-draining seed compost and sprinkle with a fine layer of vermiculite.
- 2 Place in a propagator or seal inside a polythene bag and keep at a temperature of 20-25C degrees until after germination.



- 3 Seedlings should appear within seven-21 days. When large enough to handle, transplant seedlings into 7.5cm pots.

- 4 Grow on in cooler but not cold conditions for 10-15 days before planting out after all risk of frost has passed. Plant in rows, allowing 20-25cm between each.

- 5 For use as a whitefly repellent, plant marigolds between tomatoes in the greenhouse border or outside.

Your Plot ESSENTIALS

This month's jobs on the vegetable patch and patio

WORDS: Sally Nex

GROWING TECHNIQUE: PRE-SPROUTING ONION SETS

When you have time on your hands in the depths of winter, there's nothing that cheers you up quite so much as ordering everything you need to plant this season. Onion sets are widely available right now, but it's still weeks before you can plant them in the ground. Often they'll start sprouting early - and if they're still in their nets, you can lose half the new shoots disentangling them.

Pre-sprouting onion sets gets around this problem neatly. Fill newspaper pots or 5cm biodegradable modules with peat-free, multipurpose compost and sink one onion set into each. Water, then leave in a cool greenhouse or cold frame to sprout.

By the time you get to planting time in March, they should be sturdy young seedlings with good root systems. Not only will you have avoided any tangles, you'll give them a head start on the season so they can grow into larger bulbs that mature sooner, too.



GYO
says

Make sure to feed occasionally. Feed onions with a general liquid fertiliser

30%

gardeners are 30% less likely to have a fall than non-gardeners

Source: ao

DON'T FORGET: INSPECT STORED TUBERS

Even though unusual edible tubers like yacon, oca and edible dahlias are frost-tender, you can keep them into next year if you lift and store the tubers over winter in damp sand or spent potting compost somewhere frost-free. A few sometimes still soften and rot in the winter damp - so bring your stash out occasionally and check they're still plump and firm to the touch. Remove any bad ones right away, so they don't infect healthy stock.

Top tip!

Have a go at roasting, braising and even pickling seakale harvests

FORCING SEAKALE

Seakale is a rare find in a modern veg plot, but for the Victorians, its delicately-flavoured forced shoots were a real spring treat. It's a mystery why it's not more popular, as it has plenty to offer the 21st century gardener: it's perennial, coming back year after year, and makes a handsome plant with showy white flowers in summer, ideal in smaller gardens where plants often have to look as well as taste good. Best of all, it gives you something different to eat in the earliest days of spring when there's little else around.

Wait till your plant is in its third season, then in January cover the crown with straw and place a dustbin or rhubarb forcer over the top. You'll find shoots emerge slender and pale in the dark; cut them when they're 20-30cm long to cook just like asparagus - they're delicious served with hollandaise sauce. More will reappear over two or three weeks; once the leaves start to open, take the forcer off and allow the plant to grow normally.



30 minute job:

Plan next year's crop rotation

- An hour spent planning for next season now, while things are quiet outside and you have the time, will save you untold amounts of time and stress later. So sketch out what you want to grow this year, how much of each vegetable you'll need and where you're going to put it. This last point is particularly important, as strategic planning can prevent many of the most common pests and diseases.
- Most pests and diseases are particular to one family of vegetables. So cabbage root fly, for example, will attack all types of brassicas but don't like peas. Move your cabbages to a new bed, replacing them with peas, and overwintering rootfly larvae are left high and dry with nothing to eat the following year.
- Keep similar types of vegetable together as you move them around the garden. Usually, the groups are roots (sometimes subdivided into Solanaceae - that's potatoes and tomatoes - alliums and other roots), legumes (peas and beans) and brassicas. Anything that doesn't fall into these groups, like sweetcorn, courgettes and leafy veg, can go anywhere. Then each year move these families to a different area and they'll always have a fresh start, for a healthy, pest-free start to your season.



HOW TO AVOID... SHREDDED WINTER SALADS



Winter salads are a pretty resilient bunch. Hardy types like 'Winter Density' lettuces, Swiss chard and mizuna shoulder their way through frost and come back fighting after the most ferocious of gales. But though they'll survive, shredded, half-frozen leaves are unappetising and your harvest may still suffer.

Make sure your salads stay in plate-ready condition with cloches, kept near

at hand to slot over leafy veg as soon as the forecast turns ominous. Glass cloches are heavier and stand foursquare in the briskest of gales, unlike polythene cloches which can blow away. If you do have to use plastic cloches, burying the edges in the soil helps hold them in place. Once the weather improves, restore good ventilation by opening the ends, then lifting the cloches off altogether.

VARIETIES TO TRY

NEW VARIETY: Onion 'Isobel Rose'

If you can't decide whether to grow white onions or red onions this year... how about pink? The pink-tinged skins of this pretty British-bred variety are a hint that there's something unusual afoot; slice into the bulb and you'll find it's ringed in alternate bands of rose pink and white. The flavour is milder than red onions, so you can slice it raw into salads - yet it keeps like a maincrop. Sow seeds now into modules to plant outside in March or April; or simply sow direct to harvest just like pink-tinged spring onions to enjoy throughout summer. (dtbrownseeds.co.uk)



HERITAGE VARIETY: Pepper 'Corno di Toro Rosso'

The name of this elegant sweet pepper translates as 'Red Bull's Horn' which gives you some idea of its elongated, curved shape. The fruits are slender but can reach up to 20cm long, and they've been prized for generations in Italy for their thin skins and exceptionally rich, sweet flavour - it's a favourite for making peperonata (pepper stew) or simply as fried peppers with onions and garlic. Like all peppers, it needs a long growing season to ripen fruits fully, so start seeds now in a propagator heated to 20°C and keep seedlings warm while they grow.



EXOTIC VARIETY: Peruvian black mint

Scatter handfuls of fresh annual herbs over your salads and you'll take them into gourmet territory, full of complex, spicy flavours that sparkle and dance on your tongue. There are loads to try, from leafy coriander and parsley to aniseed-flavoured chervil; and if you're feeling adventurous, you could add this Peruvian relative of the French marigold, too. Known as huacatay in its native Peru, its soft leaves have a tangy, fruity flavour, like a sweet mint. It's frost-tender, and grows particularly well in polytunnels, reaching up to 1.8m tall - though it also grows happily (if smaller) outside.





David Domoney: **TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF**

David Domoney tells you how to get your 2020 garden off to a flying start



As a new year begins to emerge, gardeners the country over are taking stock of their green spaces or taking up the mantle for the first time. January is a great time to turn over a new leaf, we can reassess and redefine what we want to achieve in the year ahead. In this issue, I'll be looking at why gardening is the perfect place to start for a little TLC and exploring resolutions for 2020.

Reasons to up the ante

It's official, gardening is good for you. There are many ways that gardening can help our health. It boosts mental health by engaging us in an activity where there are visible rewards and milestones, it encourages time outside with nature - which is proven to reduce stress - and provides a channel for social activity. As well as this, it's good for us physically, too. Not only does gardening support an active lifestyle, it can grant us access to healthy homegrown produce. There are a whole host of health benefits to be gained from falling headfirst into the gardening this year.

Giving back to mother nature, to your community, or to your family home through gardening feels great, but this extends to your local wildlife population, too. From the microbes in the soil to the bees and birds, your garden plays a part in supporting the wider ecosystem and it's really gratifying to feel like you're contributing towards something much bigger than you.

Gardening can be either a solitary pastime or a social one, so it's a great backdrop to spending quality time with loved ones. Set your little ones a goal in the garden and it will spark their enthusiasm to get stuck in. A joint task is also the perfect platform to open up communication as well. It's why therapeutic horticulture is so effective and now prescribed on the NHS.

Ways to make it stick

According to research, you're more likely to make a resolution stick if you make it a positive change. For example, make it "get out in the garden more" instead of "watch TV less". It's also important to set yourself an achievable target. Try to take

Veg advice

Ideas to get you going

Whether you're an old hat at horticulture or as green as they come, here are some ideas to begin building your empire:

● **Creative composting:** Most gardeners adept at grow-your-own are well-versed in the benefits of compost, but why not step up your game; hot composters really speed the process and can boost turnover or try wormeries as a way to compost in compact spaces. Else, stacking wormeries can produce liquid feed from your food waste, so there are lots of ways to keep composting at the top of your agenda. If you're dipping your toe in for the first time, you can start quite small - with just a portable compost bin and garden waste. Find more resources on getting started at daviddomoney.com

● **Wildlife works for you:** Wildlife is a sure-fire way to get you fired up. On urban allotments, in particular, you'll find habitats and wildlife corridors which are vital for supporting local wildlife. In turn, these go towards championing abundant growing conditions. One idea for the year ahead is to get to know the creatures that visit your plot. This will help to show you gaps in your gardening gambit. For instance, if you know that hedgehogs are hanging around, you can bet they're taking control of some of the slug and snail populations for you. Equally, ladybirds inhabitants help with some aphid populations. Once you know what's what, you can start to encourage the creatures required to eradicate pests. Pop in hedgehogs homes, superglue pinecones together for ladybirds, or add bug hotels made from stacked pallets

● **Break new ground:** The great thing about gardening is that you can set yourself aspirations appropriate for your experience level quite easily and you never run out of new challenges to try when it comes to growing your own. For the beginner, try your hand at 'chitting' potatoes - this is where you start tubers off inside so that they're ready to plant out in March or start a herb garden for seasoning your home cooking. For more avid green fingers, sow chillies in seed trays, force rhubarb or why not plant some new varieties of bare-root fruit trees

● **Group gardening:** There's no better feeling than sharing your passion with loved ones. Planting a tree is something that spans generations because they're so long-living. Plus, get your kids involved with the planting ceremony and it hands you an opportunity to spend time with them and open them up to the wonderful world of nature - win-win!



incremental steps towards a longer-term goal, rather than expecting to become a virtuoso overnight. To this end, the first few steps of creating a wildlife-friendly space might be the simple act of putting up some bird boxes - now's a great time to do so and it will pay off come spring.

Take the time to learn the skills you need to succeed first and, if in doubt, visit a local garden centre or fantastic garden to spark some inspiration.

Though there are upfront costs involved with starting out, there are many ways you can save money and still get gardening. Get involved with a local or nation-wide peer to

peer lending site or app - these connect owners of tools with those in need of them. Edinburgh even has a tool library where, instead of books, a library card will get members access to machinery and tools. Once you're up and running you may find yourself with a surplus. Swap your yields with a neighbour in need and get something you need in return... a bag of crumbly compost or more seeds perhaps?

Whatever your motivation for spending some more one-on-one time with mother nature, there's nothing to lose and everything to gain. So, grab your spade and get stuck in.

Anne Swithinbank

How to grow lettuce

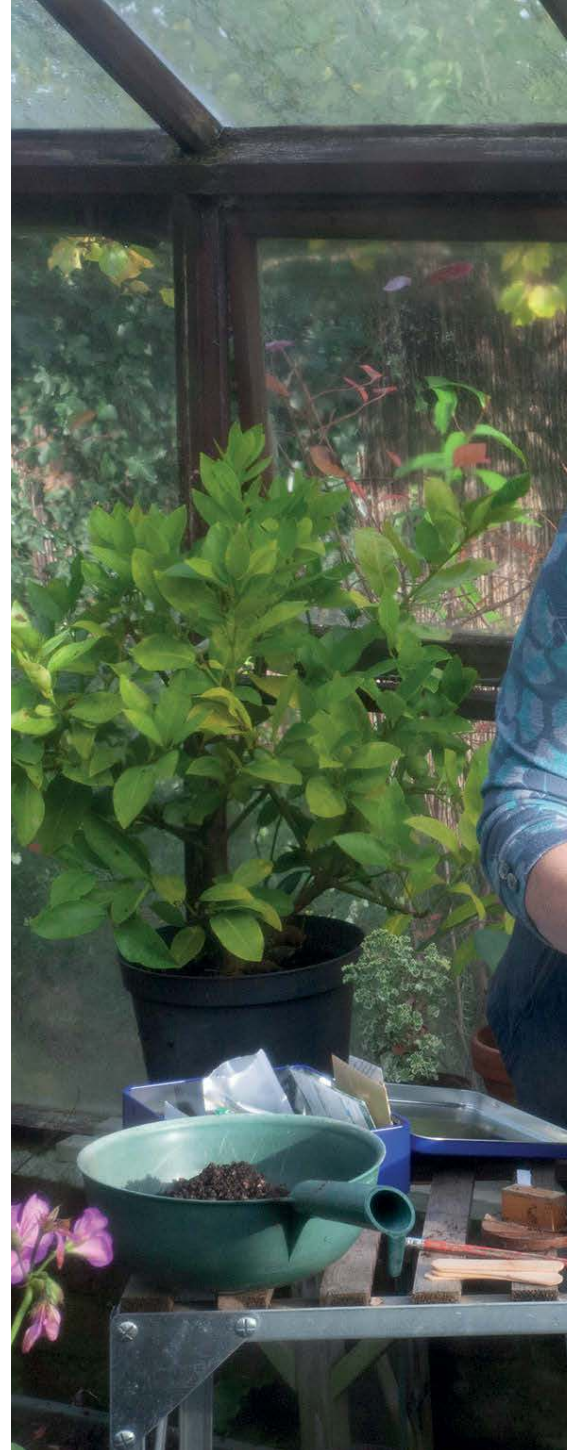
Anne reveals how to plan your nutritious leafy supplies over the growing season ahead and reveals her must-grow varieties

Lettuce is a staple for salads, sandwiches and wraps, yet supermarket offerings are so often flavourless and of limited variety. This leafy crop grows well outdoors in our climate and with covered space for early sowings and winter growing, self-sufficiency at least from spring to autumn is a worthwhile aim.

In the gentle warmth of a propagating case or windowsill the sowing of hardy varieties can start from mid-January but as soon as germination takes place, move seedlings to a bright, cool well-ventilated greenhouse or polytunnel. By all means sow into modules or from spring, direct

to soil outdoors but my preferred method is to space seeds thinly and evenly onto the moist surface of compost in a 9cm pot. Covered with a mere scattering of compost, they germinate at around 13°C. Transplant seedlings one per module or 9cm pot for planting out later, when spacings of a trowel length apart will help plants resist slugs and fungal diseases.

A couple more sowings made in May and July keep a succession going into the autumn. For winter and early spring pickings, sow hardy varieties in August for growing under cover. During summer lettuce seeds struggle to germinate when



soil temperatures exceed 25°C, particularly for the few hours after sowing. During heatwaves, sow during evening to compost or soil moistened with cool water.

Lettuce plants need moisture to grow but appreciate good, well-drained soil. They suffer in extreme heat and summer crops are often best shaded lightly by other crops. Slugs are their main problem but easy to outwit. Placing 'slug pubs' or deterrents





like wool, grit or copper between their daytime shelters and the lettuces will help keep them off.

Harvesting lettuce by the leaf is by far the most successful method, starting when plants are immature. Remove damaged outer leaves, gather sound ones and leave behind a central seven or eight around the growing point. More lettuce is eaten, slugs can't take up residence in dense hearts and this method suits all but tiny cos like 'Tom Thumb' and crunchy icebergs.

Top tip!

● When growing lettuce during the colder months, sow or plant in a pattern that allows them to be covered easily by your cold frames or tunnel cloches.

Anne's favourites

● **'Ashbrook'**

A loose-leaf lettuce with frilly, sweet tasting leaves. **Sea Spring Seeds (01308 897 898, seaspringseeds.co.uk)**

● **'Black Seeded Simpson'**

An old crisphead variety ideal for early and late sowings. **Sow Seeds (sowseeds.co.uk)**

● **'Edox'**

Good for early sowings, a medium red and green butterhead to try'. **Dobies (0344 967 0303, dobies.co.uk)**

● **'Winter Density'**

A semi-cos variety making long crisp leaves. Good from an August or autumn sowing. **Kings Seeds (01376 570 000, kingsseeds.com)**

Expert advice

If you have... 15 minutes

Sow sweet and chilli peppers

Space seed evenly over compost in a small pot or tray, cover lightly with a thin layer of vermiculite and transplant singly after germination. Or, set one or two seeds per small module or fibre pot thinning to one later. A temperature of 21°C is needed, so place in a cosy propagating case or inside a loosely knotted poly bag on a warm windowsill. Grow plants on in warmth and as they fill pots with roots, move them on to 13cm and finally 20-23cm pots depending on ultimate size.



If you have... 30 minutes

Sow Nantes type carrots into a pot (or bed)

Protected from rain, fresh seed will germinate slowly but steadily with no extra heat. I use pots 30cm wide for plenty of room for roots, half filling with a good, stone-free soil scooped from the top of an outdoor veg bed and topped off with weed free potting compost. Fill, tamp the surface down gently and sow evenly over the surface. Either space seed out and thin later to a plant every 5cm. Or make drills 8cm apart across and sow into these.



If you have... 60 minutes

Plan hot bed construction

For unheated greenhouses, they supply extra warmth without electricity. Work out how to contain the extra height with crates or boards and source fresh horse manure mixed with plenty of straw or miscanthus, but not sawdust. This is added to a trodden and firmed depth of 45-60cm, watered if dry and covered. When warm, add a layer of potting compost or old grow bag medium, to a depth of at least 13cm. Cover, allow to warm for a few days and then use like a heated bench for pots and trays. Outdoors, cover with a frame to retain warmth. Make direct sowings when the bed is slightly cooler and by spring, outdoor hot beds are perfect for courgettes and pumpkins.





SCHOOL GARDENS and *Wellbeing*



Huw Richards discusses
the undeniable benefits of
gardening in schools

*An incredible benefit
of a school garden is
that it is one of the few
activities which can
facilitate the teaching
of every subject on the
school curriculum*

I remember the first time I heard of wellbeing. It was at a morning assembly in school and I hate to admit it, but back then I thought the assembly was a waste of time. Not because I didn't agree with it, but because it was such an alien concept to me that I didn't want to start exploring something new because I had enough work to do with an impending exam season. Since then, my attitude to wellbeing has made a U-turn, and certainly for the better.

Therefore, I was delighted to hear that the theme for this magazine is wellbeing.

It has taken too long for it to become mainstream and I honestly believe that wellbeing from gardening and spending time outdoors holds the answer to so many issues arising in society, primarily with children who are struggling to cope with growing pressure and expectations. I must be clear that I am no expert in this field and everything I say is based on my own personal experience and opinion. One passion that drives me to do the work I do, is the quest to help the younger generation have the opportunity to access an abundance of fresh food and also the

chance to learn about how it is grown using a 'hands-on' approach in school and community gardens.

An incredible benefit of a school garden is that it is one of the few activities which can facilitate the teaching of every single subject on the school curriculum. You have the more obvious links such as biology, but you can also link the growing with physics, mathematics, drama, history and languages. One example is that with mathematics you can use it at every stage - from calculating how many seeds can be sown in a given



area, to estimating the time input needed per kilogram of output (harvest).

