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Huw Richards
*My simple ways
to beat slugs,
organically*

Ellen Mary
*Why you should
add magnolias to
your plot*

Nick Bailey
*Grow your own
bamboo plant
supports*

Want healthy spuds, naturally? Garden Organic tell us how! Turn to pg.85

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WELCOME

... to the April issue of *Grow Your Own*! As the sowing season cranks up a gear there is plenty to be excited about in the garden. If you are getting started with carrots this month, Anne Swithinbank is on hand with everything you need to know to get the best from your crops (pg.32). RHS experts are sharing insight into growing beans (pg.22), spinach (pg.18), okra (pg.21) and 60-day strawberries (pg.24), so there is something for everyone. Kim Stoddart is helping you plan out the design of your new garden (pg.66), and we have a simple step-by-step to help you upcycle some common household items into a brilliant, decorative planter (pg.81) so there is plenty to keep you busy!

As well as this, our growing campaign, #growwithgyo is moving its focus to caring for seedlings - so turn to page 30 to find out how to claim a fantastic 15-20% discount on cloches, fleece and wildlife products from the RHS shop. Keep an eye out for our sowing updates on our website, and make sure you share yours, too!

We'd love to see your plots and what you've been sowing so far, so get in touch on the social media handles below.

Happy growing!

Laura

Editor Laura Hillier



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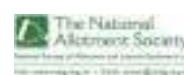


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GYO is proud to support the organisations shown below. Their members write regularly for this magazine, ensuring that you receive the very latest top-notch advice from industry experts - it's crucial to us that everything you read on these pages can 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



Don't destroy dandelions to save bees

Gardeners should not pull up or mow over the dandelions in their garden in order to help our struggling bee population, says Professor Jane Memmott, the new president of the British Ecological Society. A third of our wild bees have disappeared over the last decade so ecologists are desperate to stop this decline. Dandelions are each made up of 100 florets packed with pollen and nectar and are therefore a great source of food for solitary bees, honey bees, hoverflies and other pollinators. We can maximise this food source by allowing our lawns to grow three-four inches high, so that native dandelions, daisies and clover can flower, and this also creates calming places for people to sit back, relax and watch the natural world.

● The RHS has announced that RHS garden Bridgewater is set to open to the public on July 30, 2020. The 154-acre site, located on the former grounds of Worsley New Hall, had been left to nature for decades, but a hard-working team and hundreds of volunteers helped to transform it into the RHS's fifth garden and, at the time, the biggest garden project in Europe.

WE LOVE

The Florence Nightingale Garden: A Celebration of Modern-Day Nursing, which is to be featured at RHS Chelsea Flower Show next month, will include plants from Florence's personal pressed flower collection. Many of these plants have strong medicinal properties that might have been used by the famous nurse to treat injured troops in the Crimean War. The garden, designed by Robert Myers, will take the form of an imagined courtyard for a new hospital, and has the theme of 'nurture through nature', inspired by the idea that the shortest road to recovery is through a garden.



● One of the trees that was grown from pips from Sir Isaac Newton's apple tree is to be planted at the Eden Project. The pips were blasted into space alongside the British ESA astronaut Tim Peake as part of the Pips In Space project and spent six months above earth before returning in 2016. The pips were then taken to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, where they were warmed to 15°C to break dormancy.

Our April highlights...



ROSE

"Find out what I've been loving and recommending this month in my top 5 garden picks. Flick to page 71 now"



BLAKE

"Head to page 89 to hear from the woman on a mission to get city kids growing their own food after school"



LAURA

"If you love strawberries and want to be tucking into them in just 60 days, turn to page 24 for brilliant RHS tips"

TOP EVENT THIS MONTH

On April 26, the grounds of Arundel Castle, West Sussex, will be home to over 20 specialist nurseries exhibiting and selling a range of locally grown, good quality and unusual plants, bulbs and shrubs - perfect for the spring garden! To find out more and to purchase tickets visit arundelcastle.co.uk

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Therapeutic gardening

"Many years ago I had an allotment but have not grown anything since. Unfortunately, I was diagnosed with non-curable cancer last year so don't know how long I have left. I found myself dwelling on this and not doing anything. With the help of my grandsons we have made some raised beds, all ready for planting. I have started potting in the greenhouse, since starting this I've found my mental wellness has improved greatly as I can focus on what to grow, it is really therapeutic."

David Woodland



Strawberries in pipes

"Last year was the first season with my newly erected tunnel. I have a background in engineering and product development. The clean start allowed me to indulge in novel methods in growing strawberries, for instance."

"Spending as little as possible I purchased the soil pipe from eBay, it had been used for surface drainage on a construction site. The fabricated

supports were made from plywood reclaimed from a skip. I wanted to maximise the utilisation of the floor space and this was my solution. I shall attempt to do salads on shelves this season and I am now experimenting with different layouts. Looking forward to this coming year with outdoor versions too."

Andy Reeves

*Thanks for sharing your story Andy.
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OVER to YOU

We asked our followers how they get kids and grandkids eating more fruit and veg. Here's what they said:

"Anything grandad grows seems to be good, especially if they've 'helped' plant, grow or pick it!"

Phil Pryce

"I had a job to stop mine pinching all the veg and eating it raw!"

Rosie Lindy Robertson

"I always got my son cooking and choosing his veg and fruit as snacks but we love growing our own fruit and veg too every year, so seeing it grow fascinates him a lot."

Clare Davey

"I run a school allotment, and since starting it the kids are eating more veg because it's what they have grown from seed themselves. Last year was that good that we have more than doubled the size of the beds to grow more."

Peter Webber

Show us your growing pics!



"As you can see, my 7-year-old son Ben absolutely adores kiwi. Have any GYO readers had any success growing these exotic and very healthy fruits?"

Lucy Travell



"I remove tops and cut the bottoms off plastic bottles to place over small flower pots of cuttings to keep humid. Much easier than polybags and reusable."

Jen Ackroyd



"I got these 'Costuloto Fiorentino' tomatoes at a seed swap and was advised to grow inside; grew them outside and they were prolific. Great all rounder."