Something that I believe should be explored more is how important it is for young people to learn by doing, rather than sitting in a class. As a child I found it extremely frustrating to spend almost every single lesson sat down by a desk with just pen and paper to create with. Children have so much energy and inquisitiveness, and we must feed their burning curiosity through fun activities using blended learning of both practical and theory, otherwise we risk destroying their creativity and passion which is what is currently happening in education. You can learn about how soil is created in geography and then go to the garden to sow seeds in different soils and observe the differences in growth. This then links biology into the equation. You can then measure the height and leaf count of the different plants which then brings an element of mathematics. Learning through gardening is the perfect opportunity to link different subjects together, and when children see these connections it makes it much easier to understand concepts because they don't just learn it from one single perspective. When kids find it easier to learn, their stress levels plummet.

The world is interconnected so why

isn't education? This is something that I learnt from a TEDx Talk* by a hugely inspirational guy called Richard Dunne, who I think has developed the most incredible way of teaching children by using principles of harmony and nature as the backbone in lessons.

If schools and children hadn't become so disconnected from nature and the outdoors, then I highly doubt there would be close to as many mental health issues seen in the younger generations today. It is fantastic to see so many schools have active school gardens, but what is missing from many of these is the opportunity to connect school gardens with the curriculum to not only give children a more connected learning experience, but to also have the opportunity to do so using practical methods in the fresh air.

The RHS is working on a hugely exciting project at Wisley where they are creating a 'Health and Wellbeing' garden, scheduled to open sometime this year. It is being designed by Matt Keightley who designed the incredible RHS Feel Good Garden at Chelsea Flower Show which helped propel the topic of wellbeing in gardening into the media and it had every reason to do so. Millions of people across the UK garden not just for the end result, be it flowers or produce, but also as a way

of relaxing and escaping the madness of 21st century life. The fact that doctors are now prescribing gardening and allotments to improve people's mental health says so much about the effectiveness, but this has been long overdue.

Mindfulness is a huge part of wellbeing, and with our lives getting busier and busier, having the ability to escape to the garden to switch off and enjoy some peace and quiet and focus on the moment is paramount. Even though the wind is blowing in the right direction, I feel that we are only scratching the surface when it comes to the future of wellbeing and gardening, and I am most excited to see this area flourish in years to come.



You can see the TEDx Talk by searching 'The best teacher in the world' – Richard Dunne' on YouTube



Charles Dowding's

Monthly Tasks

What to do in your garden this month, with key organic and no-dig advice



Occasional winter gardening is a win-win, for both us with the extra activity and light outside, and our plots. I love how in January, there is time for background work which can improve the soil and set us up for saving time in the summer. These jobs might include any of the following.

Be flexible in your planning

This is a key part of feeling good in the garden, that it's your space to be creative in, and not bound by someone else's rules. Four year rotation is a tightrope that most gardeners (except with clubroot and white rot) do not need to walk, and then you can grow more of what you like to eat, plus be more flexible in what to plant next.

This links to the next point about feeding all your soil with compost, whatever you think to grow there. Well fed soil life is then ready to help any plant find the food and moisture it needs, provides you with healthy microbes to aid digestion, and we have wellbeing at all levels.

Mulch all beds with compost

It's a fallacy that for some veg you do not need to spread compost. The result of that would be poorly-fed soil organisms, for whom organic matter is the key to health and staying active.

When soil inhabitants are hungry and less busy, structure deteriorates and so does growth, while weeds increase as they become harder to remove, and less moisture is retained.

Feeding soil is about maintaining top health at all levels, from bacteria to broad bean plants. It's not about providing nutrients but to ensure that all veg grow healthier and larger, thanks to a thin mulch of compost.

Aerate a heap

If you used a lot of green leaves to make compost during late summer and autumn, it may be soggy and will benefit from aeration, so that the bacteria which speed decomposition are fed with oxygen. Either turn a heap onto an empty bay or space next to it, or use a proprietary aerating tool. One of mine rotates like a corkscrew, another has two hinged spikes: both work well and are easy to push or rotate in, then require effort to pull upwards.

The missing ingredient in many compost heaps is air, so these tools are worth using.

Plan for succession

Most vegetables mature in half a season, so there is time to resow and replant in summer, for more harvests in autumn and winter. Make a note of suitable sowing dates in your diary, because summer



rushes by and it's then too late if you miss them.

Examples are to sow beetroot, carrots, broccoli and cauliflower in June to early July, radicchio in early July, bulb fennel and coriander after mid July, spinach and salad rocket in early August, spring onions late August. Then salads for winter in early September. Buy seeds ahead so you are ready.

Sowing dates are in Charles' wall calendar, reduced by £3.50 for GYO readers, when you use the code GYOSOW on Charles' website shop



Catch Charles on episode 1 of *Grow Your Own's* brand new podcast 'The Dirt', out on 5th December!

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Laura Hillier, Editor

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We showcase the brand new nationwide grow along that you need to be a part of!

The sense of community is one of the many great things about growing your own - whether this is the community on an allotment site, or the brilliant, supportive online growing community. There are always plenty of tips and advice to be had - alongside a healthy little pinch of competitiveness!

This is where **#growwithgyo** comes in. We are thrilled to announce the launch of our brand new, nationwide grow along in partnership with the RHS. By joining in, you will get a selection of fantastic discounts on a range of RHS-endorsed products - from planters and tools, to seeds, plug plants and more! There will be plenty of tips and advice along the way to help you get the best from your crops, as well as a virtual county show at the end of the season to share our failures and our triumphs - as well as to crown the best of the best from the **#growwithgyo** family.

We will all be sharing our journey as we go - so if you have any cheeky shortcuts or fail-proof techniques for any of the crops along the way, do share them and get involved with the conversation.

Whether you join in using the hashtag online, via our forum, or send in letters and pictures, we are keen to see how you all get on. Let's start a new growing revolution!



This month's top tips

- Plan, plan, plan! This may not be a peak month for making sowings, but it is a great opportunity to assess how you got on in your 2019 garden - what worked, what didn't, what you would like to grow this year and what you will be skipping
- Take inventory of all of your tools and gardening kit. Make sure it is all in good condition and if anything needs repairing or replacing. Is there anything you need before you start sowing this year? If you are looking to treat yourself, a propagator is a great addition to your shed, and there are a range of options - from all-singing, all-dancing heated types, to more basic ones if you are just testing the water
- Get compost savvy. Whether you have a large compost heap, a compact bin, or are looking to start from scratch, now is the perfect time to work out how to up your compost game. It is also a good opportunity to check any bags of compost you might have left over from last year, and to see what you need to source before the peak season for sowing begins

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How to get involved!

1 To get your hands on a fantastic selection of discounts on some brilliant RHS-endorsed products each month, sign up to the *Grow Your Own* newsletter at growfruitandveg.co.uk/newsletter - don't miss out! These brilliant discounts will help you to get started on your **#growwithgyo** journey. You will also receive seasonal growing advice, the latest events in the gardening calendar and up-to-date news. Subscribe now for free!

2 Don't forget to pick up *Grow Your Own* magazine each month for top seasonal tips, updates and more!

3 Make sure you are following us on our social media platforms, and have registered to be a member of our forum growfruitandveg.co.uk/grapevine so you can stay up to date with all the latest **#growwithgyo** news, and to share your progress. Each month we will choose an image to feature in the **#growwithgyo** hall of fame.

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**next
month:**

Look out for your top offers on **#growwithgyo** seeds and top sowing tips - don't forget to spread the word!

GARDENING *for* **WELLBEING**



Ellen Mary uncovers the reasons you should be growing beautiful witch hazel in your garden



The wellbeing benefits of growing your own food and connecting with plants is becoming well documented and we know that spending time in the garden and on the allotment plot can help with our mental and physical health. Just looking at flowers gives us a feeling of happiness and eating our own produce is one of the most satisfying things to do, not least because it provides a healthy diet but plants give us so much more! The benefits to our wellbeing are immense and as science improves we may find even more reasons to immerse ourselves in the plant world to improve our health than we do now.

When we enjoy gardening we are also understanding and working with the seasons, watching insects, birds and the bees, ensuring productivity and developing a biodiverse garden. All of these elements provide a greater sense of the natural world and how it works around us and with us. Having this connection can help to clear the mind and naturally enter a mindful state. So when you are tending to your vegetables, allow your mind to focus on the job at hand and forget all the tasks you have to do at home or work. You are likely to be more productive and stress free with this approach and don't forget after a hard days work in the garden to sit and observe everything you've achieved, with a smile.

The benefits of growing witch hazel in the kitchen garden

It has to be about the incredible fragrance during the months where little else is in bloom. There is the most beautiful *Hamamelis mollis* (Chinese Witch Hazel) in Isabella Plantation in Richmond Park and the fragrance drifts around the garden drawing you to take a look at the tassel like yellow flowers. It was this very tree that provoked my research into its medicinal properties after the memory of being a child and my Mum always dabbing witch hazel on bruises. 'It'll bring out that bruise quicker' she used to say.

Not only is it beautiful and fragrant but also really easy to care for and as it's slow growing, it can also be possible to grow in a large pot as well.

All parts of the witch hazel have been used for hundreds of years by native Americans including using the branches to make bows and storing the seeds for food. As an astringent, it's incredibly calming which reduces swelling and bruises, itching, stings, burns and minor cuts. Also used in cosmetics Witch Hazel can reduce eye bags and calm irritated skin. There are many benefits for common health complaints plus it's simply beautiful to admire on a cold winter's day. If you only have a small space or you don't want to take up too much room in your kitchen

garden, why not choose a variety you love and grow it in a large pot by the greenhouse or shed? That way, every time you walk past you'll be bewitched by the incredible scent.

How to grow witch hazel

There are many to choose from, including yellow or orange and red flowers so pick the variety that best suits your kitchen garden and consider the ultimate height and spread. The position will need to be sunny, although part shade would be fine with a free draining soil. When you plant your new Witch Hazel make sure there is plenty of well rotted organic matter incorporated into the soil and this time of year is the perfect time to get planting, unless the soil is frozen or too wet.





They need regular water for the first couple of years but deadheading and pruning isn't necessary. So all in all, a pretty easy one to grow for maximum reward!

Making the most of the crop

Witch Hazel can be bought from health food stores as a topical solution. Many people use it as a face toner but it can dry out the skin, so use a good moisturiser afterwards. It is anti inflammatory and can be applied straight onto the skin from a piece of cotton wool. Some people have reported that using a little

on the scalp before washing their hair has improved sensitivity and itching as well. Due to the fragrance and many properties, my favourite way to use witch hazel is in a natural deodorant...and everyone needs some of that when digging all day in the garden! Again, this can be bought from a shop but why not try to make your own? The process of growing something in the garden and using it as a natural approach to health and wellbeing is both fun and empowering. Making and using your own natural skin care products can greatly reduce the use of chemicals as well.

NATURAL ROLL-ON DEODORANT

- 1.** Put 225g witch hazel bark into a saucepan
- 2.** Cover with filtered water (ensure the water is about 3cm above the bark)
- 3.** Boil the water and then simmer with the lid on for about 25 minutes
- 4.** Allow to completely cool and strain into a bottle
- 5.** Put 1 tablespoon of filtered water into a bowl
- 6.** Stir into the water about 1/2 a tablespoon of magnesium flakes
- 7.** Add in a pinch of sea salt and stir
- 8.** If you would like to add in some essential oil, pick your favourite and add in 12 drops or combine a few such as lavender and grapefruit (12 drops each)
- 9.** Use a funnel to transfer into a roll on deodorant bottle
- 10.** Top up with the witch hazel tonic and shake well
- 11.** Keep any leftover witch hazel tonic in the fridge for other usage

* always check with your doctor before using any natural skincare and do a skin test for allergies first.



Stay up to date with Ellen Mary! Visit ellenmarygardening.co.uk and follow her on instagram @ellenmarygardening

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MEET OUR PANEL



Blake Roberts
is the deputy editor of *Grow Your Own* magazine



Mike Thurlow
is a retired head gardener and gardening author



Joshua Tutt
is an organic garden designer

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

Re-charging soil

Q I've recently taken on a new plot, and have been told that the soil is prone to waterlogging. What measures can I take to avoid this?

Alice Reading, via Facebook

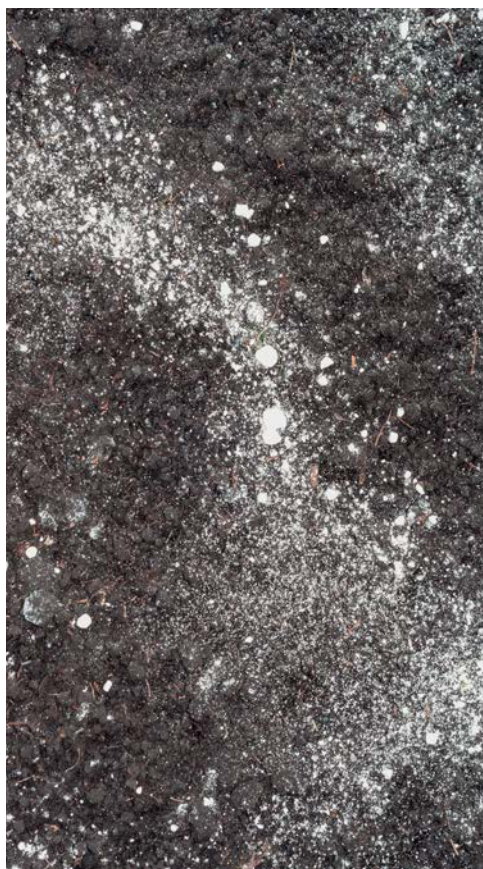
Blake says: "Bad drainage can mean bad news for your crops. In heavy soils, you'll need to create a better consistency that is free-draining. Try digging in a good dose of well-rotted organic matter such as manure that has the added benefit of improving texture and also boosting nutrients. This needs to be done a couple of weeks before you plan to plant anything. Alternatively, if soil waterlogging is a real problem, you might want to think about introducing some

raised beds to the plot, to give you more control over drainage."

Q I've got quite acidic soil, is there a way I can change this to make it more suitable for growing crops?

Colin Wakefield, via email

Blake says: "Acidic soils are suitable for certain crops, like blueberries or cranberries, but many prefer a more neutral pH balance. Testing kits are widely available at garden centres, and it's worth regularly checks to see how acidic your soil is. If you find that it's below 6 then it's time to take action. Digging in lime at the start of winter is advised to give maximum time for it to make an impact, and most gardeners apply a 'garden lime' which is recommended for this usage."





Q I once again suffered downy mildew on my cabbages this year, I just can't seem to get rid of it. What would you suggest?

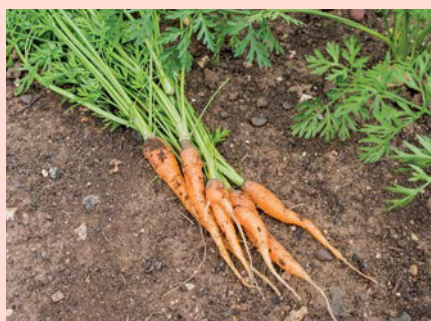
Trevor White, via email

Mike says: "Brassica downy mildew is a serious fungal disease of brassica seedlings and mature brassica plants. It flourishes under warm, wet conditions that allow the fungal spores to easily move from plant to plant. Early, young, spring-sown brassica plants growing under greenhouse protection are especially vulnerable to attack. Mature plants growing outdoors will suffer in the humid weather of summer and early autumn. The fungal spores are spread from infected plants and diseased plant debris. There isn't a fungicide control available to the amateur gardener. Weeds belonging to the brassica family also act as host plants for the disease. Plant at wider spacings to improve air flow between plants. Keep the plot weed free, removing and collecting any fallen, diseased leaves. It is safe to dispose of them on the compost heap. Using crop rotations can also help."

Q I was really disappointed that my carrots this year had lots of thin roots rather than one nice chunky one. Do you know what caused this or what I can do to produce better ones next time?

Helen Johnston, via email

Joshua says: "There are many reasons why carrots could not form a good chunky root. If your soil is too heavy this can restrict root growth. Try loosening up your soil with compost, leaf mulch and sand, being careful not to add too many nutrients too quickly as it can result in lovely green foliage but not much else. Another very common reason is watering. Insufficient watering causes shallow rooting so be sure to water deeply and regularly. Finally make sure you thin your carrot seedlings. This allows room for them to grow larger once uncrowded by competition."



Q I'm looking at ordering my tomato seeds this month, which ones are best for growing without too much space?

Steve Dawe, via email

Joshua says: "Having limited space won't stop you from a bumper crop of tomatoes. I used to grow dwarf varieties in a window

box. A great tip is to grow trailing varieties in hanging baskets or vertically on a sunny wall. Try Tomato 'Tumbling Tom Red' a small bite-size sweet variety that doesn't require any pinching out and crops early. Or if you're looking for a more traditional upright variety for the greenhouse or patio try Sweet 'N' neat, perfect for pots and containers."



Q I'm taking up gardening this year mainly as a hobby to keep me in good health. What benefits should I expect?
Julie Harold, via Instagram

Blake says: "Brilliant decision! There are a multitude of great health benefits from gardening, both physical and mental. The beauty of being able to get out onto the plot is that you're getting gentle exercise, but because your mind is occupied with the job at hand, it doesn't always feel like traditional exercising. Lots of gardeners also swear by the mental health benefits of being out and about in nature and using time at the allotment as a place to de-stress, and now even the NHS is looking to prescribe gardening to help boost wellbeing. Finally, growing your own food will absolutely make you eat more healthily, because you'll have nutritious greens on tap for most of the summer!"



Q I've never grown leeks before, which varieties are best, and what diseases should I look out for?
Aaron Panton, via email

Blake says: "Leeks are productive and generally quite a reliable crop to grow on the plot, plus they're packed with flavour. Some of the more popular choices amongst gardeners in the UK include 'Musselburgh' (winter hardy with a mild taste and tender stems), 'Autumn Giant 3 Albana' (long season with medium-sized stems), 'Lyon Prizetaker' (a great option for exhibition if started under glass in January), and 'Northern Lights' F1 (British bred with blue-green colours that change to a deep purple). Common problems with leeks include leek rust, leek moth and onion white rot. Good hygiene and crop rotation methods should keep most issues at bay."



Q I've moved into a new house recently, and have an apple and a plum tree in my new garden. Do either of these need pruning at this time of year and how easy are they to prune?
Olivia Lornfield, via email

Mike says: "Plum trees are never pruned during the winter. This is to reduce the risk of the tree becoming infected with silver leaf disease. Established plum trees are best pruned around mid-June to July. Avoid pruning any later. Apple trees can be safely pruned from November to early March. In both cases, remove all dead, diseased, damaged and crossing branches, aiming to create an open shaped tree that allows warm sunlight and air to reach the centre. Always cut back the base of a branch or shoot, avoid leaving stubs and don't prune heavy branches. With the apple and the plum any other summer pruning should only involve the removal of inward growing shoots of the current season's growth that will crowd the centre of the tree."

PROBLEMS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN JANUARY

Leggy seedlings

Some crops enjoy an early start, but most will become too leggy if sown in January, because they shoot upwards in search of light. This can weaken their long-term development. Use artificial lights to help mitigate or try wrapping a piece of cardboard with tin foil and place next to seedlings to maximise sunlight.



Winter weather

It's cold out there during January, protect your edibles that are still in the ground with cloches and cold frames, but if your plot is clear, snowfall will actually help to insulate soil. Always brush snow off greenhouse roofs and any places that might suffer under weight.



Damping off disease

Don't allow your seedlings to be the victims of damping off. This is caused by over-watering of young plants, leading to them collapsing and dying. To prevent, limit watering to every two to three days and check that plants have absorbed water before adding more.



DISEASE FOCUS:

Peach leaf curl

A problem that affects both peaches and nectarines is the disease peach leaf curl, which is a result of the fungus *Taphrina deformans*. The leaves are severely damaged by this disease, which causes them to become wrinkled and distorted in appearance with red-purple blisters, and then they will fall from the branch.

If your tree has this disease, then the infected leaves should be removed as soon as possible, however it's better to prevent it in the first place where possible. There are no chemical controls for fending off peach leaf curl, but there is a cultural control that is quite simple to put in place.

Protection and prevention

Rain spreads the fungus spores so to protect your tree, erect some plastic covering. This is relatively easy if training the tree against a wall, but might be slightly more challenging if not. The sheet should be put up from when the leaves have fallen in autumn until spring, in May and will also offer some protection from frost, too.

For infected trees, removal of diseased leaves is paramount, and these should be burned rather than added to the compost heap. Remove all leaf litter at the end of the year to maintain a hygienic plot.



Must-have products for 2020

Make sure your plot is productive this year with our guide to the garden gear you should be using

It sometimes seems that there is a different garden tool for each job on the plot. Some people love them, and some don't, but every gardener has their own personal favourites that they couldn't imagine living without. Here are the GYO team's must-have gear for 2020.

Digging tools

Good-quality forks, spades and hand tools are a must-have on the allotment. Even no-dig gardeners will still find these tools handy when they need to turn their compost heaps, create planting holes and more. Lots of digging tools now also come in differing lengths, weights, styles and with attachments for ease of use so there's bound to be one out there that suits you.

Hoes

It goes without saying that hoes are one of the most used bits of kit on the plot. This general purpose tool is great for mulching, weeding, cultivating and for all other general garden tasks. From draw hoes, to Dutch hoes, to stirrup hoes, to onion hoes – there's one for every job!

Raised beds

Space can be at a premium for people growing on small plots. Ditching traditional rows in favour of raised beds, grow pods and planters, will help you to grow more as well as minimise weeds, pests and back strain. They're also a great option if you've got heavy, sandy or wet soil.

Sowing and planting

Plant pots, labels, tampers, dibbers, string lines and propagators will help you to get off to a smooth start this season. It's a good idea to go through your current stash and recycle or donate any broken or damaged products and make a list of the things that need replacing. Heated propagators are also great at helping you to get ahead. These products create ideal temperatures for seeds to be raised in when there's still frost on the ground outside. You should also stock up on plant feeder and frost protection in anticipation of those first outdoors sowings.

Secateurs and saws

A sharp pair of secateurs are a go-to for gardeners. From hardy ones, to delicate fruit snips, there's a pair of secateurs to suit your garden task. When it comes to the time for pruning, these (plus a good saw!) are must-haves for getting the job done without causing damage to your trees and bushes. Keep these tools clean and sharp and they can last a lifetime.





Salvia Wishes series

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Vegebag

You'll be growing in no time with the newly released Vegebag from Vegepod. Simply pop up the bag, fill with compost and your favourite vegetable seeds or seedlings and away you grow. The protective mesh keeps pests away, retains some warmth and allows your plants to breathe. Well positioned drainage holes ensure your plants are not overwatered and the unique design allows you to move the bag with ease when required. Available in 2 sizes. VegeBag's available from vegepod.co.uk and unwins.co.uk



Narrow fruit cage

This Long Narrow Fruit Cage is a substantial yet neat solution with a zip door offering protection from birds and small animals. Featured at RHS Hampton Court Flower Show it is constructed from Matt Black polymer coated steel, guaranteed for 10 years and has a centre height of 2.44m enabling protection for dwarf fruit trees and large soft fruit bushes. Visit agriframes.co.uk or call **0117 934 1790**

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Planting perfection with Soil Blockers

Soil Blockers are easy to use and made from robust zinc-plated steel construction - ideal for the eco-friendly gardener. By eliminating the need for plastic pots, this will allow you to minimise plastic use on your plot. You can help to reduce our global waste by using organic gardening tools such as the Soil Blocker. Visit soilblockers.com



Learning with experts

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Inspiring online courses with world experts to help you grow your own food and flowers. Courses are the best way to improve your growing skills and knowledge to maximise the yield of your plot. Visit learningwithexperts.com to make 2020 your best year for growing ever!



Improve your soil with Compost Worms

For thousands of years, worms have been hard at work aerating, tiling and fertilising the soil, and play an important part in helping improve soil conditions and putting nutrients into the ground. Compostworms.co.uk specialise in growing and supplying worms for composting and earthworms to improve soil condition. If you have slow draining soil, clay soil or struggle to grow plants in your garden, then their selection of garden worms will maximise your chance of a bumper crop in 2020. For more information visit compostworms.co.uk

Fruit cages

Manufactured in the UK in Bridport Dorset, these fruit cages are made to last and are an essential for any plot. Available in aluminium or steel and in a variety of sizes, these fruit cages can even be custom made to your requirements. All netting is rot proof, long-lasting and UV stabilised. Easy to follow assembly instructions are provided. For the complete range of cages and garden equipment, visit wmjames.co.uk or call **01308 425100**



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5 OF THE HOTTEST Peppers

Spice up your life with some of the hottest fruits on offer in the kitchen garden

If it's eye-wateringly hot food you're after, then why not try producing your own spice? Chillies are one of the earliest starters in the vegetable garden, and while some might take a little more encouragement than others to get out of the starting blocks, once they're away, they're quite simple to grow. We've hand-picked the best of the best when it comes to chillies with a kick.



Annabelle says:

"Chillies are fantastic – they can increase your metabolic rate, aid digestion and balance blood sugar levels. They are also packed full of beta carotene which helps keep your heart and immune system healthy. Their real superpower, though, is that they are full of capsaicin – the thing that creates the burning feeling! Levels vary with (the hottest chillies have most). The burning effect sends a message to our brain that we are in pain, causing body to release endorphins – the hormone that makes us feel GOOD!"

Tag us...

Show us your chilli plants and share your best pointers for productive results by tagging us on Instagram @growyourownmag

'Bhut Jolokia'

Measuring over a million on the Scoville scale (the measurement for heat levels in chillies) this isn't one for the faint-hearted. Sow early and grow under glass for a long growing season, as this will help turn it from a pale green to a vibrant flame red once ripe. Sometimes they can take a while to germinate, but will reward your patience with scorching fruits!

'Heatwave'

As its variety name indicates, chilli pepper 'Heatwave' is ready to turn up the temperature in the kitchen garden. A fiery mix of red, orange and yellow fruits, this cayenne is best-grown in greenhouses, adding a splash of colour amongst the greenery that usually fills under cover growing spaces. It is a beautifully ornamental type.



Dimensions

Height: up to 75cm
Spread: up to 50cm



Dimensions

Height: up to 75cm
Spread: up to 50cm



‘Scotch Bonnet’

Getting its name due to its similarity in shape to the Scottish ‘tam o’ shanter’ hat, this aromatic and spicy chilli is best eaten fresh. Closely related to ‘Habanero’ types, it’s a staple in Caribbean hot sauce recipes. Sow early to maximise growing time (they should mature by late summer). These bushy plants look great in a container where they can be moved around dependent on the weather.



Dimensions

Height: up to 50cm
Spread: N/A

‘Hungarian Hot Wax’

Place on a warm windowsill or outside in a sheltered and sunny spot. The ‘Hungarian Hot Wax’ chilli is a solid choice for our unpredictable British climate, bearing long, pointed fruits that offer shades of green, yellow, and bright red. Its nectar-rich flowers are also a real draw for pollinating bees, which as we all know is a huge benefit to the vegetable grower.



Dimensions

Height: up to 60cm
Spread: up to 45cm

‘Aji Limon’

Adding zing and zesty punch to any dish, these hot favourites ripen from a pale green, to a deep purple before maturing to a bright lemon yellow. Easy to grow and offering a lot of bang for your buck (they’re quite the prolific cropper) ‘Aji Limon’ is ideal for hanging baskets, as the plant will explode and cascade down the side. Try adding to homemade tomato sauce for a distinctively lemony kick.



Dimensions

Height: up to 120cm
Spread: up to 120cm

SMART NEWS

The only pages modern gardeners need for brilliant growing ideas

GYO Spotlight

Growing awareness of mental health boost from gardening

As we celebrate all things gardening for wellbeing this issue, recent research by Squire's Garden Centres shows that there is an increased awareness among gardeners surrounding the mental health benefits of vegetable growing. 94 per cent of gardeners surveyed said that horticulture has a positive impact on mental health. Sarah Squire, Chairman of Squire's Garden Centres, commented: "I know I am not alone in finding that spending time outdoors makes me feel more relaxed, improves my mood, and generally makes me a happier person. As we all become more aware of the importance of taking care of our mental as well as our physical health, taking time to enjoy our gardens or local open space is a great home remedy freely available to us all."



LET US INTRODUCE YOU TO...

Bergerac Potatoes

Heralding from France, this maincrop potato has purple-black skin and amazing purple flesh, and is also called 'the truffle potato'. The potato has a delicious sweet, nutty flavour but the good things don't end there. High levels of antioxidants contained in this potato (the same pigments that are found in red wine and blueberries) are said to lower blood pressure and help prevent cardiovascular disease. pennardplants.com



Tomato 'Shimmer'

A hybrid tomato with yields of 300 to 350 fruits in a season. Larger than a cherry but smaller than a Roma, with green stripes, touches of shimmering gold, a unique almond shape with a sweet succulent flavour. Colour your salads with greens and golds, or enjoy snack-sized fruit fresh from the vine.

nickys-nursery.co.uk



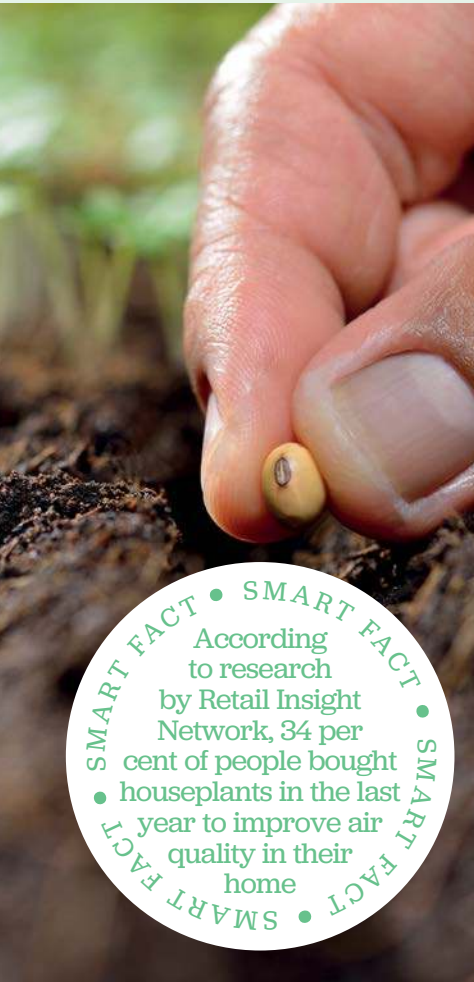
Starting up

...AN INDOOR SOWING STATION

Many gardeners find January a quiet month in the growing year, but some veg seeds can be sown now as they require a longer season in order to produce substantial yields. Make an early start with these pointers to ensure that you experience successful germination.

- Warm up your compost - bags that have been kept outside or in an outbuilding will often be cold. Seeds placed into this medium will automatically be slower to germinate. To speed up the process, fill pots with this soil and warm them in an airing cupboard overnight before sowing.
- Use a propagator - due to the shorter days and cold weather, it can be difficult to create a consistent climate for young seedlings to flourish. There are many propagators available that can be set at a particular temperature and increase germination rates.
- Enhance the sunlight - when the sun is shining, be sure to make the most of it! Covering a piece of cardboard with kitchen foil and placing this behind seed trays will allow the plants to enjoy more rays as they are reflected back onto them.





Cutting-edge gardening tech

A custom-built mobile robot, likely a LEGO Mindstorms-based creation, is shown on a grassy area. The robot has a blue and white base with a large black and white arm structure. It features a motor and various sensors, including a camera lens. The robot is positioned near some green bushes and a tree trunk.

New podcast to unearth gardeners' guilty growing secrets

GYO / advertorial

A close-up photograph of a flowering plant, possibly a species of *Myrica* or a similar shrub. The image shows a dense cluster of small, tubular flowers. Many flowers are bright red, while others are white. The flowers are arranged in a somewhat loose, branching pattern. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting foliage. The lighting is bright, highlighting the colors of the flowers.

A wooden lattice fence with a white-painted base, surrounded by colorful flowers and greenery. The fence is made of light-colored wood and features a crisscross lattice pattern. The base is painted white and is adorned with a variety of flowers, including purple, yellow, and red blooms. The fence is set against a backdrop of a brick house and a clear blue sky.



Smart step-by-step: **GROWING FRUIT**

Horticultural expert **Kay Maguire** from the *Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew* shares her ingenious pointers for producing mouth-watering fruit



1

Citrus in pots

Container growing makes it possible for all of us, no matter where we live, to grow tender fruit. For those living in cool-temperate areas, growing tender crops in pots means this can be done indoors permanently, in a conservatory or greenhouse or in a cool spot in the house such as a porch; or else, during summer, they can be put outside on a terrace or patio and moved inside as soon as the temperatures start to drop.

Citrus are beautiful, small trees with glossy, evergreen leaves and fragrant flowers that blossom throughout the year. However, all are frost tender and most, such as lemons, oranges, grapefruits and

limes, need consistently warm conditions with a minimum temperature of 10°C/50°F.

Each plant needs a container at least 50cm/20in in diameter. If you plan to move your plant in and out of shelter, choose a light plastic or fibreglass pot rather than a heavy clay one, to make this annual task easier. Specialised citrus compost is available, or you can make your own using a soil-based potting compost mixed with 20 per cent sharp sand to improve drainage.

In summer, water plants regularly, allowing them to drain freely, but in winter keep plants on the dry side, letting the compost dry out between waterings. Citrus are hungry plants and need regular feeding. In summer, when plants are producing green, leafy growth give them a high-nitrogen fertiliser, and in winter, when plants are flowering and fruit is ripening, give them a general-purpose feed. Repot plants in spring or refresh the top 5cm/2in of compost with fresh mix.

1 Citrus are extremely slow-growing plants so improve your chances of getting fruit by purchasing a plant that is at least three-years old.



2

2 Citrus can flower year-round, and fruit can take a long time to mature, so it is not unusual to see plants with both flowers and fruit at the same time.



3

3 Citrus plants prefer a good weekly drench rather than being watered little and often, even if this leaves the plants a little dry in between watering.



4 Hand-mist around citrus plants during and after flowering, to increase humidity. Standing pots on trays of wet gravel will also help.



5 Citrus plants need minimal pruning, particularly dwarf container varieties.

Wild strawberries are delightful, little plants that produce small fruit with a fragrant, very distinctive flavour

Wild strawberries from seed

Wild strawberries are delightful, little plants that produce small fruit with a fragrant, very distinctive flavour that is quite different to the strawberries that are available in shops. They are perfect for growing in containers and also make pretty edging plants to borders in both the ornamental and the edible garden.

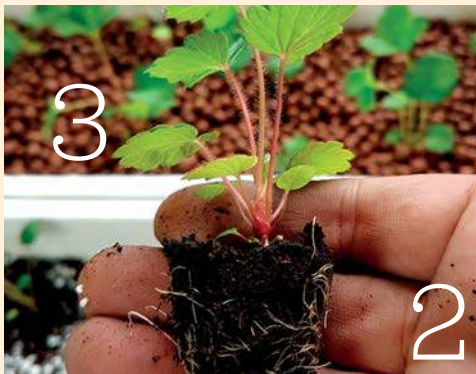
Seeds can be shop bought or collected from your own plants, as most wild strawberries should come true from seed. Sow indoors in spring or autumn in small pots or seed trays filled with a sieved multipurpose potting compost or a seed compost such as John Innes No. 1. Firm down the compost with fingertips, and water in so that the compost is moist. Thinly scatter the seeds across the surface of the compost, then lightly cover with a sprinkling of sharp sand or sieved compost. Place on a windowsill or in a greenhouse and cover with a pane of glass or else cover each pot with a clear plastic bag and seal with a rubber band, to increase humidity and help germination.

Wild strawberries need a constant temperature of 18-21°C/65-70°F, so a pot positioned above a radiator may be suitable but germination can still be slow and erratic.

Once seedlings have developed roots and two true leaves, prick them out individually and pot on into individual small pots. Grow on the young plants, and in late spring plant in the garden having hardened them off first. Do this by leaving the plants outside during the day and bringing them back indoors again at night, for about two weeks, to get them used to temperatures and conditions outside.



1 Scatter wild strawberry seeds thinly across the surface of the compost and grow on in a greenhouse or on a windowsill. Prick out seedlings once they have two true leaves.



2 Once young plants have developed a good root system and are growing strongly, pot on into individual pots.



3 After hardening off autumn- and spring-sown plants for a couple of weeks, plant out in late spring.



4 Wild strawberries are perpetual fruiting, which means they flower and fruit all through the growing season, producing a constant but small crop.



5 Strawberries are ripe once they are an even red all over and have a sweet aroma. Pull them gently from the plant as they bruise easily.

Extract from: *The Kew Gardener's Guide to Growing Fruit* by Kay Maguire, published by White Lion publishing at £12.99

Smart guide to: HYDROPONICS

Fancy trying a new way of growing your crops? Give hydroponics a go!

Growing your vegetables using hydroponics may seem like it will be overwhelming and complex, but in fact, it is something any gardener can try – and it can be especially useful if you are gardening in a small space, or if you are a time-strapped grower.

The practise of hydroponics, as a basic description, means growing plants without soil, either with an aggregate, such as perlite, and feed being dissolved into the water they sit in, or being grown straight in the water in cells/pots. This method can be used for almost any edibles, but is particularly well suited to salad crops, such as lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. This term also covers crops grown in the ‘nutrient film’ technique, where a nutrient-rich solution made to trickle along gently sloping and covered gutters. The plants are grown in little containers of rockwool and placed at intervals in the gutters. The

roots form a thick mass in the humid, well-aerated spaces and this results in strong plant growth.

When you imagine hydroponic growing systems, you probably think of large tunnels packed with industrial amounts of veg, but you can dip your toe into the water with a number of great hydroponic kits, perfect for growing at home. These often fit on a windowsill for simple home care, and come with everything you need – trays, grow lights and any growing matter – sometimes even the seeds. You can get some fairly basic ‘plug in and go’ type of systems if this is your first foray into growing in this way, or you can go for some of the ‘all-singing, all-dancing’ types if you are a bit more tech-savvy. These obviously come in at a range of price points, too, so you can experiment and see if hydroponics are for you, relatively cheaply at the start. The kits also cover all the different types of hydroponic



growing styles, so it is well worth doing some research into which type lends itself to you and your needs best before you take the plunge.

Key benefits

When using these systems, the crops you are growing will often be irrigated with an automatic or drip watering system. This is circulated around the tank, and reduces waste, as these sealed systems will have less evaporation than open ground. It will be important (as with other types of growing) to keep an eye on your plants and containers – get used to what they look like and how they behave. The more familiar you are with things, the sooner you will be able to identify and stamp out any issues that might raise their heads.