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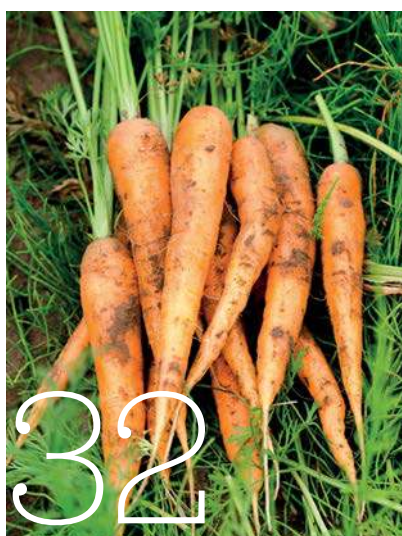
April's **BEST CROPS!**

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



Bountiful bamboo

Stuck with the bad reputation as being too invasive for the garden, Nick Bailey shares the 'safe' species to grow



Plot staple

Crunchy and colourful, we find out how to produce carrots on the plot with advice from Anne Swithinbank



Fruiting favourites

David Domoney tells us how to swap out ornamentals in order to fill our gardens with productive shrubs



Health-check tubers

Garden Organic shows us how to spot, and solve, pesky problems plaguing our spuds on the plot



Aromatic elderflower

Simon Akeroyd continues to create his drinking garden in Devon with the introduction of elderflower

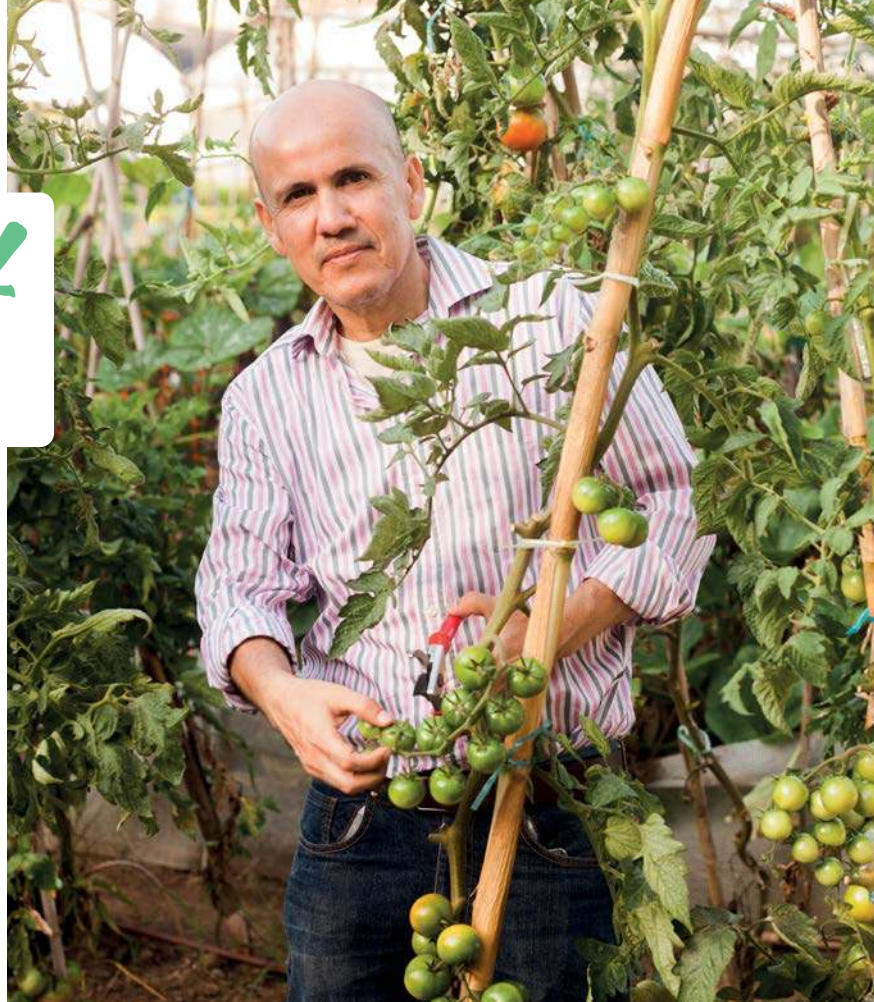


Magnificent magnolia

Ellen Mary reveals the magic, and benefits, of growing majestic magnolias in the garden

Jobs on the *Plot*

Things are finally beginning to take shape on the plot this month, after a long wait over winter. You'll be able to enjoy harvesting some of your spring crops, and take things up a notch in terms of sowing and transplanting your summer veg. So grab your tools and get to work because in April there's no time to waste.



The Herb Garden

Divide and replant chives, mint and lovage. Thyme can also be propagated by pegging stems into pots until they develop their own roots. Trim back last year's perennial herbs before their new growth pushes through and makes the task impossible. Prick out basil seedlings from propagators and transplant into pots that are filled with a gritty compost mixture.

Container growing

- Prevent tomato crops from becoming pot bound by keeping an eye on their growth, and moving them to larger containers once they look to be outgrowing the space you've given them.
- Similarly, for any container-grown fruit trees, watch for roots spiralling around the base of the pot and transfer to something bigger once they need it.
- Start to feed fruit trees in containers with a balanced liquid feed once a fortnight to encourage healthy foliage.
- Watering potted crops is an art form - you have to establish that tricky balance of 'not too dry' yet 'not too wet'. Hot weather and vigorous growth demands an increase in irrigation needs.
- If you're limited on outdoor space, sow short-rooted varieties of carrot (like 'Parmex') and dwarf peas like 'Douce Provence' in tubs this month.



Seasonal tasks

The vegetable patch

- Plant your second early potatoes at the start of the month, depending on which part of the country you're in. These can be followed by maincrop types for a continued supply to the kitchen.
- April is a great time to start sowing your brassica bed. You'll ensure you have plenty of transplants, for final bed positions in a couple of months' time.
- Plant your onion, garlic and shallot sets in a well-drained, sunny spot. Gently push them into the soil and firm them in, just leaving the tips showing.
- Outdoor sowings may still benefit from cloche or fleece protection. Be prepared for a cold snap by having these to hand to help avoid losses.
- Keep an eye on weeds across your plot and remove any uninvited guests as soon as you spot them.
- Feed spring cabbage plants with a high-nitrogen fertiliser this month to encourage the development of luscious, leafy growth during the harvesting period.
- Apply a light support to your emerging pea crops such as twiggy sticks to keep those pods above the ground and away from hungry birds.
- Carrots can be sown outside this month in free-draining, fertile soil. Be careful when thinning out, not to crush foliage (thin by hand) as you want to avoid attracting the pest carrot fly to your produce.



PROBLEM OF THE MONTH:

Hungry caterpillars

Just as the tender spring growth of last year's autumn sowings come into their own, these wriggly pests will be looking to enjoy your hard-earned harvests as much as you plan to. If you see any crawling over your edibles, pick them off immediately as the damage they cause can be fairly instant (so it's worth inspecting plants regularly). Caterpillars make a welcomed snack for hungry birds if left in a container, or try moving them a good distance away from your plot to avoid returning offenders.