There aren’t many problems to look out for, but do keep an eye on your water quality, and also watch algae build up.

Overall, this is a very efficient way to grow – plants tend to grow slightly quicker through hydroponics than they would grown in the ground, so it can be a real time saver. If you live in an area where



soil quality isn't great, you don't need to worry - and you don't need to cart large, cumbersome bags of compost around!

One of the other key benefits of using hydroponics is that you will tend to suffer with less pests, diseases and weeds. Conditions are much more controlled, and far less at the mercy of exterior issues.

Exciting examples

As well as being a fun and interesting way of growing for gardeners to experiment with, another side of hydroponics was showcased at RHS Chelsea in 2019 with the 'Gardening Will Save The World' garden from Ikea and Tom Dixon. This brilliantly showcased how using these innovative methods can help us to grow more food in smaller spaces - and crucially, without land - as the world's population continues to swell. The aptly-named show garden showcased a variety of crops and proved to be a really popular talking point from the show, raising awareness of these techniques, and allowing gardeners to see what is possible, wherever you grow or however experienced you are.

Top hydroponics tips

- Making sure the pH balance is right is essential when growing with hydroponics, so you will need to invest in some testing kit. Don't worry if you don't have a pH meter, as test papers are widely available and will often be one of the more cost-effective options
- It is important to remember that light is another crucial element to your vegetable cultivation, and the plants will need a good dose of decent light every day. If you are setting up your hydroponics system indoors, you will need to invest in an LED heat lamp. There are many different ones available for purchase, so have a look around and see what will suit you
- Think outside the box. If you want to set up a hydroponic growing space but aren't sure where to do it, look around you. You can create green havens on roof terraces, or even as a living wall, so this is a really space-friendly way of growing your own

Smart Technology in your garden

Problems with rats, greenhouse temperatures, or thefts from sheds?

The uWatch Cube does it all



- Sends Day or Night camera images
- Movement (PIR), shock, GPS, temperature, Bluetooth sensors
- Battery Powered, LCD screen, built-in "roaming" SIM
- Alerts sent to your phone/email in under 30 seconds
- Instantly deployable and portable
- Police "Secured by design" approved

Do you want to be alerted with a picture if someone attempts to break into your shed or 'borrows' your wheel barrow? Or to find out what is damaging your crops? The uWatch Cube is the versatile buddy for your smart phone for peace of mind telling you what is going on when you aren't there. The kit is police approved and deters unwanted visitors poking around your growing space, while keeping you updated wherever you are and whatever you are doing.

This smart system can tell you how cold it is in your greenhouse, and alert you to any wildlife visiting your plot, so it is the perfect choice for the savvy gardener, offering protection to tender crops over winter, and helping you to understand the natural visitors helping you with pollination and pest control.



Give the gift of security – was £343 NOW £299

Get the police approved uWatch "Shed" Kit for £299 inc VAT. Just enter the code "GYOCUBE" at checkout.

● **12-month SIM contract included!**

uwatch.co.uk | 01491 651229 | lb@uwatch.co.uk

The "Upstairs Downstairs Hive Intronce"

It lets bees defend their hive from inside their entrances, as they do in the wild, which is easy for them to defend against wasps and wax moth.

"Bees fly, so why do we insist they enter their home at the bottom of the hive?" says Filipe Salbany, 2019 National Honey Show innovation silver medal winner. To get all the benefits, the UD Hive Intronce is fitted to both brood boxes and supers. These include:

- Simple hive ventilation
- Makes "cold way" warm
- Improved foraging efficiency
- Does away with the bottom entrance so pests can't get in
- Reduces moisture in hives



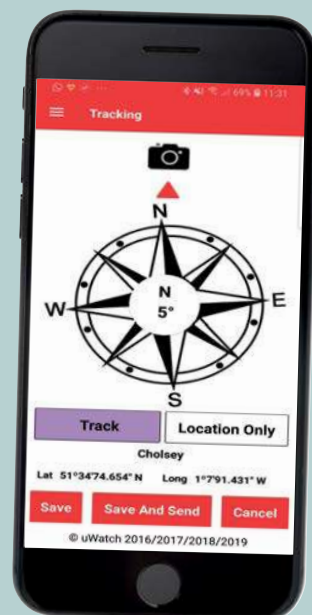
Extremely easy, quick and inexpensive to retrofit. A great Christmas gift for the "thinking" beekeeper £26.99 incl delivery. Find out more at **beespace.xyz**

Bee.Watch

Using your phone as a tool to help the environment

The UK is lacking factual data about what is happening in the environment - what pesticides are we using? do we need them? what effect do they have?

- The Bee.Watch app was developed by beekeepers to help record apiary inspections and swarm collections. It now incorporates farmers, other pesticide users and Bystanders.
- With the Bee.Watch Bystander App you can get pesticide alerts, report bee swarms and record and notify points of environmental interest (eg. hedgehogs, owls, Japanese knotweed and Asian hornets) to the appropriate authority



The app is £7.50/year and will create a wealth of environmental data - A perfect eco gift for the kids. For more information, visit **bee.watch**



Rose's top 5 for JANUARY

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

Read this

I love to read about all-things gardens, even ones from the past. *The Tudor Book of the Garden* is a window into the world of 15th and 16th century garden design that tells us all about Tudor gardeners, tools, plants and even the botanicals Shakespeare named in his plays. What makes this book even more special is that the second half of it is a garden planner. This section has been split into the four seasons with space to pencil in your plants.



Insta this

I've been travelling around Instagram this month to find out what fruit and veg people are growing in other parts of the world. First up is Amy (@[frontYardveggies](#)) who grows watermelons, passion fruits and avocados in her Santa Monica front yard. Lee (@[garden_with_lee](#)) from Brisbane, Australia, cultivates mangos, persimmons and macadamia nuts in her subtropical plot. And finally, Luay (@[urbanveggiegarden](#)) from Toronto, Canada, has been having fun digging up dahlias.



Plant this

You might think that there isn't much going on in the garden this month but planting soft fruit trees is a silver lining. Bare root apples, apricots, pears, peaches and plums can all be plonked into the ground this month. Open mail-ordered fruit trees straight away and plant into a deep wide hole that has had lots of well-rotted organic matter added to it. Tie the tree to a wooden stake, press down on the soil to remove air pockets and give it a good mulch.



Buy this

We've just had Christmas so you might already be kitted out with the latest gardening gear. But, if something was missed off your wishlist, buy it now to beat those January blues. These stunning gardening gloves from Wrendale Designs are just the thing to brighten up tiresome winter weeding. Sporting a sparrow, a mouse and a hare, they're sure to make you smile every time you put them on!



Start this

There's no better time to sort our often overflowing seed tins than January. If you've found that you own about a hundred packets of radish but you're desperate to start sowing leeks, why not start a seed swap? Collect all the seeds you'd like to share with others, organise some snacks, get your gardening friends together, and start swapping! It's a great way to make space, make new friends, reduce waste and get a start on the new season - what's not to love?





GARDENING HEROES:

KIRSTY WARD

We chat to allotmenteer **Kirsty Ward** about how she's used gardening therapy to aid her mental health recovery process



Each month, we'll be celebrating the gardening heroes from vegetable plots around the country. Those individuals, groups and organisations that are truly making a difference to the world of horticulture.

As this is our wellbeing issue, it felt only right for us to catch up with Lincolnshire allotmenteer Kirsty Ward, better known by her large Instagram following as *My Little Allotment*, about the way she's using her beautiful growing space as her very own outdoors therapy.

"I fell pregnant with my second daughter in January 2016. From the start to the end I

had difficulties. I went into premature labour, had a really traumatic birth, and it was a horrible time. Once we were home safe, I was coping well, and I was just incredibly happy for the pregnancy and birth to be over and so I got on as a mum with a toddler and a baby.

"One morning in March 2017, my husband was on his way to go to Russia to work for four weeks. We got up, made breakfast for me and the girls, and during breakfast, I left the table and went upstairs. His taxi was waiting for him so he came to say goodbye and I was on the bed, sobbing uncontrollably. I was just really inconsolable and I didn't make a lot of sense when I was talking, but the one thing I



kept saying was that I thought I was going to die, he was going to die, the kids were going to die if he went away.

"He decided not to leave and we sought medical advice. Initially the doctor thought I was suffering from post-natal depression, I started taking tablets and went on a waiting list for cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). I was so poorly, with suicidal thoughts, panic attacks constantly, night terrors, insomnia, physical pain, sweating, and actually I got CBT privately about nine days after my breakdown. I found out that when something bad had happened during my pregnancy, he was away on a job. So him going away for the first time acted as a trigger for all the trauma in my head and I had a full on breakdown.

"I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is very different from post-natal depression, because obviously I'd had no problem bonding with my daughter; I didn't have any trouble being a mum, and my partner leaving to go away was a trauma trigger, and my brain couldn't cope. I was really poorly for two to three weeks, bed-bound, but luckily with the CBT, the tablets, I got back on my feet.

"One of the first things I did was to bake some cakes with my eldest daughter. It was only a twenty-minute task, but I managed to do it. I just felt like I'd lost my identity, like I wasn't a person. I was Jason's wife and the kids' mum, and I felt like I was defined by a mental health breakdown; but I wasn't me, I wasn't a person and I didn't have anything that I wanted to do.

"I decided to read a bit more about PTSD, because I think you assume it's something that's quite exclusive to veterans, but you don't realise it happens to other people. That's where I read that gardening therapy can help people with mental illness issues, with wellbeing, and that it was really good for people with PTSD because it gave them a really good focus.

"When my husband suggested I should get an allotment, I said: "Are allotments still around?" because I remember my dad

having one and visiting when I was younger, but didn't know they still existed! I rang the council, and they said they had some spaces and it was a few weeks later that I actually got myself an allotment."

Starting on the allotment

"I began as a complete novice, and I decided to start up an Instagram social media account, hunting for allotment and grow your own inspiration, just to see what people were doing so I could copy. If people were planting onions, I'd plant them, and then I started getting myself some books and stuff. And this is where I think there was a real turning point in my recovery.

"With PTSD, it is more or less lifelong thing. It's not something that you just get over, it's something you learn to cope with, and I knew I needed something else because tablets and therapy aren't lifelong coping mechanisms.



So I was hoping that this garden therapy thing would work for me, and it did, it completely changed my life.

"There are so many benefits to being on the allotment, I started to feel like I was enjoying things again. I can just remember this one point where I thought, what do I want to do with the allotment moving forwards, how do I want to plan it out, and this was the first time that I'd looked forward, looked ahead into the year, rather than just getting through that day. It was quite a turning point, realising that just being down the allotment a couple of times a week was really helping me.

"When you have actual therapy, you know your having therapy, but this wasn't like that, I'd just go down and get digging and planting, being in nature and listening to the birds, and focusing on the gardening, the exercise and physical exercise that releases endorphins [the chemicals that make you feel good] all of those things were having this positive effect on me, and two and a half years on, I'm in a completely different place. I'm not on tablets anymore, I'm not having therapy, I've moved on from that and now I use my allotment as my therapy, as my coping mechanism. There's just something so wonderful about it that I can't explain how much it's changed my life.

"Obviously, not everybody can just get an allotment and feel better, it's important to go and seek professional help. But there's so much to be said for allotment spaces, growing your own as a therapy option, something that can help your mental health and wellbeing. I would not be where I am now without my allotment. I think I've found who I am again, it's made me a person, rather than an empty shell, because even after therapy and tablets I didn't feel like a person, the allotment just offers somewhere to go, it's a little sanctuary, it's such a beautiful place to spend time, and it's so easy to spend time there, it's really good for stress relief."

Simple
projects to
start now

JANUARY UNDER COVER

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

WORDS: Sally Nex

Dos & Don'ts

- **DO** make the most of this relatively quiet time to get organised. Stock up on supplies like plant labels and string and go through your stash of pots and seed trays, sorting them into sizes before stacking them neatly. Get rid of any which are past their best; if they're plastic, replace them with non-plastic biodegradable alternatives so you're ready and raring to go when the new season starts.
- **DON'T** wait till June for your first strawberry: dig up a few crowns from the garden now and you can force them for super-early berries. Plant in a roomy container of multipurpose compost and bring into a cool greenhouse; they'll burst into growth within a month and flower not long after. Pollinate by hand, dabbing a soft artists' paintbrush into each blossom, and you'll have fruits by early May.

Top tip!

You can also grow chillies on south-facing windowsills for a beautiful indoor option.

How to avoid: Etiolated seedlings

At the turn of the year, a gardener's fingers start itching to sow some seeds. But although you can provide warmth with a heated propagator or windowsill, light levels are very low - and that makes seedlings grow long and leggy (technically known as 'etiolated') as they search upwards towards the sun. Etiolated seedlings make for weak

plants, so it's better to wait until light levels improve before you sow. But some seeds, like tomatoes and chillies, need a long season to grow to maturity and ripen their fruits. To avoid these early starters becoming etiolated, invest in grow lights - some are small enough to slot into propagator lids. Keep them lit for 10-12 hours a day and seedlings grow sturdy and strong, however dark and dreary it is outside.



Sow now: Superhot chillies

Superhots are the chilli-grower's holy grail. It's best to earn your spurs with easier, less fiery chillies - 'Prairie Fire' perhaps, or 'Apache'. Then once you've mastered growing them, graduate to varieties which are more exotic - and much, much hotter.

If you thought Scotch bonnets were hot at 300,000 SHUs (the unit used to measure chilli heat) they are mere pussycats compared to tiger-strength superhots like Nagas, Scorpions and Bhut Jolokias, regularly topping one million SHUs. The current record holder (which you can also grow at home) is the 'Carolina Reaper', at an eyewatering 2.2 million SHUs.

All superhots are used to tropical temperatures and are demanding to grow well in the UK. But if you're up for a challenge, start now to give them the longest possible growing season. Use rubber gloves to handle the seeds, as they're as hot as the fruits. Place them in a propagator heated to 28-30°C to germinate, and keep young plants warm as they grow, either in a propagator or on heat mats. Then keep them in the greenhouse right through summer. The fruits ripen late, but when they do you'll know all about it. Just keep a pint of milk handy when you try tasting them...

3 VARIETIES TO TRY:

- **'Dorset Naga'** was the first superhot to top a million SHUs and is British bred, the offspring of the legendary Ghost chilli, used in India to ward off elephants (seaspringseeds.co.uk)
- **'Trinidad Scorpion'** bears tiny red fruits, each with a little curved twist on the end (hence 'Scorpion'). It certainly carries a vicious sting at 1.5 million SHU (southdevonchillifarm.co.uk)
- **'Carolina Reaper'** is the daddy of them all, at 2.2 million SHUs the world's hottest chilli. Handle with extreme care: eating its fruit has put people in hospital. (nickys-nursery.co.uk)

Step by step: Chitting potatoes

Seed potatoes are on sale now – but it's months before it's safe to plant them in the ground. Let them sprout, or chit, indoors while they're waiting, though, and you could get a head start on the season.

1



Early, or 'new' potatoes get the most benefit from chitting, as they've already started growing before you put them in the ground so you'll get that all-important first harvest that bit sooner. For second earlies and maincrops the benefit is less pronounced – but it's still worth getting them out of their nets so the shoots don't become tangled.

2



Stand the tubers up in eggboxes to hold them upright and keep them separated. Ideally, you should stand them rose end uppermost – that's the rounded end with the most 'eyes', the little buds where the shoots will emerge from. These can be tricky to spot; look for little indents in the skin, often in clusters at one end of the tuber.

3



Write the variety on the eggbox, then put your chitting tubers somewhere cool and frost-free, in bright light but not direct sunlight. The windowsill in an unheated spare room is ideal, but some chit potatoes by the shed window or on the bottom shelf of the greenhouse staging. The sprouts begin to appear within just a few days.

4



Some people rub off all but the four or five topmost shoots before planting; this gives you fewer, but larger potatoes. Leave all the sprouts on and you'll get more spuds, but they'll be a little smaller. Once the sprouts are about 2.5cm long – usually six to eight weeks after chitting begins – they're ready to plant.

TECHNIQUE



Snow-proof your polytunnel

The year's first snowfall is a magical event: light, fluffy snowflakes coating everything in sight with a soft blanket of white. But all that gentle floating is deceptive: as it collects into a thicker and thicker layer, snow can get seriously heavy, weighing as much as 100 kilos per cubic metre – easily enough to stretch a polytunnel cover and even buckle the frame.

Even in light snowfall it's important to brush the snow off the polytunnel roof each day; as well as taking the weight off the frame, it lets much-needed light in for the plants underneath. But if heavy snowfall is forecast, you may not be able to get to your polytunnel quickly enough. In this case, brace the frame with wooden struts wedged against the highest curve of the hoops, and light a greenhouse heater inside the tunnel. This keeps the temperature just a few degrees higher, encouraging snow to slide off instead of settling.



Weekend Project: Go to a seed swap

The long, dark days of winter, when you can't get out into the garden and even if you could there's not much to do, are best spent indoors planning all the wonderful things you're going to grow next year.

One of your indoor jobs is to sort out your seed stash and winnow out the extra packets you'll never get around to sowing. But don't throw them out – pass them on to another gardener who might be delighted to have a go at growing them.

Seed swaps are a great way to exchange your extras for something you want to grow instead. You bring along your unwanted packets of seed –

either bought or saved from your own plants – and then choose the same number of seed packets from those other people have donated.

They began in 2002 with Seedy Sunday in Brighton (seedysunday.org) – the country's longest-running seed swap and now a hugely popular event, including talks, demonstrations, a café and over 50 stalls. There are dozens of similar swaps all over the country; search online for one in your area. Many join forces with Potato Days so you can stock up on seed potatoes and onion sets, too, getting your gardening year off to a flying start!





Growing under cover

Keep your crops happy, healthy and protected from the elements this season

If there is one thing you can be certain about as a gardener, it is that the weather will be uncertain! From snow in spring, to late-season heatwaves, plenty of rain and everything in between, the last few years have seen unpredictable weather patterns that can really throw a growing season off. However, there are measures you can take to help your plants along, whatever temperatures and conditions we have.

Undercover growing - no, not detective style, but growing in structures that offer your crops shelter from inclement weather and pests - is a great choice. There are many different types to choose from in all different styles, materials, sizes and prices brackets - and in some cases you

can even make your own, so there really is something for everyone.

Choosing your structure

Greenhouses and polytunnels are a common sight on many allotment sites and gardens, and are fantastic for offering a year-round growing space and protection. They may feel like a big investment, especially for a beginner gardener, but they really are worth their weight in gold for year-round growing, and are available in a vast range of prices, styles and materials to suit your space and gardening needs.

Cloches are a simple and effective way of protecting seedlings and small, tender plants from pests and frosts, and are a great option if you don't have the space to

dedicate to a larger piece of kit. They are easily removed and popped back on if we get any late frosts we weren't expecting, so are perfect in our unpredictable climates! You can buy beautiful, ornate glass cloches, simple hard plastic ones - or you can even make your own out of the top of an old pop bottle.

A cold frame is a great choice for someone who doesn't have the space to invest in a full greenhouse or tunnel, as they offer protection for seedlings and tender plants, before they are moved out into the open and planted in the ground. Again, there are a range of styles and types to choose from, so have a look around for the type that will best suit you. If your cold frame is free-standing and movable (not leaning against a wall, for example), you can even use them to cover over soil in raised beds to warm it up before the planting season begins.