Under cover

- Keep an eye open for pests such as greenfly and squash any you find. Ensure pots have been given a clean before sowing to avoid disease spread.
- Replace torn covers on polytunnels if splits have appeared during gusty spells we experienced earlier in the year. If you're hoping to invest in a polytunnel this year, turn to page 77 to find out more.
- Start sowing crops such as courgettes, cucumbers and squashes under cover. And prick out and pot on emerging seedlings when necessary.
- Make sure that under cover plants are kept moist but not overwatered, this can be a fine balancing act at this time of the year, as weather warms and plants become thirstier.



Fruits of your labour

- One of the most anticipated events in the grower's calendar - April is likely to bring your first harvest of sweet forced strawberries. Get to grips with growing cold-stored strawberries with the RHS advice on page 24.
- Continue harvesting any remaining forced rhubarb stems and your unforced rhubarb, too. To pick, gently twist and pull the stems from the base.
- Be aware of any cold frosts that are forecast in your region and protect any trees or bushes that are covered in flowers with horticultural fleece.
- Think about sowing tender crops such as cape gooseberry under cover now. Thinly scatter seeds in a pot of compost and transplant to individual pots when large enough to handle. Harden off and move to their final growing position in late May or June.

Focus on this:

Sowing outdoors

Increase your chances of success outside, by warming

the soil prior to reaching for your seeds, as often in April the ground can still be a bit chilly. This can be done simply by covering the earth with cloches, plastic sheeting or fleece until you are ready to sow. Within a matter of weeks a flush of weed seedlings will appear under the covers; hoe these off. Move the hoe shallowly so that more weed seeds aren't brought up to the surface. Then you'll be ready to make drills for your veg crops, safe in the knowledge they won't be swamped.





GYO
says

If you grow bamboo on your plot we'd love to see how you use it – send your pics to us on our social platforms!



Useful Plants: **Bamboo**

Bamboozled by this cane producing plant?

Nick Bailey reveals its multitude of uses
and the 'safe' species to grow

Eats, Shoots and Leaves' is the iconic book on grammar by Lynne Truss, or if you look at it in another way, it's a deliberate and much bandied about double entendre. The phrase, of course, refers to the diet of the Giant Panda, a huge creature, close to extinction arguably because of its low nutrient diet of bamboo shoots and leaves. However, the fact that bamboo is low in nutrition and I suspect tastes of very little belies the fact that this plant is extraordinarily useful. It's in the *Poaceae* or grass family of plants and is a species that has evolved to thrive in various climates across the globe. We may think of it as an Asian plant, but wild species can be found in Africa, South America,

North America and Australia, too. Unlike branched woody plants, bamboo has a very different structure to its stems, which gives it its great strength and flexibility. Essentially, bamboos have a series of vascular bundles which are placed randomly through their stems. This arrangement contrasts with woody plants who have their vascular bundles in a ring under the bark.

Across the planet bamboo is employed in numerous ways from constructing scaffolding and bicycles to being eaten or turned into fabric. While most uses of bamboo are utterly sustainable, given how fast the plant grows, fabric is a different story. In order to produce a viable fibre from bamboo it has to go through

some pretty radical chemical processes. So, despite bamboo socks being very comfortable and apparently 'eco-friendly', hemp or other fibre plants are much more sustainable. That said, bamboo's versatility is undeniable. Grown in the garden or on the veg plot it provides a superb windbreak that prevents turbulence in the garden and creates a soothing sound to boot. Once established, a hedge or single specimen of a clumping bamboo such as many of the *phyllostachys* species are a great source of canes for the garden. Left in their branched state the tops of the stems serve well as pea sticks while the body of the stem makes for perfect staking canes and sturdy climber wigwams. The cut stems are also perfect as row markers on the plot, storage for string and numerous temporary structures such as frames wrapped in enviromesh for growing brassicas and other vulnerable crops. Also, thanks to the sub-terranean rhizomes of bamboo, it makes an ideal plant for stabilising land. Some of the short species such as *Pleioblastus 'Variegatus'* are ideal here. In terms of choosing the most useful bamboo to grow opt for robust but non-invasive forms of *phyllostachys*. They tend to have relatively thick (1-3cm) stems and average around 4-5m in UK gardens. Some are spreaders while others

are clumps so be sure to check before you commit. *P. nigra* for example is fairly clumping while *P. aureosulcata* is a rampant spreader. Shorter, clumping species such as the various forms of *fargesia* are useful for stabilising banks and creating windbreaks in small areas but their stems tend to be too thin to make viable stakes and the like. But if you really want to go for it, and have lots of space, consider growing *Phyllostachys edulis* 'Bicolor'. Grown in relatively protected garden, this 'Daddy' of a bamboo can reach 10m, producing construction-worth 8cm thick canes in the process.

What's in a name?

The truth may be lost in the mists of time but one theory as to the origin of the name bamboo goes as follows: it is thought that the name derives from the Malaysian word mambu. Okay folks, it's that moment to suspend disbelief, but other sources suggest bamboo was referred to as 'bambu' - a reference to the explosive ba-boom noise it makes when burned on a fire!



TAMING THE DRAGON

Bamboo has a fearsome reputation as a rampant beast that'll take over you and your neighbours gardens, but not all bamboo are made the same. Species such as *Phyllostachys nigra* and *fargesia* tend to stay in a relatively tight clump, in other words they don't send out long rhizomes in attempted land-grabs but rather remain as described - a clump. Other species can be more aggressive but are easily managed by either sinking a 1m rhizome barrier (available from junglegiants.co.uk) or simply chopping around the base of the plant 1-2 times a year to sever wayward rhizomes eager on escape.



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Your RHS professionals



Richard Eborn



Lenka Cooke



Trish George



Guy Barter

HOW TO: Sow spinach, grow okra, plug the fruiting gap with '60 day' strawberries and get the answers to pressing plot problems

18 Beginner's guide

Spinach Richard Eborn shares his expertise on sowing, growing and harvesting heaps of succulent spinach leaves this year

21 Edible exotics

Okra Also known as bhindi or ladies' fingers, RHS horticulturalist advisor Trish George tells us how to grow these great green pods

22 Growing guide

Runner beans Find out how to get bumper crops from this real plot staple with expert plot-to-plate advice

24 RHS technique

'60 days' strawberries Delve into the delights of swapping regular strawberries for their cold-stored relatives

26 Your questions answered

RHS expert Guy Barter answers a whole host of plot problems, including how to grow saffron, and beating red spider mites