As with any bits of gardening kit, it is worth taking the time occasionally through the season to check your under cover structures for wear and tear, or any damage from strong winds etc. Noticing this sort of thing early means any issues can often be fixed quickly and easily.

You can also get plenty of under cover growing accessories to help you get the best from your crops - from greenhouse heaters to automatic air vents and watering systems. The possibilities are endless!



Excel under cover

The Walk-in Wonderwall is a netted brassica/vegetable growing tunnel. It is a no-go area for pigeons, cabbage white butterflies and caterpillars, while also preventing slugs and snails from entering. Its design gives crops protection from strong winds while allowing rain and sunlight to penetrate. Use the Walk-in Wonderwall to get the most out of your plot. Visit walk-inwonderwall.co.uk or call **01543 677531** for more information.



Knowle Nets polytunnel

Whether you want to create a mediterranean climate in your garden, grow exotic crops or just enjoy traditional fruit and vegetables all year round, a polytunnel offers a versatile and practical space to grow and work in comfort, whatever the weather. Knowle Nets has been supplying unrivalled quality products to gardeners at the best prices for over 50 years. Visit knowlenets.co.uk to see the full range or call **01308 424342** for more information.



Victorian feature greenhouse

Robinsons Greenhouses, long famous for their 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



Keder Greenhouses

Extend your growing season with a Keder greenhouse, the warmest greenhouse available without heating. There is a large range of sizes available, to suit every plot or garden, designed to nurture and protect your precious crops. These greenhouses are safer, lower maintenance and more cost effective than traditional glass, while being far stronger and more durable than standard polytunnels. Visit kedergreenhouse.co.uk

Vitavia Zeus

Designed for the passionate hobby gardener, this strong and beautiful greenhouse has an impressive eaves height of 1.89m. It is available in five sizes and comes with an integral base. A lockable stable door equipped with strong fixings provides additional ventilation options without having to expose plants to cold drafts. The polycarbonate roof minimises heat loss and reduces condensation. This Vitavia greenhouse really will enhance the appearance of any garden. Visit vitavia.co.uk for more information.



Palram Greenhouses

Palram Greenhouses are made from rustproof Aluminium with unbreakable polycarbonate making them low maintenance, vandal resistant and safe to use in gardens where children play. With sizes from 6ft x 4ft, Palram make a greenhouse suitable for every garden. Buy any Greenhouse from Garden Oasis and get an extra 5% discount using the code GYO5 before 31st January 2020. Order online at gardenoasis.co.uk or call **01543 889900**

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Wild about weeds

Jack Wallington makes the positive case for incorporating more weeds into outdoor green spaces

People often say to me, 'If only this plant would grow as well as my weeds.' It strikes me as an interesting statement, because if one plant is growing happily and the other not, perhaps the plants are telling us something.

I've always loved weeds. They sneak into our gardens hoping to flower before we notice. A garden without weeds is a soulless, lifeless thing. But, more than that, the last weed you pulled out may have been destined to transform your garden in the most beautiful and unpredictable ways.

Driving around New Zealand I've seen thousands of lupins growing as weeds in people's gardens, but also along roadsides as an introduced invasive. In the wild this

is a problem for native plants and wildlife, but in gardens there is no denying their towering beauty. In North America, native *Pennisetum* grass can be found as a weed along highways. Japan cultivates moss to the point the rest of the world envies its use, yet elsewhere we blast it from the face of the Earth with a jet washer.

Weeds have a problem the world over. When we lose control of a plant, its presence feels suffocating and our reaction is to get rid of it entirely. However, if we stop for a moment to appreciate weedy plants, without the negative propaganda, we find attractive, often pretty things. By taking time to understand weeds better, we can control and enjoy their beauty in

our gardens.

Years ago, on my allotment in London, a tiny weed appeared growing among my beans. Intrigue, empathy - whatever the reason - I left that weed to see what it would become. A year later I'd forgotten about it entirely, itself buried beneath other weeds. Then, one dusk, there it was, a glowing white spire with the golden sun setting behind it: *Digitalis purpurea* subsp. *albiflora*, the less common form of Europe's native foxglove, igniting a weedy epiphany. What if these weeds, seen as problem plants to be evicted, are actually creating easy beauty if we bother to stop to look?

I'd already been leaving in my designs a few weeds that I liked: *Anagallis arvensis*



with its gorgeous, dusty orange flowers; *Oxalis corniculata* var. *atropurpurea* – against the advice of many gardeners – I loved for its purple-brown, heart-shaped leaves with perfect edges, which show off its bright yellow flower; *Euphorbia helioscopia*, with acid-green flowers among the purple of my cabbages. They didn't seem to be causing the problems people said they would, and I liked the look of them. That's it, I thought, they're staying.

More than a plant

Since childhood I've felt a connection with weeds. Behind our family's cottage garden in Buckinghamshire, I used to run through forests of *Heracleum mantegazzianum* (I understood its sap was dangerous), I swung from jungle vines of *Clematis alba luxurians* and I stomped over *Hedera helix*. When I was about seven, I remember feeding our dandelions with fertiliser to grow bigger and better flowers.

Weeds were the first flowers I knew, they are probably the first flowers anyone knows – the little daisy and buttercup in the lawn. Blowing dandelion clocks. In fact, ask most people to name flowers and I'm sure these will come up more than many non-weedy garden varieties.

While many people get frustrated with weeds in gardens, I've grown increasingly fond of them. They're beautiful, they're part of the natural world, attracting bees, butterflies and hoverflies, and they're connected to our lives. Part of me likes them because they're so familiar. Familiarity provides a link, a friend, an emotional or nostalgic connection.

Another part of me – the rebellious, weed-like part! – likes weeds purely because other people tell me not to.

Weeds enhancing design

These days, as a professional garden designer and horticulturist, I actively incorporate weeds into my own garden and into designs for clients. Not all weeds are ugly, uncontrollable brutes. Many are beautiful plants with colourful flowers and a habit that suits modern garden style.

As I've explored and discussed the world of weeds with people, I've found that everyone has at least one weed that they let off the hook, one they leave in their garden. Often it fills a gap where nothing else grows, it has a personal connection, or it feels right for the place.

Many gardeners I work with grow more than one weed in their clients' gardens,



understanding the weed's beauty, using just enough control to stop them dominating. Some have even taken weeds to the height of horticultural excellence, including weeds in gold-medal-winning designs at the world-famous Chelsea Flower Show.

Perhaps some plants become so ubiquitous we start to dislike them, drawn instead to something shiny and new. I'm as guilty of this as anyone, but I also like to look at familiar plants with fresh eyes. There's something comforting about the familiar and there's always a different, imaginative way to present them to make them feel new.

Taming the weedy wildflower

Somewhere there's an unspoken scale that



ranks plants from 'weed' to 'wildflower' through to 'ornamental'. At one end sits *Fallopia japonica* and, at the other, *Rosa canina*; *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* sit in the middle feeling confused.

No one has ever published the rules of this scale and it seems to change according to who's talking. One person's weedy *Meconopsis cambrica* is another's garden ornamental; still others will swear it's a wildflower. Frankly, the *Meconopsis cambrica* is both all and none of these things at once.

It seems strange to me that *Geranium robertianum* is considered a weed, while *Myosotis sylvatica* isn't. Or that someone who loves the look of daisies should be made to feel bad about them growing in their lawn. Why do lawns always have to be green? If I can ever afford a lawn of my own, it will be the weediest, most colourful lawn ever to be walked on.

Some weeds, like *Oenothera biennis* even started life as garden plants. A plant is a plant and if you like it, you should grow it no matter what anyone else thinks or what label it's been given. Labels are annoying. They're often someone else's opinion telling us what we should think. 'Weed' being a good example - it is merely a broad and negative term associated with any plant that pops up where we weren't expecting it. The label is a lie.

What is a weed?

The standard definition of a weed is 'a plant in the wrong place', which seems to make sense on the face of it, but it doesn't get to the heart of the issue. Ask a farmer what a weed is and he or she will tell you it's a plant that ruins crops or harms livestock. Conservationists (I include myself) would say weeds are invasive plants that humans (usually) have introduced and that interfere with natural ecosystems. Gardeners on the other hand generally tell me a weed is a hair-rippingly annoying plant that simply will not go away.

In the wrong place, certainly, but each reason for being so is very different. We, as gardeners, are in charge of what does and doesn't grow in our gardens. Rightly so. Gardens are personal spaces where humanity and nature collide in a beautiful collaboration. Striking the balance between designed and natural is the challenge only humans as a species are capable of meeting.

Even if we like the look of a plant, if it persists and spreads easily to the point it's difficult to control, we probably get frustrated with it and it becomes a weed. But ultimately only you can decide if a plant is a weed in your eyes. Don't let other people define what you can or can't like - it's your garden and only you can say what should and shouldn't have a place in it.

*They're beautiful,
they're part of the
natural world,
attracting bees,
butterflies and
hoverflies, and
they're connected
to our lives*

Weeds aren't always messy

In gardens, weeds are those unplanned plants that pop up to thwart our careful, considered design efforts. They add colour we didn't want, grow where we wanted a bit of breathing space, give shape that throws off our intended balance. I could argue that it's not the weed's fault that we hatched a plan without it, but I know all too well those plants are breaking our rules, those little rebels. And while they may well be rebelling against our tyranny of the garden, perhaps we should listen to what these rebels have to say.

Sustainable and wildlife-friendly

Weeds will grow where it suits them best, you don't need to fight against the conditions

by changing the soil pH, watering regularly or adding manure or fertiliser. This can mean less work for you (an important point to remember) and it also puts less pressure on the environment.

Weeds are loved by wildlife, too - for nectar, shelter, nibbling on. Long flowering periods help. It seems a shame to prevent this because we've been told a plant is a weed. Levels of benefit for wildlife will depend on the particular species, as well as where it's growing in the world. Sometimes a weed will have more insects feeding off it in its native country than where humans have introduced it, but not always - sometimes the opposite is true; there are no general rules.

None of this needs to come before design: everyone can find a weed for their design that ticks the eco-friendly boxes without resorting to scruffy areas of unmanaged grass and bug hotels made from junk. Highly formal designs can be as wildlife-friendly as naturalistic ones, and weeds can be as tidy and formal as the most trimmed and pruned of ornamental flowers.

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THE GROWING BENEFITS OF GARDENING



Kim Stoddart shares her inspiring story about setting up gardening workshops, the positive impact this has had and how you can set up your own!

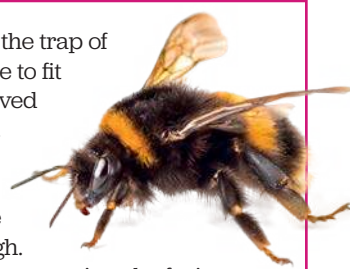
Inspired by my fantastic 10 year old autistic son, Arthur, who has benefited immensely from gardening, I set up a social enterprise, Green Rocket Futures C.I.C to make horticultural therapy available to those with disabilities. Or as I prefer to call it, differences. Through an EU funded project, Dyma Ni I work with a group of young adults every Tuesday in my training gardens in West Wales. It's definitely the most fun day of the week. The group are amazing and each week we work on a different grow your own related project or activity. From, creating artwork with materials sourced from the

veg patch to making seed bombs, to taking cuttings, to the magical process of sowing seed to picking produce to eat, every week is a pleasure and also a revelation as new skills and abilities are gradually revealed.

"As I mentioned above, my son was a big inspiration behind the project, and seeing first-hand how beneficial being on the veg patch, growing, watering and picking produce has been for him as he struggles to cope with a world full of sensory challenges. The great outdoors and the connection therein provides a natural emotional regulation, a calmness that is highly beneficial for someone struggling with the 24/7 noise of everyday living. People

with autism are over or under stimulated in a myriad of ways, be it sight, sound or smells and the garden provides a haven from this and also societal pressure to be or act in a certain way. Nature doesn't judge as it is full of colour and swirls and misshapen edges and it affords the perfect backdrop for confidence building and looking at what my group can do rather than what they can't.

"Often with differences like autism the focus is on what the person can't do rather than what they can as this is another influence for me as we are keen to show that everyone is capable of something and as I say my group amaze and inspire me every week with their abilities as their confidence builds.



you can fall into the trap of expecting people to fit into a preconceived box or activities. Let them own it and watch how their confidence shines on through.

“Take time to appreciate the fruits of your labour. To just sit and be in your garden or on the veg patch. Leave your phone inside and tune into what you have around you through your own eyes. Maybe pick some lavender or herbs, or just feel some compost between your fingers. Take time to just be away from the hectic ness of 24/7 modern living. It's not just those with differences - in our increasingly out of control world we all need time to tune in and let go of the multifaceted pressures to look, be and act in a certain way. Take time out and see how great that makes you feel.

“Our pilot project ends in 2020 so we're looking for more funding to keep this going. I'm also speaking to people about a spin off project around autism and entrepreneurialism which will use the gardens again as a backdrop. I'm keen to show what people with autism are truly capable of if we'd just stop expecting them to fit into our perceptions of normal. I will be running more gardening courses for the general public as well with profits from this being fed into the work of the social enterprise. I'm very excited about 2020 it looks to be colourful spectrum laden rainbow of a year.”

To find out more about Kim's gardening courses, visit [greenrocketcourses.com](https://www.greenrocketcourses.com)



“We offer meaningful activity where everyone has a voice and we try and tailor our activities as much as possible around personal interests. Friendships have been built, skills learnt and the feedback we've had has been great. For me personally, getting to know the individuals has been a real pleasure and has opened my eyes even further to this idea that everyone has something to offer if we'd just give them the opportunity. To be honest I no longer believe there is such a thing as normal any more. I think working with this fantastic group has in turn given me confidence to be myself more, quirks and all.

“Also, it has reinforced to me the importance of taking time to savour and appreciate the garden. I have a tendency to charge about gardening and stopping and smelling the plants and noticing the intricate details of the flowers or produce, the smells and sounds is life-affirming.

“Collaborate as much as possible with other local groups in your area. The more you can work with others the better your project will be. I personally partnered with a local charity called Ray Ceredigion to make my project come to life as it widened the reach of the work we could do. I think it's also important to give the group you are working

with their own voice as much as possible. Be prepared for them to surprise you with their excellent ideas. The more they can have ownership over what you develop the better it will be for all concerned. Otherwise





GARDEN MAKES **Potager Brick Path**

Give your plot a practical and attractive overhaul with this brilliant project

If you've been considering adding a useful and decorative potager path to your allotment or veg garden, this is the perfect choice - and it is really simple to do, with materials that are easy to get hold of. You can use this step-by-step as a basic template, but customise the path to fit the size and shape of your own space, and the way you use your plot. It doesn't need to be a hugely costly project, as you can use reclaimed bricks, but do make sure they are in good condition, as any broken or jagged parts could create an uneven surface, and you don't want to trip over while carrying your garden tools!

Adding a path like this to your plot is a great idea, as it means you don't need to trample across soil to access beds, and helps you to set out clearly defined areas, which is handy when planning your crop rotation schemes for the next few years. Consider this when planning the space out and laying your string markers. It is important to get it right at this stage, so do experiment a bit.

We'd love to see the paths you have created in your own gardens, so get in touch on our social media platforms, and you might see your plot featured on these very pages!



1 Set the width you would like your path to be by hammering in wooden pegs to mark out where you will lay your bricks. Consider the size of your plot, planting plans and how you will need access to certain beds



2 Once you have set out the width and length for your path, tie blue string around the wooden pegs to create the lines which will make up the edges of your path. This helps you see if the shape and size works visually



3 Next, you will need to loosen the soil in the areas inside the string, where the path will sit. Then rake this out nice and flat, and to collect the loose earth, which you will then need to remove, so the bricks sit flush with the edge



4 Before you add your sub base, use a spirit level to check the ground is level and your path won't be sloping off one way or the other, and that you are happy with the eventual height of the path



7 Use kiln dried sand on top of the freshly-laid bricks to finish the path off. Spread it out to fill the gaps between the bricks, and use a broom to disperse it evenly along the path, making sure nowhere is missed



YOU WILL NEED:

- Bricks
- Sand
- Spade
- Garden fork
- Rake
- Blue string
- Mallet
- Gloves
- Scissors
- Spirit level
- Wheelbarrow
- Wooden pegs



5 Add a base to the path by tipping the gravel/sand out of a wheelbarrow, and tamp this down well so it is level and solid for the bricks to be laid on. This will minimise movement once the path is in place



8 Now it is time for the finishing touches! You will need to go around the edges of the path with some more sand, and double check all gaps are filled in properly and that everything is sitting evenly and feels sturdy



6 Start laying the bricks onto the compacted base, using a spirit level to check that they are level as you move along. The pattern shown here is known as a 'brick basket weave' but you can use whichever style you like best



9 You are now ready to plant up the areas around your path! You can either plant in family groups for a rotation system, or use intercropping which can help keep on top of pests and diseases - whatever suits your garden best!



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SIMPLE STEP-BY-STEP Grow herbs for free – it's easy!

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Most garden borders, patios and windowsills will be home to long stalks of rosemary that sport stunning purple-blue petals when in flower. Long-loved for its appearance as well as its fragrance, this herb is also used to enhance the flavour in a lot of popular dishes such as soups, stews, casseroles and roast dinners. Producing new plants from the ones you've already got isn't just simple, it will also save you time and money in the long run. What makes this step-by-step even better is that most of the things you need for it you probably already own or they can be borrowed from a garden or an allotment neighbour - nifty!



1 You'll first need to take some rosemary cuttings from your mature plants. Using a sharp pair of scissors, snip off some healthy herb stems but avoid the ones that still have the delicate flowers on. Make sure to leave enough of the plant so that its vigour is not affected.



2 Once you've got all of your rosemary cuttings, carefully take away the bottom part of the stem. To do this, cut it with a sharp knife around 2cm from the base just beneath a growing point located on the stem. Repeat with all of the snippings you are propagating new plants from.



3 It's a good idea to put your selection of new cuttings into a clear plastic bag and to add a few drops of water for moisture. This will help to stop the stems from wilting before they can be dipped in a rooting hormone and planted into the module trays.



4 The end of the stem can then be dipped in a root hormone liquid which can be found in most garden centres (you can also use a rooting powder). This will make the roots develop even faster so the impatient gardener has less time to wait for growth!

7 Make sure to water the cuttings once planted, allowing the liquid to be absorbed by the soil. The trays can then be kept inside or outside in a heated cold frame or a greenhouse. The plants will suffer in a frost so make sure to keep an eye on the forecast!

Use rosemary in: Orange and Rosemary Curd

Makes 1 large jar

Ingredients

- 150ml ($\frac{2}{3}$ cup) freshly squeezed orange juice
- 3 tbsp lemon juice
- Zest from 2 oranges
- A few sprigs of rosemary, roughly chopped
- 125g ($\frac{2}{3}$ cup) caster (superfine) sugar
- 125g (4 oz) butter
- 2 eggs, plus 3 egg yolks

Step-by-step

- 1** Sterilise a large jar, by washing it in hot water and putting it in a warm oven to dry out.
- 2** Put all the ingredients in a saucepan and set over a low heat. Break up the eggs, then start stirring. The butter will melt, the sugar will dissolve, and you will end up with a smooth, runny liquid. Keep stirring over a low heat until the mixture starts thickening - it will be almost imperceptible to start with, then it will suddenly speed up. Keep stirring, making sure you scrape all over the base of the pan (you don't want any egg to scramble), until the curd has thickened enough that when you coat the back of a spoon, you can trace a line down it with your finger.
- 3** Remove from the heat and strain into a jug, then pour into the sterilised jar. Leave to cool then transfer to the fridge.