28 Dates for your diary

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



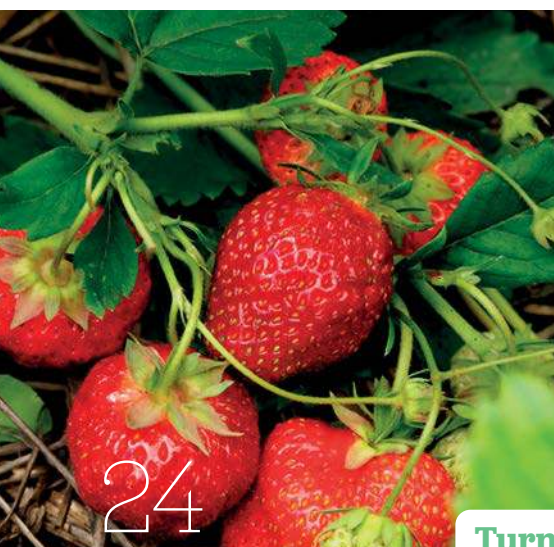
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Turn the page for RHS advice on April jobs

SPINACH



Bursting with vitamins – this versatile leafy green can be grown all year round, says **Richard Eborn**, RHS Garden Wisley horticulturist



Preparation

To ensure good growth incorporate well-rotted organic matter such as garden compost a week prior to sowing and rake in 150g per metre squared of general fertiliser (or blood, fish and bone). Plentiful organic matter should ensure the leaves do not taste bitter. Prepare the soil by digging it to 30cm (1ft) as spinach has deep roots. Create a fine tilth for easy sowing.

Sowing

Spinach does not transplant well so direct sow in the ground outside rather than indoors. Sow the seeds thinly, about 2cm between seeds, and 2.5cm (1in) deep in rows 30cm (12in) apart. At Wisley, we sow the seeds of summer cultivars (such as *Spinacia oleracea* 'Red Kitten') from early to mid-March outdoors beneath fleece.

You can sow the mildew resistant cultivar 'Amazon' AGM in spring or autumn. Sow the winter cultivars (such as 'Giant Winter' or 'Hector' AGM) in August and again in September.

Renowned from the children's cartoon character Popeye, spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) is one of the best sources of vitamins A, B, and C and has a higher amount of iron and calcium than most cultivated greens.

It was introduced into Europe around 1000 CE from Iran (and is thought to be of Persian origin). However, it was not until the 18th century that it began to be cultivated in England.

Spinach thrives in cool weather and short days so is best to sow in the spring and autumn. At Wisley, we have found that spring sowing is more successful. It is one of the few crops to prefer neutral to alkaline soils (others include beetroot and chard). It is important to get the crops off to a good start so plant the right varieties in a rich, organic soil supplying lots of moisture. The correct sowing time is essential for growing spinach successfully as the seed is more sensitive to ground temperatures than other vegetables.



The optimum soil temperature is 15°C (60°F). For the best germination rate, the soil should not be cooler than 10°C (50°F) or warmer than 21°C (70°F). At lower temperatures, they may take longer to germinate and at higher temperatures they may fail. Spinach needs six weeks of cool weather from seeding to harvest.





The fresher your seeds the better the germination success so buy new each year.

Growing

Spinach has similar requirements to lettuce. Keep the seedlings moist but not soggy. Water deeply and regularly especially during dry spells. Once the seedlings are large enough to handle, thin them to 7.5cm (3in) apart. A few weeks later, you can harvest alternate plants. If you have heavy clay soil consider raised beds (6-8 inches) above the existing soil. Foliar applications of fertiliser (nitrogen) will help the growth - a vigorous spinach is a tasty spinach!

From October, winter cultivars will appreciate protection. At Wisley, we cover crops with cloches, but alternatively you can cover with fleece.

Harvest time

Pick summer crops from late May until October and the autumn sown spinach between October and April. It takes about six weeks to harvest time from sowing. Harvest the leaves continually as they reach a usable size.

Possible problems to avoid

● To prevent bolting (premature flowering) sow at the correct time, at the right spacing choosing bolt-resistant varieties. Also, ensure the soil, or compost, is moist.

● Spinach downy mildew may affect the crop, especially in mild, humid weather. To prevent this ensure there is plenty of space around the plants to improve air circulation. When watering, direct water at the base of the plants avoiding the leaves. Also, choose mildew resistant varieties.

● Exclude birds, especially pigeons, with netting or fleece.

● Aphids may affect the plants but natural enemies generally keep them in check. Spray weekly with SB Plant Invigorator, and insecticide that works by physical action, for bad infestations.

● Caterpillars can hole leaves. Pick them off when spotted on the plants and dispose of.

● Slugs and snails relish the leaves so keep a vigilant look out and pick off the culprits regularly or put out slug traps.

● You may spot leaf miners on spring-sown crops. The maggots of the flies tunnel inside the leaves creating large irregular blotch-shaped mines. Pick off affected leaves. Always buy plants that are certified as virus-free and destroy plants as soon as yields start to fall and you suspect them having succumbed to viruses. Typically, canes should be replaced every seven-12 years, ideally in another location to minimise risk.

Which spinach varieties do you love to grow? Let us know by tagging us @growyourownmag on Instagram

RHS TOP SPINACH VARIETIES

● **'Savoy' Spinach** (e.g. *Spinacia oleracea* 'Regiment') is very productive and handles the cold better than most types of spinach. It has deeply crinkled leaves and a low growth habit that makes cleaning a pain.

● **Semi-Savoy Spinach varieties** (such as *S. oleracea* 'Banjo' or 'Tyee') are more upright which makes mud splash less likely, and the leaves are not so crinkly, so they are easier to wash. They have better disease and bolt-resistance and are a good type to grow at home.

● **Smooth-Leaved Spinach** (for example *S. oleracea* 'Space' AGM or 'Trombone') has smooth, flat leaves that are easier to clean, which makes it the primary choice for processed spinach.

● **Baby Leaf Spinach** (small-leafed spinach) has gained in popularity recently, which are varieties that simply do not get large and are tender and sweet if picked in the early stages of growth. Try *S. oleracea* 'Lazio' AGM or 'Matador' AGM

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Okra is very sensitive to cold and usually stops growing in September

Edible exotics: Okra



RHS horticultural advisor **Trish George** shines a light on this less-common crop that is a staple ingredient in many world cuisines

Okra thrives in humid, warm conditions - the hotter the better - cropping well in hot summers. You need a greenhouse, or at least a cold frame or cloche, to grow this tropical perennial successfully in our temperate climate.

Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) is related to cotton and hibiscus, with attractive pale yellow flowers with a purple centre and heart shaped leaves. The immature green pods have a unique texture and sweet flavour and are used in African, Caribbean and Indian cuisine. The origins of Okra are unknown but it is thought to have originated in Africa and the Egyptians were growing it 2,000 years ago. Okra was probably taken by slaves from West Africa to the Caribbean and America and then onto Western Europe. It is now widely grown in tropical regions across the world and the fruits are eaten raw or used in curries, stir fries, stews, or used to thicken dishes including gumbo.

Sowing, growing and harvesting

Sow okra seed in March-April using a propagator above 16°C (60°F) and cover the seed with vermiculite or sieved seed compost. Germination may take 10-21 days but soaking the hard seeds in warm water for two hours before sowing, helps to improve germination.

When the seedlings are big enough to handle, prick them out into trays 5 cm/2ins apart or into individual pots and grow on at 20-30°C (68-86°F), pinching out the growing point to encourage a bushy plant. When they are 8-10 cm (3-4") tall, plant into growbags or large pots, if growing indoors and provide a stake as they can grow to 1.2 m (4ft) tall. A second layer of plastic or fleece, placed around the plant and supported by canes, will help to raise the humidity around the plant. Okra is very sensitive to cold and usually stops growing in September.

If planting outdoors choose a sheltered, sunny position with fertile, well-drained

soil and use black mulch to warm the soil. Keep plants moist at all times and feed with a balanced liquid feed especially, if plants are pale or the lower leaves are yellow.

You can expect to harvest okra after 8-11 weeks and the pods are best picked young (3-5 days after pollination), when they are about 8cm (3") long. Pick regularly as they quickly become tough and stringy, so you may need several plants for continuous cropping.

Things to watch out for

Okra is prone to attack by aphids, red spider mite and white fly so use biologicals to control these pests if you are growing them in a conservatory or greenhouse. Botrytis or grey mould may also be a problem in damp, cool conditions so remove spent flowers and mouldy leaves as soon as possible.

Best types to grow

'Clemson Spineless' is an old favourite but there are F1 hybrids like 'Pure Luck' and 'Cajun Delight' or the red podded 'French Quarter' (which turns green on cooking). Young Okra leaves can be cooked like beet greens, an edible oil can be extracted from the seed and the seeds were roasted and used as a coffee substitute in the American Civil War.



Runner beans



Enjoy bumper crops of delicious beans with advice from RHS horticultural advisor, **Anne Adam**

To many people they are a symbol of summer, and runner beans (*Phaseolus coccineus*) are highly productive and one of the easiest vegetables to grow. The flavour of freshly picked beans from the garden far surpasses the taste of shop-bought alternatives. Well-tended plants can produce tender crops from mid-July through to September.

Runner beans originate from South America and were first brought to Europe following Columbus's voyage to the new world in 1493. Initially, they were grown in Europe as an ornamental plant but time and selection have led to the highly productive beans of today. They are a perennial vegetable which is usually grown as an annual - in mild areas the roots can be left in the ground and may re-shoot again the following year.

Older cultivars have strings on either side of the pod which need to be removed before eating. To avoid this, grow 'stringless' cultivars such as 'Polestar'. Recent introductions such as 'Moonlight' are self-pollinating which helps fruit set in hot, dry conditions. Dwarf cultivars like 'Hestia' grow to about 45cm high and are ideal for container cultivation.

Runner beans are vigorous climbing plants and will need supports at least 1.8-2.4m high. Many gardeners use a double row of bamboo canes or hazel poles spaced 30cm apart with 30-38cm between the rows. Alternatively, make a wigwam of six to eight bamboo canes or use a combination of canes and string or mesh. The weight of the foliage of the beans can become quite heavy, so ensure your supports are sturdy and make sure you leave room to walk around the plants to pick the crop. The flowers are attractive so wigwams of beans can look good in flower beds.

Prep the plot

Choose a site with rich, well-drained but moisture-retentive soil, ideally in full sun, although the plants will tolerate light shade. A sheltered site is best as it encourages



pollinating insects which can help fruit set. To provide suitable soil for runner beans, many growers prepare a trench filled with organic matter such as garden compost. This can be particularly useful if your soil is poor, but is not essential as traditional digging and mulching is also successful. You may need to experiment to see which method works best on your plot. Work in some granular fertiliser before planting, apply a second dressing mid-way through the season and if the weather is dry don't forget to water this in. If growth is poor, you can give the plants a high nitrogen liquid feed during the growing season.

Ready, set, sow!

You can sow your runner beans indoors in individual pots or modules, ideally in a greenhouse, or alternatively, in another warm, bright place. Fill your containers with good quality seed compost and sow two seeds 5cm deep in each container. After



pickles and chutneys. You can dry seeds for winter use, however they need a long cooking and soaking time and are mostly not as good as other dry beans. An exception is the white seeded 'Czar' which can be used like butter beans.

Problem? Solved!

Poor fruit set can be an issue - this may be due to very hot weather especially at night, poor growing conditions and especially lack of water. Too few insects or the presence



germination, remove the weaker seedling and grow on in good light. Acclimatise the plants to outdoor conditions by hardening off and plant them out once the danger of frost has passed.

Early plantings can be more vulnerable to slug damage and the lack of warmth may lead to weak plants with yellow leaves. Once the soil is warm and the risk of frost has passed, runner beans can be sown directly in the ground where they will crop. Sow three seeds 5cm deep, at the base of each cane or support. When the seeds have germinated, which will take around two weeks, remove all but the strongest plant to each cane.

If you just need a few plants or aren't able to raise your own, you can buy them in garden centres and by mail order. It is worth sowing a second batch of beans in early July to provide harvests from when the early sowing runs out of steam until the first frosts.

Growing on

Initially you will need to twist or tie in the young growth but plants will soon start to support themselves. Once growth reaches the top of the canes pinch out the growing points to encourage the production of new side-shoots. Mulch the rows during the growing season to aid water retention. Watering is vital in dry weather to promote good cropping, apply around five to nine litres of water per square metre every three to four days making sure the soil is moist to a depth of 20cm.

Harvest time

Beans are ready to harvest once they are 15-20cm long, snap easily and the seeds are still small and pale in colour. Pick every two or three days to encourage further pod production. Remove all mature pod because if they are left on the plant it will stop producing new flowers and beans. An excess beans are easily frozen or made into

of more attractive flowers nearby can also lead to poor fruit set. Birds may peck at the flowers making pollination more difficult. The traditional remedy of spraying flowers with water is no longer thought to help. Consistent watering and companion planting can help with some of these issues. Beans are usually relatively pest and disease free, but occasionally runner beans are affected by diseases such as bean rust and halo blight. Insect pests include black bean aphid, southern green shield bug and red spider mite, which can be treated with biological controls.





RHS TECHNIQUE: HOW TO GROW '60 DAY' strawberries



Lenka Cooke, RHS Horticultural Advisor, investigates the benefits of growing cold-stored strawberry plants

However carefully you select strawberry cultivars for continuous picking of fresh fruit throughout the summer, there is always a gap between the summer-fruiting strawberries and the perpetual (everbearing) strawberries that crop from late summer. Thankfully, planting so called '60 day' strawberries will bridge the gap.