Recipe from **LEAF: Lettuce, Greens, Herbs, Weeds** by Catherine Phipps (Quadrille, £25)
Photography: Mowie Kay

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5 Prepare your module trays for planting the cuttings in. To do this, fill each one with a good quality compost and tap it three times on a hard surface so that the soil is level. If the modules have drainage holes, consider standing them in a second tray - especially if you're keeping them indoors.

8 Continue your care routine until the plants become well established. Check the underside of the tray as the plants grow to see if any roots are poking out as this is a sign that the plants are ready to be potted on. Each cutting can now be transferred to its own terracotta pot.



6 Take the compost-filled tray from step two and the rosemary cuttings. Plant the stems in the soil. As you plant, make sure that the cuttings are equally spaced apart and have enough room to grow on. Keep on doing this until you run out of rosemary stems.

9 Continue growing the plants on in their new containers, keeping an eye out for any pests such as rosemary beetles. In due course, your rosemary will need potting up or planting outside and in spring and summer will provide you with a sweet fragrant harvest.



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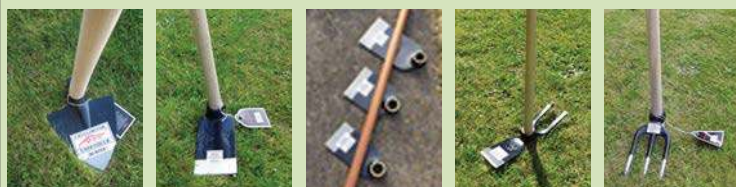
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MY TASKS THIS MONTH



Joe Harrison keeps his greenhouse productive during January and looks ahead to a busy growing season

“It’s the beginning of a new year and it’s time to burn those few extra calories we may have consumed during Christmas dinner; wrap up warm and with flask in hand, brave the cold weather and get outside.

“We may be in the middle of winter but there is actually lots to be done on the allotment.

In January I can often be found in my greenhouse with a bag of compost, eagerly raiding my seed tin in search for winter hardy varieties to sow. I hate to see our greenhouse workbenches empty so I endeavour to keep them as fully stocked as possible with lots of seed trays, pots, tubs and containers full of seedlings throughout the winter months.

“Sowing sweet peas during winter ensures you will have a beautifully scented, floral display in early spring so January is a perfect time to do this. I use tall reusable plastic pint glasses to sow ours in which gives the long tap roots plenty of unrestricted space, allowing the plants to establish a strong root system before it’s time to plant them out.

“Spinach is such a great vitamin-rich vegetable which we love growing, however, our summer sowings have a tendency to bolt each year due to the warm weather. I find sowing winter cultivars a lot easier to manage because they are less likely to go to seed due to their slow growth and the low temperatures so January sowings really are a must for us.

“Sometimes the plummeting January temperatures can actually be a good excuse to have a sit down in the greenhouse. It’s a great opportunity to take stock of what seed packets we’ve accumulated; deciding what we’ll be growing over the coming months, taking time to gaze thoughtfully out at the blank canvas before me, wondering what exciting things this new year has in store for us.”





Garden Organic masterclass: **Sustainable container growing**

Anton Rosenfeld shares his tips on getting the best from your pot-grown crops

Container gardening definitely has its place in food growing - it can be a quick way of instantly breathing life into a small space that may otherwise be devoid of anything green, and reaping the harvest. However, that doesn't necessarily mean it is the easy option. Plants living in the restricted ecosystem of the container need different treatment to those allowed the freedom of the soil, and it is important to make sure that caring for them doesn't become a drain on those non-sustainable garden resources.

This starts with the container itself. We are probably all guilty of hoarding a large collection of black plastic pots in our sheds that are difficult to recycle. So there really should be no need to buy another

plastic container. Either buy something made out of natural materials such as frost-proof terracotta, or wood, or recycle another container such as a trug, storage box or even an old wheelbarrow.

Then decide what you will fill it with. Using a peat-based compost is a definite no-no. Not only are you contributing to the degradation of a unique and dwindling habitat, but your plants won't thank you for it - a soil or loam-based compost will be easier to manage for longer term plantings and has less of a tendency to slump.

Choosing what to grow is the easy part - plenty of food plants will grow perfectly well in a container including herbs, garlic, beans, tomatoes, peppers, salad leaves, fruit bushes and even trees. Try to look

It can be a quick way of instantly breathing life into a small space that may otherwise be devoid of anything green

for early-maturing, compact varieties that don't produce large amounts of foliage before they start producing anything edible. Make sure that any plants you buy in haven't been treated with neonicotinoid insecticides that will remain toxic to bees.

One massive advantage that containers have over the soil is that they can be moved. This allows a greater flexibility with planting, so that any frost tender plants can be planted out early in the year but can still be moved inside if a late frost is forecast.

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.

GYO says

When you are making compost, remember not to add perennial weeds, as these can survive and re-grow



Step-by-step: make your own container compost

An example of an ideal container compost is three parts loam, one part nutrient-rich material and one part leaf mould.

Loam (soil) is the ideal base for container compost as it is more tolerant to fluctuations in water supply than a peat substitute such as coir or wood chip. It is a mix of clay, sand and silt particles. You could obtain it from left-over soil dug out of your garden, mole hills or piling up spare turf in a stack and letting it rot.

Nutrient-rich materials include manure, garden compost or worm compost. Green

waste compost (sometimes sold as 'soil improver') generally releases its nutrients more slowly so the compost mix may need extra liquid feed.

Leaf mould adds organic matter, improving aeration, drainage and biological life within the potting compost mix. It is easy to make, just by piling up autumn leaves and letting them rot down. But it can take one to two years before it is ready, so you will need to be patient. If it is sieved, it makes a good seed compost, but there is less need to sieve it to make a potting compost.

Organic growing

3 top tips for successful container growing



Watering is the main challenge for the container grower. From April to September, each container will need checking daily, and may even need watering twice a day in hot weather. A bark or cocoa shell mulch will help reduce evaporation from the pot, reducing the need for watering



Feeding is another challenge. Even if you have a nutrient-rich compost, during the active growth period the plant is likely to exhaust its supply within six weeks. Making your own plant-based liquid feeds is easy; with just a handful of young nettles or comfrey, chopped and soaked in a bucket of water, the mix will be ready in weeks



Although the pests that attack your plants depend on what you are growing, vine weevil is a common pest in container growing. Look out for the tell-tale 'hole-punch' sized notches in the leaves, made by the adult weevils munching at the leaves. This is a sign that their fat larval grubs are likely to be eating at your roots. Watering with a treatment of nematodes can help in the autumn



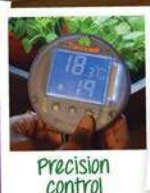
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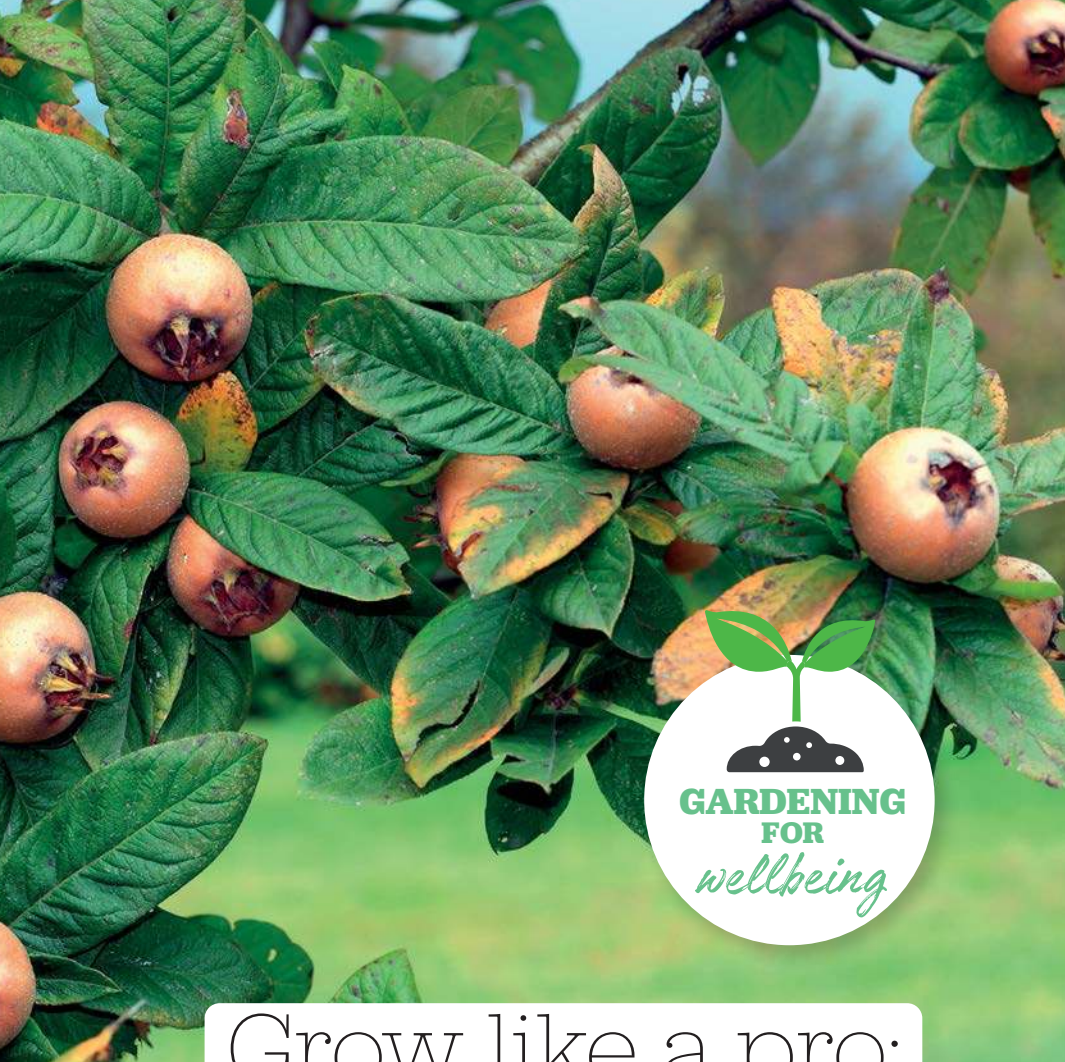
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Grow like a pro: **Medlars**

They may not be at the forefront of most fruit gardener's plans, but don't write off these handsome trees just yet

There aren't many fruits that you can tuck into in the cold months of winter, but the rich, musky flavour of medlars are a winter delight to be savoured. Something of an acquired taste, these forgotten fruits are tart when eaten raw, so it's best to use them in desserts or carry out bletting first. This is a process designed to soften the fruit to bring out the sweetness.

Unfortunately, between the slightly divisive taste and requirement for rotting a little to make them more palatable, they've (perhaps understandably) fallen out of fashion slightly. But, give the medlar a go, and you'll be treated to glossy green foliage and big white blooms that'll keep your garden looking beautiful year-round.

Best growing conditions

Where should you grow medlars? Ideally in an open and sunny site in order to get the best from them. They can tolerate some shade, but won't be quite as prolific.

Make sure to avoid frost pockets. Deep, fertile and well-drained soil is advised, but these trees will tolerate most soil types. Due to its spreading tendencies, it's better-suited to larger gardens.

Usually, medlars are grafted onto a Quince A rootstock, rather than grown on their own roots. Common varieties include 'Dutch', 'Royal' and 'Nottingham'. All are self-fertile meaning only a single tree is required.

Pruning and troubleshooting

Prune medlars in a similar way to apple trees, in winter when dormant. This will help to maintain a healthy shape and encourage good flowering and fruiting. Established trees will require little pruning.

Medlars tend to be relatively trouble-free, but can sometimes be targeted by moth caterpillars snacking on leaves. These might spoil the handsome look

Fruit masterclass



Annabelle says:

"Do you look at different varieties and think 'Ooo...I'd love to try those but I'll stay with what I know'? Every year I challenge myself to grow something new. It can be scary, like new challenges in life. But, if they grow and become a success, it's a big confidence boost. If they fail, well, sometimes that happens, it's a lesson learnt and a chance to try something else. Give a new crop a go!"

of foliage, but rarely has any long-lasting impact. Pick off as you notice any hungry visitors.

Harvest time!

Harvest in late October or early November depending on when the first frost is forecast. Once ready, they'll pull away easily from the branch, stalks attached. Rather than eating straight away, dip in a salt solution and store in sawdust in a cool and dark location for a few weeks. After they have been bletted they will taste far better, even if this process doesn't sound all that appetising.

Use in delicious jellies and jams, desserts, or turn into wine. Some people also like to spoon out the flesh and pair with sugar and cream, accompanied by port. If you grow medlars, we'd love to hear how you eat yours. Get in touch with us on social media to show off your yields of this unusual fruit!





GROWING FOR BETTER HEALTH

Kim Stoddart explains how to ditch the January blues with recommendations for natural grow-your-own vitality for the year

Of course growing any food has to be good for you. As well as the nutritional value of produce itself, the ability to pluck and carry lovingly tendered fruit and vegetables from plot to plate delivers a warm, wholesome sense of wellbeing (and taste) that is hard to beat. No wonder we love it so much. Yet, among this veritable array of home-grown goodies, there are some plants which stand head and shoulders above others in the good-for-you stakes. Some are staples, others less-commonly-grown varieties which are well worth a look. All of which deliver extra health-laden benefits which makes them an attractive prospect weaved into existing veg patch planting at each and every opportunity.

Here's my personal pick of the best ideas for making the most of what is also often readily available for the 2020 growing season ahead:

Probiotic Perfect

Healthy soil for the veg patch equals healthy plants, and healthy gut bacteria for us means an enhanced immune system, many believe. It's no wonder that there continues to be a rise of interest in probiotic and prebiotic foods. It certainly makes sense to me and the great news is that the veg patch offers much with which to work.

Get fermenting

Although white cabbage is the key ingredient for the most commonly known ferment,

Sauerkraut, you can actually work with a much wider range of produce in this way. Such as courgette, tomatoes, cucumber, green beans, beetroot, radish, cauliflower, peppers or broccoli. This method of preservation has been used throughout the ages across many different cultures and it's good bacteria-boosting food which also packs a tasty punch as a condiment to many dishes.

Just slice, dice or grate your produce of choice and add a salt brine to a sterilised jar and let the magic of fermentation commence.

Prebiotic Power

These are plants that are especially good at feeding the friendly bacteria (the good ones) in your stomach so their addition to your diet goes hand in hand with probiotic foods



as explained above. In my mind it's just an excuse to eat more delicious vegetables such as Jerusalem artichokes, garlic, leeks, onions, dandelion greens and asparagus.

Anti-inflammatories

Some people believe that inflammation is a major cause of illness in the body so the prevention (or reduction) is a boon to overall health. The good news is that many herbs, spices and foods pack a strong anti-inflammatory punch so it's easy to have lots of these at your disposal.

Rosemary

In some studies this herb has apparently been shown to have one of the best anti-inflammatory results. Once established it will keep providing readily for many years to come. As well as using it fresh or dried, it makes a nice flavour-packed addition to homemade flavoured oils and vinegars.

Ginger

This can be grown inside your home or under cover in a pot. Just work with a piece of shop bought root, choosing a roughly inch-long segment with a visible bump (or protruding eye) which can be planted under plastic cover in potting compost on a windowsill about now.

This should be in a warm spot, which will help to get it growing.

I personally couldn't be without ginger. As well as loving the flavour it also really helps me with my admittedly mild (but very present) allergy to onion meaning I can eat it in very small cooked quantities as long as I also eat ginger. I also take it on the (now rare) occasion I have a hangover and it generally seems to help, which again comes down to the anti-inflammatory properties within.

Turmeric

This vibrant root is a tad harder to grow than ginger but can be successfully nurtured into life in the UK in the same way. Its yellow pigment, curcumin, is the anti-inflammatory hero within which provides this spice with its superb medicinal potency.

Stinging nettles

This is a great excuse (if ever I heard one) to leave an area of your patch to grow wild. It's great for wildlife and the humble nettle also boasts powerful potential. Drying or cooking nettles will remove the dreaded sting and the young leaves, especially in spring, lend themselves well to all manner of soups and casseroles. Just use like spinach and tap into the amazing properties within.



GROW YOUR OWN HEALTHY TEA

Chamomile

The relaxing potency of chamomile tea is well documented but the flowers and petals of both varieties of this lovely plant (German and Roman) are also good for helping to reduce inflammation.

Peppermint

This vigorous grower will establish itself with gusto in your garden so make sure to keep it contained in a pot or bed lest it try and take over. Yet, it's great for digestion and much more besides. Try a few leaves steeped in hot water for a highly refreshing brew.





Vertical gardening

Permaculture gardener **Vera Greutink** tells us how growing upwards can maximise our outdoor space and allow us to grow more

Vegetables vary greatly in the yield they give in relationship to the space they take up in the garden. Since many gardeners nowadays have to content themselves with tiny plots, an effective use of the growing space is a priority. The easiest way to increase this area is to think in three dimensions and let your plants grow upwards! There are only two things you need for vertical growing: suitable plants and suitable supports for them. Many edibles are climbers by their very nature or require only a little nudge in the right direction. Climbing supports can be bought, made, or, in some cases - even grown.

Supports Tepees

Apart from supporting your climbers, a tepee can also be a decorative element in your garden - even before or after it's been covered in plants. I like to make tepees either from bamboo canes or from relatively straight branches of willow or hazel. Using bamboo is somewhat easier because the canes are almost perfectly straight and you can get them in approximately the same diameter and length. Using willow or hazel canes which are less uniform requires a bit more creativity but the resulting structure usually has a certain rustic appeal that the

stiff bamboo cannot emulate. To build a tepee, I first stick four canes in a square formation into the ground, approximately one meter (3ft) apart. Then I'll add four more canes to make a rough circle and bind the tops together with strong twine. If this base is made of hazel or willow branches, I will weave thinner and flexible willow whips through the upright canes to create horizontal rings at different heights. These will stabilize the whole structure as well as provide more grip for the climbers and expand the range of what I can grow. While a bamboo tepee is best suited to growing climbing beans, a rustic tepee made out of hazel or willow can also support peas and squash by giving their tendrils something to latch onto. I usually break down the bamboo tepees at the end of the season and store the canes in the shed but a well-made willow or hazel tepee will often last for two consecutive seasons.

Twine

As long as your twine is strong enough to carry the weight of your plants, this is an extremely easy and effective way to support your climbers. I use twine most often in the greenhouse where it can be fastened to the roof of the structure. The straw bales we get at the beginning of the season for mulching are tied together with a very strong twine and I like to repurpose it as plant support. I also have good experience with cords sold

for clotheslines – they are sturdy and weather resistant and last many seasons. I first tie the top of the cord to a sufficiently sturdy construction above the plant and then make a loose loop around the stem of the plant a little above the ground. As the plant grows, I gently twist the stem around the twine. When the plant reaches the top, you can use the trick professional growers use in greenhouses and lower the twine with the plant before refastening it so that an additional length of twine becomes available for the plant to wind itself around. This means that when you start, the twine or cord you use needs to be longer than the distance from top to bottom. Growing tomatoes this way can prolong their season and increase your yield. Twine and cord are best suited for supporting tomatoes, cucumbers, gherkins, beans and small-fruited melons.