Specialist suppliers usually have the best choice. Catalogues variously offer new plants as; 'Misted tips' or young strawberry runners rooted into individual 4cm modules under mist propagation in late summer, bare-root 'runners' available from autumn to spring and so called '60 day' strawberries offered from late spring until early summer.

What are '60 day' strawberries?

These are cold-stored top-quality runners of summer fruiting cultivars. Like bare-root strawberries, these rooted runners are lifted in late autumn-winter and graded. Usually only top grade runners are selected for '60 day' plants. After trimming and bundling they are stored at -1.8°C in an industrial refrigerated store. This keeps runners dormant for distribution and planting in late spring to early summer, instead of sprouting naturally in spring.

As the name suggests they will crop approximately 60 days after planting, fruiting considerably later than they would normally do. This technique was originally developed for growers to bridge the mid-summer gap in commercial strawberry production between summer varieties and the everbearers. Gardeners can now also take advantage of this practice. The disadvantage is that only a limited number of cultivars are offered as cold stored runners for the '60 day' cropping and they are only available from specialist suppliers.

Bear in mind that in the following year the '60 day' strawberries will go back to their normal cropping period for that particular summer fruiting cultivar.

You may be a bit worried once you open the parcel by the appearance of the cold-stored runners. They often appear lifeless with very few small leaves. Once planted, they will surprise you with rapid growth. It is very important to plant them out as soon as possible and to give them good aftercare.

Choose a sunny spot with well-drained soil. Strawberries are prone to diseases that may remain in the soil from the previous strawberry plantings. If possible, it's best to plant on a new site or where strawberries have not been growing for

at least five years. Alternatively, plant in growbags or containers filled with peat-free multipurpose compost.

Prepare the bed in advance, so it is ready for immediate planting. Dig in bulky organic matter, such as garden compost or a manure-based soil conditioner, to improve drainage as well as soil improve moisture retention.

When planting, the crowns (the tops of individual dormant plants where the leaves grow from) should be at soil level. Plant 30-38cm (12-15in) apart in the row, allowing 45cm between rows.

Consider planting through biodegradable mulch films or plastic sheeting stretched over the beds to control weeds and stop soil splashing on the fruit. Keep the plants well-watered and feed with a high-potassium liquid fertiliser, such as tomato feed or Phostrogen, fortnightly, once the fruit has set.

Tickle your taste buds and learn how to turn your strawberries and other home-grown fruit into delicious smoothies, cordials and gin on a half-day workshop at RHS Garden Rosemoor, Devon, on 8 May. Find out more at: rhs.org.uk/courses

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Elegance

Cupid

Strawberry plants are easy to grow and all they require is a sunny, sheltered spot. Plants can be spaced 30cm (12in) apart in the open ground. Alternatively they can be grown in growbags (10 plants per bag) or containers.

Our hand graded 'frozen' (cold-stored) strawberry plants are raised under the PHPS scheme and are guaranteed to be free from pests and diseases. The advantage of 'frozen' plants is that they produce fruit the first summer followed by bumper crops for the next 2-3 years. Provided they are planted outside by the end of July, they will crop just 60-90 days after planting. **Delivery is from late March/April. Offer closes 30th April 2020.**

VIBRANT (early) - A fantastic new variety to start the season! Produces medium to large bright red berries that are sweet and flavoursome. Heavy cropping and resistant to mildew. *Usually £16.50*

STR026 12 plants - NOW ONLY £14.85 inc. p&p

KORONA (early) - This early strawberry is an excellent garden variety as it combines superb flavour with high levels of disease resistance. It produces heavy yields of large, attractive, bright red fruits that are highly rated for their excellent flavour and aroma. *Usually £15.50*

STR005 12 plants - NOW ONLY £13.95 inc. p&p

ELEGANCE (mid) - Produces very heavy crops of large, glossy fruits with a wonderful sweet strawberry taste and a juicy texture. In trials it proved to be the heaviest cropping variety. *Usually £16.50*

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CUPID (late) - An outstanding new variety producing heavy crops of large berries with a lovely sweet, aromatic flavour. Very disease resistant. Does well on a wide range of soils. *Usually £16.50*

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MALLING ALLURE (late) - This fabulous new variety was bred specifically for flavour. The orange-red fruits are very juicy and sweet. Heavy cropping with good resistance to mildew. *Usually £16.50*

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JUST ADD CREAM (perpetual) - This very special pink flowering perpetual variety combines the sweetness of home-grown strawberries with the delicious aromatic flavour of the wild woodland or alpine strawberry. The plants are compact producing masses of pretty pink flowers and look very decorative planted in patio pots, hanging baskets and borders. Ripens Aug-Oct. *Usually £16.50*

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GIJNLIM - This male dominant F1 hybrid produces heavy crops of succulent green spears just one year after planting. It can also be grown as white asparagus if the plants are covered with a mound of sandy soil and harvested before they push through the ground. Crops early to mid season. RHS Award of Garden Merit. **ASP004 12 crowns - ONLY £18.95 inc. p&p**

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Your questions **ANSWERED!**



Guy Barter shares his knowledge to solve your gardening problems

Scrubbing the worst affected trees with a stiff brush and soapy water from spring until early summer can give useful control



Simple guide

Growing saffron

Q Last year I bought and planted 25 saffron crocus corms in a trough. They grew and flowered well and produced a good crop of saffron. I let them grow on and when the leaves died down I moved them to a shady spot until the late summer. I fed them and added more soil and when they began to grow again moved them to the sunny decking where they had originally grown. This year they produced leaves but no flowers. Can you tell me where I went wrong? Margaret Leggett, via email

Guy says: "The corms have probably split into more small corms, too small to produce a flower. Flowering should re-commence once corms have grown larger. Dividing and replanting after they become dormant may speed up their growth rate returning them to flower more quickly by giving them more space to grow. If the corms have not divided it is likely that there was insufficient warmth and light for them to grow well enough to form a flower bud. Improving growing conditions should help them return to flower. With luck at least some will reach flowering size for 2021 and more by 2022."



Asparagus advice

Q This should be the first year I get harvests from my asparagus crop, after a lengthy wait, I want to make sure I do everything properly, so do you have any tips for harvesting them - and is there anything I should be doing to encourage good harvests? Do I need to harvest in a certain way to ensure I don't do any damage for future years? Erin Cooper, via email

Guy says: "Start cutting when spears emerge in April. Finish in the third week of June. If covered with cloches or fleece for an early crop: end cutting earlier. Using a long serrated knife cut as long a spear as possible, avoiding damaging spears yet to emerge. Avoid allowing spears to become long - this will curtail the crop. For white asparagus, cover the bed with woven black plastic mulch to prevent greening. Feeding is highly advantageous; apply 100g per square metre of growmore or other high nitrogen general fertiliser before harvest, and 90g common salt after harvest."

Red spider mites

Q The last couple of years I've ended up with an infestation of red spider mites over my greenhouse plants, I really don't want to have to turn to chemical remedies, so wondered if you have any organic ways to help me fend them off this summer? Pete Bridges, via Twitter

Guy says: "*Amblyseius californicus* a predatory mite introduced in spring, devours a wide range of insects, surviving on these, killing sporadic red spider mite infestations as they arise from overwintered eggs. With luck these nip infestations in the bud. Later in summer, if the red spider mite multiplies, introduce *Phytoseiulus persimilis*, another predatory mite, before the red spider mites get too numerous. If the mites multiply too much a preliminary spray of an insecticide that works by physical contact, fatty acids, soaps and oils for example, can reduce numbers to a level that *Phytoseiulus* can tackle, while leaving no harmful residues on crops."



Woolly aphids

Q I have three different varieties of espaliered apple trees which I planted (partly trained) three or four years ago. Two of them, 'Katy' and 'Golden Delicious', have become badly infected with woolly aphids. I have tried to grow them organically, and have sprayed with liquid soap (not detergent) and with a hose pipe. The infestation is now so bad that there are numerous swellings both on small shoots and on the main branches, most of the swellings being of greater diameter than the branch itself. Could you advise on what I should do? Frances Stearman, via email

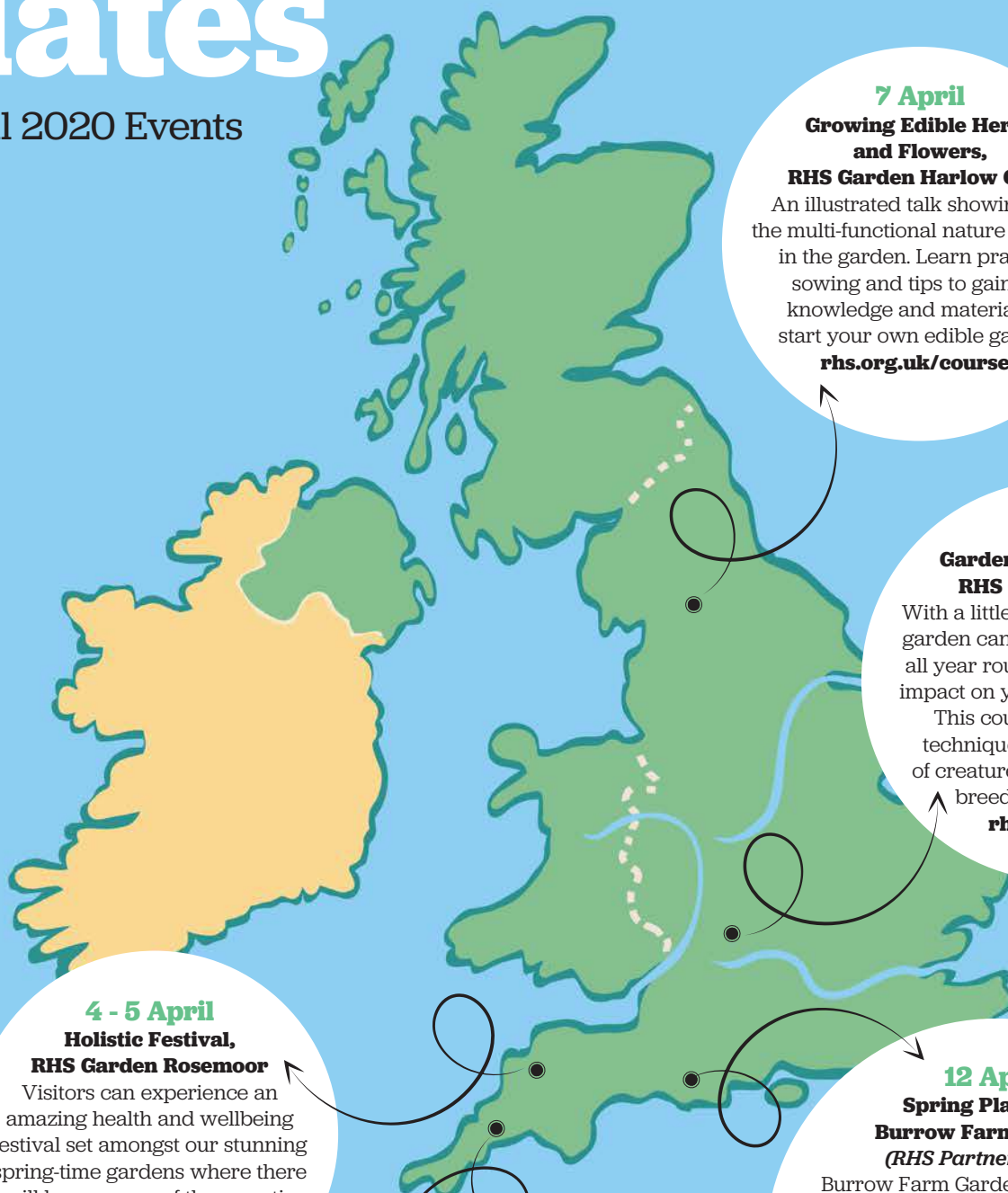
Frances Stearman, via email

Guy says: "Pruning is unlikely to prevent future infestations and will reduce yields of apples. Scrubbing the worst affected trees with a stiff brush and soapy water from spring until early summer can give useful control. In summer, applying sprays of organic insecticides based on oils, soaps or fatty acids will limit woolly aphids and leave no residues that might inhibit the moderately effective natural enemies of these woolly aphids. With luck, combined spraying and natural controls will keep infestations to bearable levels. It is unclear why your trees are more affected than usual, but most trees are only lightly infested."



Diary dates

April 2020 Events



4 - 5 April

**Holistic Festival,
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rhs.uk/rosemoor

21 April

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hotelendsleigh.com

7 April

**Growing Edible Herbs
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rhs.org.uk/courses

17 April

**Gardening for Wildlife,
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This course offers tips and techniques to attract a range of creatures to forage, nest and breed in your garden.

rhs.uk/wisley

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Get involved with the new nationwide
grow-along that you need to be a part of!

This month, our attention turns to preparing our outdoor spaces for the next couple of busy months on the plot. It is important to look at tasks like warming the soil for those early plantings, and how to welcome wildlife to the plot - from beneficial pollinators, to slug-guzzling hedgehogs, caterpillar munching birds and everything between. Seeds will be germinating in propagators, and we are all itching to get underway with our plans, so don't forget to share

your progress on the **#growwithgyo** thread on the *Grow Your Own* forum.

We will be showcasing our progress over on our social media channels, as well as on 'The Grapevine' which can be found at growfruitandveg.co.uk/grapevine. Make sure to follow along and you will be in with the chance of winning some fantastic prizes from the RHS later in the season!