Plant stems

Some plants grow so tall and their stems are so sturdy that they can act as a support for other plants. Corn and sunflowers are a good example of homegrown plant support and beans are the best vegetable to grow against them. The supporting plants need a little head start which is why I only sow the beans when the corn or sunflowers are about 20 to 30 centimetres tall. Two beans can be sown per plant and it is also a good idea to space the corn or sunflowers a little wider than you normally would so that the beans get sufficient sunlight.

Concrete remesh

Inspired by one of my favourite YouTube gardeners Patrick Dolan of 'One Yard Revolution' I have made an extremely sturdy support out of concrete remesh. The remesh is attached to an EMT conduit frame using



zip ties. To hold the panels upright, I drive one meter long pieces of rebar halfway into the ground and slide the conduits over them. Once you've made the initial investment of money to buy the materials and time to build the support, these panels will last pretty much forever. They are also easy to move and to store for winter. I made my panels two meters (6.5 ft) tall and one meter (3ft) wide. Our raised beds are 1, 2 x 3 meters (4 x 10 ft) which means a single panel can be erected on the short north side of a bed (so as not to cast shadow over the other plants) or a row of three panels can go down the middle of a bed in the north-south direction. These panels are suited to any of the vertical vegetables mentioned below.

Vertical vegetables

Climbing Beans

Beans are just about the easiest vegetable to grow vertically because they are naturally inclined to wind themselves around any available support. There are countless varieties you can grow, some better suited for fresh eating, some for drying. One type that deserves a special mention is the runner bean (*Phaseolus coccineus*) which I like for its versatility. It can be harvested at many different stages: first, we enjoy some of the flowers in salads, then we pick some green pods before the seeds start to swell and lastly, we harvest the seeds, either to eat fresh or to dry them for the winter.

Squash

Competition sized fruits of winter squash are of course too heavy for vertical growing and are better left to trail over the ground. But the smaller fruited varieties are perfect for vertical gardening. My favourites are the cute mini-pumpkins such as 'Gold Speck' and

the ivory coloured 'Baby Boo', or the slightly larger green-striped 'Sweet Dumpling' and different varieties of acorn squash. Squash plants have tendrils with which they can attach themselves to a support but it's better to guide the plants a little and tie them to the support when necessary. If you grow them against the concrete remesh panels, you can weave the stems of the plants back and forth through the openings in the remesh. This support is also sturdy enough for squash with larger fruits – last year we used it to grow 'Dishpan Cushaw' squash with some of the fruits weighing over seven kilos (15 pounds).

Cucumbers and gherkins

I like to grow both: cucumbers to enjoy fresh and gherkins for pickling. When I grow them in the greenhouse, I usually support them with twine, but when I plant them outside I prefer to grow them against the remesh panels. Just like in the case of squash, the stems can be woven back and forth through the openings.

Peas

Shelling peas, snow peas, sugar snap peas – all are good climbers but my favourite is the succulent sugar snap pea whose pods can be eaten in their entirety. I love shelling peas in theory but in practice often resent the half hour they add to dinner preparation. I like to grow sugar snap peas in a rainbow of colours: last year I had the green 'Amish Snap', the yellow 'Opal Creek' and the purple-podded 'Magnolia' side by side. Align the height of the support with the height of the variety you want to grow. Some pea varieties won't reach above your knee while others can exceed two meters (6.5 ft).

Tomatoes

Indeterminate tomatoes are usually pruned to a single stem which needs to be guided up along some kind of support. Bamboo canes, twine or metal spiral supports are all suitable. Tomato varieties with a more unruly growth habit which are harder to tame such as 'Matt's Wild Cherry' can be grown against the remesh and left to branch out a bit. Here too, I find that weaving the stems through the remesh is an easy way to fasten them to the support.



Vera's Greutink's book **Edible Paradise: How to grow herbs, flowers and veggies in any space** is available to purchase at shop.permaculture.co.uk/edible-paradise.html. Published by Permanent Publications. You can also follow Vera on Instagram @growntocook and watch her on YouTube (GrownToCook).

January's ALLOTMENT INSPIRATIONS



On the plot news and advice for the month ahead

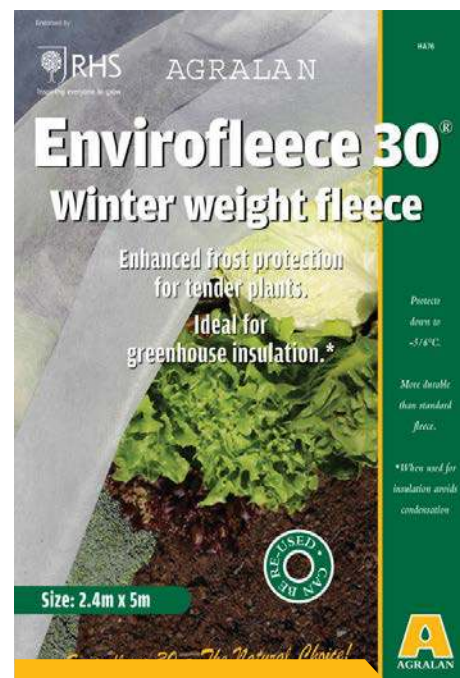


Keep busy on the plot during January

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

If seasonal cold winds and rain are preventing you from venturing out onto your plot, then now is the time to undertake some allotment maintenance jobs.

- Thoroughly clean greenhouses, polytunnels, cold frames and any other under cover structures with warm soapy water and a little disinfectant. This will help to create better light conditions for your seedlings and young plants in the coming months. It will also destroy pests, diseases and fungus lurking in the corners.
- Inspect any glazing for cracked or loose panes and if found, repair or replace them. Check that your shed roofing felt will withstand winter winds and replace it if it doesn't look like it will.
- Give your tools and equipment a look over. Cutting tools, spades, forks and hoes should be sharpened and, if appropriate, cleaned and oiled. Wooden shafts will last much longer if you clean them so give them a light sand down and oil them using linseed oil.
- Drain all of the fuel out of your power machinery and give them a full service in time for the coming season. Also don't forget to tidy your shed! You never know what you may find under the rolls of netting and cardboard waiting to go in the compost heap.
- Make a list of sundries that you need to replace. If heaters, propagators or growing pods are used, they should also be checked over and all pots and trays washed in readiness for that first exciting sprinkle of seeds.



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Q&As

This month we asked you...

Q What tasks/sowings are you most looking forward to in 2020?



JANUARY JOBS

- Whether or not you still have your Christmas tree up, or you took it down on Boxing Day, now is the time to add it your compost heap. This task is more than a one-person job so find someone to help you first. Strip off the branches, break them into smaller sections, and add everything to your bin
- You can start sowing vegetables in heated propagators this month such as broad beans, onion sets and celeriac. You can also plant soft fruit canes on the allotment but watch out for frost pockets and areas that can become waterlogged
- Start 'chitting' early seed potatoes by standing spuds 'eyes' side up in egg boxes in a light and frost-free place. Make sure to do this before the end of January since it can take up to six weeks for the shoots to grow 3cm long which is how long these need to be before planting



"I hope to grow quinoa next year. I grew it a couple of years ago and it did very well (it looks very much like fat hen). I sowed some of the last of the crop this spring but it failed to germinate so I'll have to buy some more seeds. It's a bit boring to harvest, rubbing seed heads between the palms, but it's okay listening to music."

Mark Riga, via the GYO website

"I will be trying new ways to grow old favourites: for example, carrots in tall pots instead of direct in the ground, Oca in raised beds, spring onions multi-sown in modules and planted out as clusters."

Teds Mum, via the GYO website

"I want to try and get a good crop of peppers. After growing several plants again last year, I only got a decent crop from one plant, so I must try harder! I will also try growing large pumpkins which I haven't tried growing before."

Rary, via the GYO website



Did you know?

Beetroot juice can be used to dye hair!

GROWING THE COMMUNITY



Balby Community Allotments and Gardens Group, Doncaster

Balby Community Allotments and Gardens Group is the proud winner of this year's Cosyfeet Community Project Award. The £750 award will fund the purchase of Backsaver spades and wheelbarrows to help older gardeners in the group to continue to enjoy working their gardens.

The South Yorkshire group has approximately 140 members, many of whom are tenants of the 72 allotments on the Balby site. An increasing number of members are aged over 80 and continue to grow fruit, flowers and vegetables as well as keeping chickens, ducks, geese, and pigeons. Involvement in the group is a passion, helping to keep them active and stay fit, as well as providing the opportunity to socialise with fellow gardeners.

"Winning this award means we can help many of our older members to continue doing what they love to do," says site secretary, Linda Pegler. "Having the right equipment will enable them to keep doing tasks that they're now finding more challenging, and bring the physical and mental benefits that remaining active offers people."

Cosyfeet makes extra roomy footwear for people with swollen feet and has an active policy of giving back to the communities it serves. Launched in 2014, the Cosyfeet Community Project Award offers a one-off donation of £750 to registered charities or not-for-profit organisations working on local projects that support and enrich the lives of older people.

"Supporting gardeners in continuing to be outdoors and active goes to the very heart of what the Cosyfeet Community Project Award is all about," says Cosyfeet Managing Director, Andrew Peirce. "We're delighted to fund Backsaver tools for this dynamic and well-organised group."

For more information on the Cosyfeet Community Project Award see cosyfeet.com/communityprojectaward

TRIED & TESTED:

Frost protection



Simon Akeroyd keeps his plants cosy this winter with these fantastic products



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

Fleece (Gardening Naturally) £6.99

This is a really useful fleece, as it is double the thickness of most standard types. This of course makes it much more durable and provides better insulation. In fact, it claims to protect plants down to -5 degrees, which is very cold! The sheet can be used in a variety of ways including insulating the insides of greenhouses, covering veg during frosts or wrapping around a tender shrub. It can also be used for covering hoops, transforming it into a tunnel cloche. It can be re-used several times, and be machined washed.



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

Fleece tunnel standard (Marshalls) £12.99

Perfect for keeping your rows of veg protected from the cold during spring and autumn, this fleece tunnel will help you to extend the growing season. It is very easy to erect, simply unfurl the concertinaed cloche and stick the sturdy galvanized hoops into the ground at intervals along the row. When finished with, the tunnel can be easily folded away and stored for another time. This high-grade 50gsm polypropylene fleece creates warmth and insulation while allowing moisture and sunlight to filter through, allowing crops to grow, whatever the weather.



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

Green fern fleece jacket (Haxnicks) £7.99-9.99

I must admit I've never seen a fleece jacket like this; it has an attractive green-fern pattern on it, as opposed to traditional white fleece, which makes it blend in well to any garden environment. The bag is perfect for protecting against frost, general cold weather and of course pests such as birds. There is a handy draw string on the bottom of it, so it can be tighten near the base of the plant, preventing it from blowing off. The fleece also allows sunlight, air and moisture to filter through it, meaning it can still grow while being protected from the cold.

WHERE TO BUY

Gardening Naturally, gardening-naturally.com

Haxnicks, haxnicks.co.uk

Greenhouse Sensation, greenhousesensation.co.uk

Marshalls, marshalls-seeds.co.uk

Two Wests & Elliott, twowests.co.uk

Gardman, gardman.co.uk

Agriframes, agriframes.co.uk



Easy fleece tunnel 3m (Agriframes) £19.99

Agriframes offers this easy-to-use tunnel fleece, which is ideal for protecting crops from frost in either spring or summer. It can also be used to keep pests such as pigeons and blackbirds off your tasty crops. The beauty of this tunnel is how easy it is to erect. You simply unfurl it and push the extra long-lasting galvanized hoops into the ground along your rows of vegetables. The extra thick fleece is UV stabilized, as is the UV resistant stitching. This tunnel provides an ideal stable and healthy growing environment for your crops.



Gardeners' cloche (Two Wests & Elliott) £39.99

This lovely-looking cloche is constructed using a lightweight aluminium frame and 4mm thick polycarbonate twin walls which provides ample protection from frosts. It is light to lift and move around the garden and the two handles on top, make it easy to relocate. It comes with pegs to secure it firmly to the ground preventing it from blowing away. It was very easy to build, taking just a few minutes. One clever feature is the unique self watering rainwater collection channel along the top ridge, ensuring that your crops don't dry out.



Pot protection jacket (Greenhouse Sensation) £20

This high quality, super-thick, thermo pot jacket provides a perfect solution to protect terracotta pots from cracking by protecting both the container and the root ball. It is easy to use with a wide opening, enabling even the heaviest of containers to be placed inside with minimal effort, with velcro fastenings and drawstring closure. Inside the brown outer layer is a thick layer of bubblewrap. A polystyrene base at the bottom provides additional insulation and prevents the base from getting cold from sitting on the ground.



Protective jacket (Gardman) £7.99

This protective jacket provides a perfect solution for protecting tender shrubs and small trees from the frost and is simple to place onto the plant. It also helps to protect plants from the wind and from pests. The green colour helps it to blend into the garden and the useful drawstring closure at the bottom of the jacket makes it easy to secure it in place. The spun-bonded fleece fabric is breathable which ensures the air can continue to circulate around the canopy of the plant, avoiding fungal problems. The jackets are available in both medium and large sizes.



Getting outside and giving a hand to the creatures in your garden doesn't only benefit them and your veg plot – you will feel great, too!

Even if you live in a town or city, there are still projects going on up and down the country – from guerrilla gardening and wilding grey areas, to group walks and open gardens to inspire everyone.

It is becoming more and more evident that time spent outside with nature has huge positive impacts on both physical and mental wellbeing. As well as this, offering a helping hand to the wildlife near your garden or allotment helps to support a sustainable community – as well as those wild helpers on the plot, munching on slugs and aphids! However, connecting with wildlife doesn't need to just take place in your own garden – there are plenty of reasons to get out and about, and into nature in a broader sense.

Many wildlife organisations and charities have open days, so like-minded people can explore the greenspace together, and connect with others. This helps to beat the isolation which can be so prevalent in today's society for some. Having these green spaces accessible within the community also helps create a sustainable infrastructure – a way of regenerating a community that makes people feel safer in the future, and gives young people the chance to gain an understanding of the natural world, and what they can do to help it thrive.

It also gives people a place to escape the stresses and strains of daily life, and allows us to connect with a natural rhythm, rather than getting swept up in the fast pace of daily environments.



For more information, take a look at some of these great organisations flying the flag for nature

- The Wildlife Trusts, wildlifetrusts.org
- Woodland Trust, woodlandtrust.org.uk
- RSPB, rspb.org.uk
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, wwt.org.uk
- Bumblebee Conservation Trust, bumblebeeconservation.org

4 WAYS TO GET CLOSE TO NATURE

- Visit a local wildlife organisation. Get chatting to other people, and find out how you can get involved with open days, volunteering sessions, etc.
- Make a bug hotel for your garden – this can be something as simple as some bamboo canes piled up, or you can get a little more creative and build one with different sections, such as bricks, twigs and pine cones
- Put out food and water for birds, especially over the winter months. Different birds like to eat different things, and in different ways – so take note of the species that frequent your area, and read up on what they like
- Plant bee- and butterfly-friendly blooms. As well as adding beauty, fragrance (and in some cases, companion planting credentials) to your plot, planting extra flowers can really give a helping hand to pollinators. Flowers with open centres are best, as the pollen is more easily accessible



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to restore and maintain
gut vitality



verm-x.com

KEEPING HENS AND MENTAL HEALTH

We speak to **Rachel Bull** (aka @thegoodlifeainteasy) and experts from the **British Hen Welfare Trust** about why keeping hens is good for our mental health



Sarah Walker from Truro



There's something special about keeping hens. For a long time, only those who kept a group of girls in their back garden knew how great it made them feel. But now the word is spreading that hens are brilliant for our mental health. The routine of getting up to feed them, checking for illnesses and collecting fresh eggs can help hen keepers to re-connect with the outside world and can also give people a sense of purpose that might be missing from their day-to-day lives. Learning about their little personalities, earning their trust, and just having some animals to spend time with has also been proven to combat feelings of loneliness, isolation and lifts our spirits, especially in the elderly.

We chatted to social media star Rachel Bull from @thegoodlifeainteasy about her group of girls, why she thinks more people should keep hens, and advice for beginners: "I've wanted hens for as long as I can remember. When I was 10, our school took us on a trip to a farm and I saw battery hens. I don't think I was meant to, but that image stayed with me and I always wanted to rescue some birds if I could.

Chicken keeping



day at work, as Sarah Walker from Truro can attest to. "I work as a reception teacher at a primary school and when I have had a stressful day I sit in the garden with a cup of tea and watch the hens enjoying life. They are entertaining to watch and are quite vocal if you chat to them! Watching them calmly exploring the garden helps me to slow down and appreciate the little things."

Liz Graves has battled depression for some 20 years and says her ex-bats help her on a very physical level when she finds social interaction difficult. "What I find so endearing is they are so vulnerable" said Liz. "You do get that sense of connection when depression severs connections with other people and the world around you. I don't know if I would feel the same if I adopted other hens [rather than ex-bats] because

"I currently have five girls: three 'posh' hens and two ex-commercial ladies who have come for a happy retirement. Our top chicken, Willow, is a black Sussex and takes people by surprise with how friendly and inquisitive she is. I don't think people realise how chickens can be quite similar to cats and dogs in nature. She comes when called and will even fly up to your lap for a cuddle. Then we have Matilda and Miss Honey, and Saffron and Cinnamon our ex-caged hens. Cinnamon is curious and mischievous, while Saffron is my gentle garden shadow. The best thing about keeping chickens is getting to know their little individual personalities. We've had 12 girls in total and they've all been so different. From the lap chickens, to those determined to sneak into the house or trash the garden in under 30 seconds, they make me smile every day with their little ways. Fresh eggs are a wonderful bonus, but they're exactly that - a bonus."

"I always used to joke that keeping chickens is much cheaper than a therapist. After all, they force you outside whatever the weather. Now, my morning routine is to make a coffee and sit outside with the hens even just for five minutes. This time forces you to slow down and just reconnect with the outside world. I've always been a worrier, but 10 minutes watching my little time thieves always helps to calm me down and get my thoughts in order. It's therefore no surprise that keeping hens has been proven to help those living with mental or physical health issues - rescuing a shy tatty chicken and nurturing her to grow in confidence is such a rewarding experience."

"The birth of my son was traumatic and I was in hospital for a while. Every morning, before coming in to see me, my husband would send me photos of the chickens out in the garden. It really made me smile and I couldn't wait to get back and just sit with them and a cup of tea - a little slice of simple normality that I could focus on while I recovered."

"I think making a safe area for your hens is the best bit of advice I can give beginner chicken keepers. We've now built the hens a large secure run for when we're not around which is meshed all the way underneath for peace of mind. If you're worried about opening/shutting hens in around work there are automatic door openers you can get for chicken coops. I'd also advise getting a good chicken vet before you need one. This goes for all animals, but chickens are no different - join a forum and find your nearest avian vet. While some of them will continue laying for a while and never have any issues, some will be sadly worn out and face health problems. You probably need to be prepared for that, as I naively don't think I was, and it broke my heart when they started to have problems. Backyard chicken keepers are so important in keeping a demand for various heritage breeds going, but make sure you know the basic laws of chicken maths - however many chickens you plan to have, the number will always be more!"

The British Hen Welfare Trust (BHWT)

The British Hen Welfare Trust (BHWT) rehomes over 60,000 hens every year, collecting them from commercial laying farms when they are considered no longer commercially viable and finding new homes for them. Volunteers across the country work hard to rehome these little animals. As keeping pet hens becomes increasingly common in the UK, the charity is hearing more and more examples of how pet hens are helping their owners through difficult times. From living with depression, easing symptoms of anxiety, and even helping them deal with grief after losing a friend or family member, chickens are becoming more widely recognised for their positive effect on people's mental and physical health.

Just having a few feathered friends pottering around the back garden can help people unwind and de-stress after a long



you get to watch them growing their feathers back which is so joyful."

Andy Norton, who lives with his sister in Shropshire, has also experienced important benefits from keeping hens as pets. Andy lives with significant learning disabilities. He rehomed hens from BHWT in 2016, and his sister, Liz Woodall, says they have given him a huge confidence boost. Liz confirmed that through looking after the hens his self-esteem has improved enormously and he always has a topic of conversation. In addition, thanks to his abundance of freshly laid eggs, he has started to earn his own money by selling eggs to friends, neighbours and fellow church goers. This is the first time in his life that he's ever had his own money, and his sister says it makes him feel like he belongs in society, rather than someone who has been pushed to the margins. She said: "You cannot believe what an enormous difference these lovely hens have made to Andy's life."

To find out more about rehoming ex-bats, call Hen Central on 01884 860 084 or visit the website bhwt.org.uk

PLOT TO PLATE



Winter warmers

Fend off the January blues with a pleasing bowl of pasta, a moreish minestrone and a tasty tagine from **Five Ingredient Vegan**

TENDERSTEM BROCCOLI AT A GLANCE

Use Tenderstem Broccoli in: Roasted Broccoli Rigatoni

Sow: Apr-Jul
Plant out: May-Aug
Harvest: Jul-Apr

Roasting broccoli takes the humble vegetable to new flavour levels. I love Tenderstem broccoli as it is easy to use, with minimal preparation – it also cooks in no time! Combine with a hint of chilli, garlic and lemon for a satisfying bowl of pasta. I love the way the olive oil, chilli and lemon catches inside the rigatoni tubes, but any egg-free pasta you like will be just as delicious. Most dried pasta found in the supermarkets is simply made from semolina flour, but always check the label before you buy.

Serves 2

Ingredients

- 200g (7oz) Tenderstem broccoli, any

very tough stem ends discarded

- 1 tbsp good-quality olive oil, plus extra to finish
- 1/2 tsp dried chilli flakes
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 150g (5oz) dried rigatoni (ensure egg free)
- Zest and juice of 1 unwaxed lemon, plus some lemon slice to serve
- Generous pinch of sea salt and black pepper

Step-by-step

- 1** Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6.
- 2** Arrange the broccoli evenly on a baking tray, then drizzle over the olive oil. Scatter over the chilli flakes and garlic slices, then

roast in the oven for 10 minutes until the broccoli appears golden at the edges and slightly crisp.

- 3** In the meantime, bring a pan of water to the boil and cook the pasta for 8-10 minutes until al dente. Remove from the heat and drain thoroughly.

- 4** Carefully spoon the roasted broccoli, chilli flakes and garlic slices over the pasta, along with any hot oil from the tray. Drizzle with a little extra olive oil, sprinkle with the lemon zest and squeeze over the lemon juice. Stir through.

- 5** Season generously with sea salt and black pepper and serve with a few lemon slices for squeezing over.

Use leeks in: Pantry Minestrone

Who would have thought that comforting minestrone could be made with just five ingredients? I love simmering this soup at that point in the week when I'm running out of fresh supplies, or at the end of the month when the bank balance is running low! If you don't have any homemade tomato sauce available, add a crushed garlic clove along with the leek, then 1 teaspoon of dried basil or oregano and 400g (14oz) canned chopped tomatoes.

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 leek, very thinly sliced
- 2 carrots, peeled and halved lengthways, then chopped
- 300ml (10fl oz) versatile tomato sauce; store-bought is also fine
- 4 tbsp dried margherita soup pasta, or any other small pasta (ensure egg free)
- Small handful of frozen or fresh peas
- Generous pinch of sea salt and black pepper

Step-by-step

- 1** Heat the oil in a large pan, add the leek and carrots and cook over a medium heat for at least 5 minutes until the carrots begin to soften.
- 2** Pour in the tomato sauce and 1 litre (13/4 pints) just-boiled water, then simmer for 10 minutes.
- 3** Add the pasta and cook for a further 10 minutes.
- 4** Stir through the peas and cook for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and season generously to taste with sea salt and black pepper.



LEEKS AT A GLANCE

Sow: Feb-Apr
Plant out: May-Jul
Harvest: Aug-Feb

Use parsnips in: Parsnip and Chickpea Tagine

I have always loved the combination of tarragon and garlic, and I have come to believe that tarragon with wild garlic is even better. It is one of the best butters you can make every spring and the combination also works well in this soup. It is a challenge to get the flavour of wild garlic into a soup like this as the flavour does disappear with heat – the solution is to stir in this pesto just before serving. The wild garlic pesto can be used in myriad ways, just like a regular pesto, but I would avoid using it in anything that involves much cooking – the flavour is much better fresh and raw, or just warmed through.

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp sunflower oil
- 2 red onions, roughly chopped
- 4 parsnips, peeled and quartered lengthways
- 1 tsp ras el hanout
- 400g (14oz) canned chickpeas (garbanzo beans), drained and rinsed
- 400g (14oz) canned chopped tomatoes
- generous pinch of sea salt and black pepper

Step-by-step

- 1** Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4.
- 2** Heat the oil in an ovenproof casserole dish, add the onions and parsnips and cook over a medium-high heat for 4–5 minutes, stirring frequently. Sprinkle over the ras el hanout and cook for a further minute.
- 3** Remove from the heat and pour in the chickpeas and chopped tomatoes, along with 200ml (7fl oz) cold water. Stir to coat the vegetables, then cover the casserole with a lid and cook in the oven for 30 minutes until the parsnips have softened.
- 4** Carefully remove from the oven. Season with sea salt and black pepper to taste.

PARSNIPS AT A GLANCE

Sow: Mar-May
Harvest: Sep-Feb

Recipes from
*Five Ingredient
Vegan* by
Katy Beskow
(Quadrille £20)
Photography
©Luke Albert



COMING NEXT Month

February issue on sale
24th December

Sow your free seeds

Enjoy a seasonal selection of tomato, oregano, celeriac and more!



Sumptuous strawberries

Find out how to grow strawberries in time for summer harvests



Glossy aubergines

Get to grips with growing this mouth-watering Mediterranean vegetable



Tasty tomatoes

We take a look at five of the top toms to add to your space this season

PLUS

- **Fruit garden** The RHS reveal how to grow long cane raspberries
- **DIY** Impress guests with a wooden cold frame you built yourself
- **Soil set** Find out how to monitor the condition of your soil

January's Giveaways

Get your hands on some great garden goodies this month

WIN GARDEN GOODY BAGS WORTH OVER £500

Get your 2020 garden off to a flying start with a fantastic selection of gloves, seeds, books and tools. Whether you are growing on a balcony, an allotment plot or anything between, we've got you covered, with key crops, handy hints and useful growing kit to help you get the best from your space.

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! A super set of products from Bio Green!

Get your garden into gear this/next year with this Super Set of products from Bio Green worth over £500! The star of the show is a stainless-steel Phoenix electric greenhouse fan heater worth £299.99 alone. It's specially developed for plant cultivation. It runs quietly but powerfully, distributing the heat evenly around your greenhouse. Staying in the greenhouse, you can also heat it with their energy-saving tube, which also ensures that heat is distributed

optimally and evenly, ideal for chilly days. The polytunnel "Super Dome" will protect delicate young seedlings from frost and extreme heat, which in turn ensures a safer and more productive cultivation. With their propagator XXL "Jumbo", even discerning gardeners get their money's worth: the ample size of 60 cm x 130 cm (approx. 2 x 4 ft) offers plenty of space for a large selection of seeds and cuttings. And finally, going away for a few days? You no longer need to worry about your plants when you've gone. With the "Hydro Wine" watering system, your potted plants will benefit from a constant trickle of moisture when porous clay stakes - fitted with a standard wine bottle filled with water - are inserted into the soil.

WIN! A classic Gardening Naturally seed tin

These beautiful seed storage boxes from Gardening Naturally come in three delightful colours, complete with hinged lids, metal handles and secure closures. It's slightly larger than others on the market so if you collect large numbers of seeds this is the tin for you. The internal compartments and depth allow you to organise your seeds, labels and mini potting tools all in one place. A beautiful and practical gift for any gardener. Made from steel then powder-coated to ensure it is rust resistant. Available in French Grey, Vintage Cream or Midnight Black. *Grow Your Own* readers have the chance of winning one of 15 seed tins!



Prize worth
£299.85

WIN! A fire bowl package from the Indian Fire Bowl Company

Grow Your Own readers have the chance to win a fire bowl package worth over £300! This prize package includes an 80cm fire bowl with a low and a high stand, a log bundle to ensure you have everything you need to light your first fire and a handy tote bag. The fire bowls are hand-crafted in India and start life as oil drums which are carefully shaped and riveted into traditional fire bowls.

Indian fire bowls can be used all year round as they function as both a fire pit to gather around in winter and in summer they are a BBQ with a difference. For more information on these fire bowls, and to see a wide range of hand-crafted Indian furniture and accessories, please visit indianfirebowlcompany.co.uk

Prize worth
£318



WIN! 'The Good Life' boardgame for all the family to enjoy

Ever wanted to go self-sufficient? Here's your chance to give it a try! Fun, easy to play, award-winning family board game. Use your wheelbarrow to move around the board to collect fruit, vegetables, pigs and chickens. The winner is the first to fill their garden and allotment. Seems simple. It is. But the 'Green Fingers' cards turn up unexpected twists and turns. So you'll have to protect your chickens from foxes, sell your crops and livestock at the village fair and avoid drought, bird flu, and your animals escaping. Five *Grow Your Own* readers have a chance to win a 'The Good Life' board game.



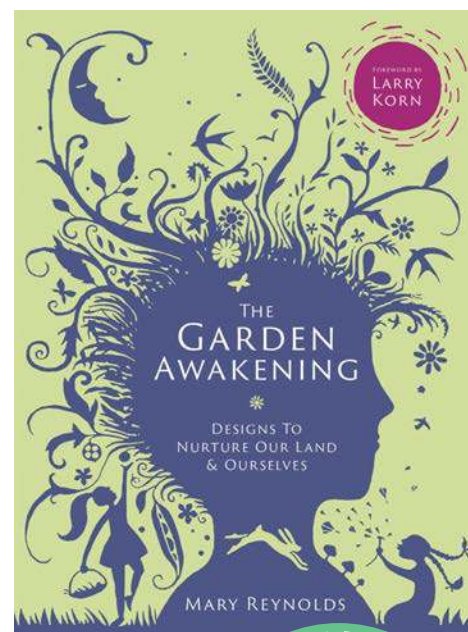
Prize worth
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WIN! A copy of the best-selling 'The Garden Awakening' book

The Garden Awakening is a garden design book with a difference.

Mary re-imagines the garden for the times we live in, looking at land the way a parent looks at a child - as a gift and a responsibility. Learn how to design and nurture a beautiful, vibrant and magical space. Bring the energy and atmosphere

of wild places into your garden while incorporating sustainable living, especially growing your own food, all in harmony with nature's own intentions. You will never look at your garden in the same way again. Get your hands on a copy of this best-selling book, as we have a whopping 10 copies to giveaway to GYO readers. Find more releases from Green Books at greenbooks.co.uk



Prize worth
£199

JANUARY Discounts

Save money and make use of these exclusive offers for *GYO* readers



Save
10%

PERFECT PLANTS

Don't let the short days and long nights stop you gardening! Plants are good for you, especially indoors where they clean the air and look amazing. There are hundreds of beautiful varieties of house plants that will keep you smiling all through the winter. It's also a perfect time for planting shrubs and even perennials, provided the soil isn't frozen. They might look a bit sparse and spindly now but just wait until the spring! To celebrate the season, **perfectplants.co.uk** is delighted to offer 10 per cent off all plants (except trees). Use the voucher code **WINTER** at the checkout. Code is valid from November 28 to January 31, 2020.



Save
10%

NATIONAL TRUST TOOLS

Invest in the new National Trust tools to help with garden chores. Manufactured by Burgon and Ball Ltd, these tools have antique bronze heads with dark wood handles giving them a traditional look and feel. 10-year guarantee, too! Quote **NT1020** for a 10 per cent discount on the range at **gardendivas.co.uk**.

Valid from November 28 to January 31 2020.

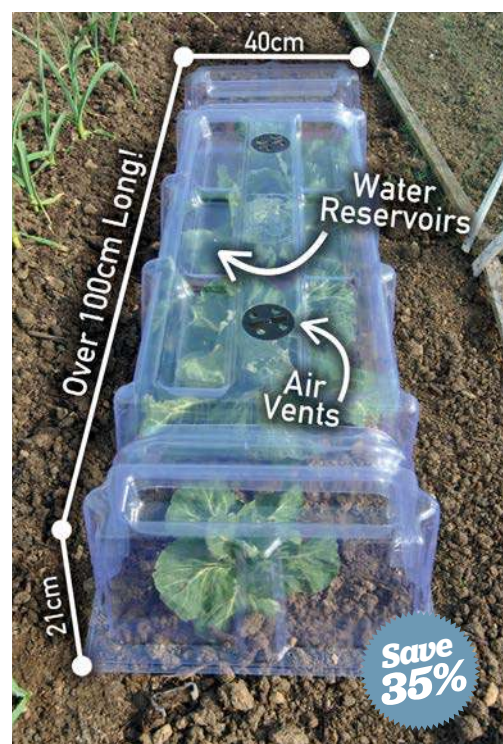
NATURAL COIR DOOR MAT

Natural coir material doormat with a rubber backing. Ideal for wiping wet and muddy winter boots. Use at your front or kitchen door, or in the greenhouse or shed. Choose from a cat or dog printed design. To order visit the 'Home and Gifts' section of **gardenis.co.uk** and enter the code **GYODOORMAT** at checkout for a 10 per cent discount off, until the 31st January, 2020. £25. GB and Isle of Wight delivery included.



MINI GREENHOUSE CLOCHE

Easy to set up, these strong, clear plastic cloches not only give plants protection from the elements, they also keep unwanted garden pests away, too! Safe under the protection of the cloche, cats, birds and flying insects will not be able to get to your young plants while they are growing. The cloches can be left in place to protect lettuces, strawberries and many other crops during the rest of the year too and with the ends attached nothing will be able to get in. Get 35 per cent off at **thompsonmorgan.com/TM_GY15** using the code **TM_GY15**. 1 Mini Greenhouse Cloche Kit - £12.99! P&P of £4.95 is applicable to all orders. The offer is valid from November 28 to January 28, 2020.



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Behind
the
scenes



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LAIDBACK PERMACULTURE ON THE ROOF

Alex Mitchell explores the growing antics of a sky-high vegetable garden in central London

High on a roof above a busy street in central London, in the shadow of the iconic BT Tower, something special is going on. A greenhouse glints in the sun, filled with tomatoes and climbing cornichons. A grapevine scrambles over a pale blue wooden pergola and Japanese wineberries clothe the walls. This space among the chimney pots is no more than 5 x 7m yet somehow it manages to provide room for a tiny shed complete with writing desk and comfortable chair, a bench strewn with cushions, raised beds full of herbs and salad and pots galore.

You wouldn't think busy Oxford Street was a mere minutes' stroll away. This is an edible roof garden, but there are no rows of cabbages or potatoes. Owner Wendy Shillam, an architect turned nutritionist, instead chooses crops for 'piquancy' - those that make a big impact when you eat them, but are only a small effort to grow. She divides these into three groups: fast-growing crops that look beautiful on the plate and are full of flavour, such as red basil or pea shoots; 'watery' crops such as cucumber or tomatoes that taste best picked really fresh; and those full of protein, such as the beans she lets dry on the plant and stores for winter.

Most of the plants grow in only 15cm of compost in shallow raised beds. Others, such as the grapevine, are in larger pots. All are irrigated by an automatic watering system that

comes on twice a day. This keeps the weight down to a minimum. This approach rules out root crops like beetroots, turnips and carrots - apart from stubby Chantenays, but most other plants are happy. "It's volume of soil not depth of soil that's important," Wendy explains, "roots can spread outwards."

The more she gardens on this rooftop, the more Wendy leans towards perennial edibles, giving less space to annuals or letting these self-seed around where they are happy. "I'm a very lazy gardener, and a very soft one," she says. "If it seeds, it stays - that way you get pleasant surprises." She points to the wild celery, parsley and French beans that have self-seeded in the shallow wooden-edged beds. Elephant garlic was planted once many years ago and has been a feature ever since.

Wendy is an expert at making the best of these precious ingredients. She uses her Par-Cel (*Apium graveolens*), or cutting celery, to make celery salt, crushing the seeds and adding them to regular sea salt for a herby kick and scattering the fresh leaves through salads and soups. The lavender is infused to make lavender sugar and the seeds collected in the autumn to add to muesli. Nasturtium seedpods are pickled like capers, others are left on the plant to set seed for next year.

"Work with nature, don't try to control nature," is Wendy's mantra. True to her word,

she uses no pesticides or chemical feeds - apart from organic liquid seaweed. Any slugs that somehow made it up to the roof are countered with liberal applications of coffee grounds and sections of chicken wire laid onto the compost that they don't like to crawl over.

"I don't go to the garden centre, I don't buy compost," says Wendy. Instead, to keep the raised beds and pots fertile, she makes her own compost in an old wooden chest insulated with sheets of polystyrene, with layers of twiggy sticks first, then prunings, banana skins, coffee grounds and other kitchen scraps laid on top. She mentally divides the box into three sections, rotating them so she knows which area is ready to use first. Sometimes she composts on the go, adding raw kitchen waste to the shallow raised beds, crumbling over eggshells, and burying veg peelings just under the surface to rot down before planting straight into it.

What's the secret of gardening in this exposed rooftop? "Create shade, protect from the wind, plant like it's the Mediterranean," she says. A bushy elderflower shields one corner from the wind, its berries making their way into homemade gin and the flowers into syrup. A low hyssop hedge forms an evergreen windbreak. Globe artichokes are a spiky and impressive screen at one end. The grapevine certainly looks happy and provides shade, too, on the pergola before turning stunning colours in the autumn. Additional sun protection is given by a cotton throw strung above her garden bench. So much greenery, so many pickings, but this roof terrace fits easily around a busy Londoner's life. People say this garden must take an awful lot of time and I'm embarrassed to admit that I barely spend any time gardening,' says Wendy, 'though I do spend many hours up here reading books.'

Extract taken from:
Crops in Tight Places by
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