This month's top tips

- In warmer areas you can start your outdoor sowings of some crops this month. It can be a good idea to use cloches or fleece to warm the ground first, and make sure you keep them to hand in case there are any late cold snaps you need to protect your crops from.
- Make supports for your pea crops. Even some sticks with netting pulled taut between them can work, if you don't fancy getting even more creative. If you do, we'd love to see what you've made!
- Get started with your pumpkin, squash and cucumber plants this month. Sow under cover in a propagator. Keep an eye on our social media accounts to see when we are sowing our #growwithgyo seeds - and don't forget to share your sowing pics!

This month's discounts

To get your hands on a fantastic selection of discounts on some brilliant RHS-endorsed products, sign up to the *Grow Your Own* newsletter - don't miss out! You will also receive seasonal growing advice, the latest events in the gardening calendar and up-to-date news. Subscribe now for free, to make sure you don't miss any of the offers from the RHS especially for you!

#growwithgyo

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 herb plants, plus the jobs on the plot for May!

Anne Swithinbank

How to grow carrots

Anne gives her pointers for producing this kitchen garden classic and advises on keeping the crop safe from its most notorious pest

Our familiar orange carrots descend from *Daucus carota*, a biennial native of Europe, North Africa and Western Asia belonging to the parsley and celery tribe. The roots of wild plants are pale and forked, while those of early domesticated crops were purple or yellow. Orange roots appeared in Spain and Germany during the 15th and 16th centuries and were bred for their colour, improved texture and flavour by the Dutch. From seed, roots develop in the first growing season but left in, would enable the plant to

flower and seed before dying off in year two.

Growing carrots can be simplicity itself on a light and stone-free soil, where beds are warmed early by the sun. As early as March, trickle seed thinly in shallow drills or bands made 15cm apart and cover lightly with soil. Thinning, to 5cm apart brings good results but if larger carrots are required, pull and eat thinnings to leave a carrot every 10cm. Depending on how many you'll need, sowings can continue to mid-summer. There are plenty of varieties, with purple and yellow



roots back in fashion again. Those described as 'early' mature the fastest, while 'maincrop' cultivars take a little longer and are favoured for winter storage.

Problems start when soils are heavy and flinty, stony or slow to dry out in spring. Sown too soon, seeds rot and if thwarted from their downward progress by a stone or clay lump, bend and fork. A slightly raised bed improved with light topsoil or old potting compost, regular additions of well-rotted compost or even larger containers of good growing medium are the answer.

Protecting from carrot fly

From eggs laid near plants, maggots hatch from May





to June and August to September, damage carrot roots with their tunnelling and pupate in soil. The best answer lies in covering carrots from the outset with fleece or mesh. I make a supporting framework from the metal hoops of an old tunnel cloche and then weigh the edges down securely with bricks; the pest flies low and a small gap is all they need. Our covers only come off for weeding and thinning, on dull or lightly rainy days when I hope the flies are less active. There are some partially resistant varieties.



Anne's favourites

- **'Blanche a Collet Vert'** A traditional Belgian variety producing white roots with a green top. A real talking point. **Real Seeds (realseeds.co.uk)**
- **'St. Valery'** A beautiful orange carrot with long tapering roots ideal for kitchen or show bench. Flavoursome and crisp. **Kings Seeds (01376 570 000, kingsseeds.com)**
- **'Ruby Prince'** An unusual red carrot full of lycopene, delicious served cooked or raw. **Nicky's Nursery (01843 600 972, nickys-nursery.co.uk)**
- **'Yellowstone'** Delivers long cylindrical yellow roots with green tops. A sweet, crunchy carrot. **Simply Seed (simplyseed.co.uk)**

Expert advice

If you have... 15 minutes

Check seedlings under glass

This is a crucial time of year when half a day in the wrong place can kill a tray of young plants. A quick check and prompt action morning and evening means newly germinated seedlings are removed from propagating cases before they overheat by day, yet are covered and protected on cold nights. Lift propagating cases lids, drain condensation and ventilate, shade or remove on hot days. Water dry seedlings using a can fitted with a fine rose (sprinkler).



If you have... 30 minutes

Propagate globe artichokes by offsets

Globe artichokes make beautiful silvery-leaved plants and sitting down to feast on the large flower buds makes for a communal lunch. Should a productive plant produce some tempting offsets, slice one or a group of two to three from the clump using a spade. If these are well-rooted, you can plant straight into good, well-drained soil. If sparsely rooted or rootless, pot into a gritty compost mix before planting out. Sometimes in summer an offset will sway outwards, so break off and root this, too.



If you have... 60 minutes

Sow French beans

Sow French beans towards the end of April under glass individually to modules, or spaced 5cm apart in a 15cm pot. In most areas they should germinate in the greenhouse without extra warmth but they might need help on cold nights. Harden them off (accustom them to outdoor living) before planting out in May. There are many spacing opportunities to explore from 8cm apart in rows 18in apart, at 23cm and even up to 45cm each way for the biggest, longest cropping plants. Climbers are set 30cm apart at the foot of their supports. Try these compact and productive dwarf French bean 'Sonesta' or the attractive, purple-podded 'Trionfo Violetto'.





David Domoney:

PLUMP FOR PRODUCTIVITY



A beautiful garden can be productive, too.
Replacing ornamentals with fruiting shrubs is one small step towards changing your garden

Baskets abound

Hanging baskets that grow outside your door can easily be transformed into productive baskets with the addition of the right crops. If you plant strawberries, like the variety 'Fragoo' - which is a beautiful trailing strawberry, they will grow quite comfortably in a hanging basket if watered regularly. Not only do you get really attractive foliage, and of course ornamental flowers, but you get delicious fruit as well, so it looks good and tastes great. Picture it, you're walking home from work, you get to the front door, pluck off a strawberry and pop it straight into your mouth to reinvigorate and the taste really puts a smile on your face.

You don't just have to grow strawberries in baskets - you can grow tomatoes, too. Trailing varieties, like tomato 'Tumbler',

makes a particularly good basket plant. I tend to take a plastic bottle, spike holes all around the sides and bury this in the middle of the basket after having chopped the top off the bottleneck. This enables me to fill up a decent reservoir of water right into the heart of the basket to slowly seep out and make sure it's hydrated - which is exactly what it needs if it's fruiting.

Fruity flowers

With fruit varieties, you often still get spectacular flowers, but you also get the crop as well. Blueberries are marvellous - in ericaceous soil, they grow really well. You can plant them in containers with specialist compost if you have particularly limey soil. I usually put a handful of rusty nails or even a rusting metal Brillo pad in

the bottom of the planting hole to make sure there's plenty of iron available, and they'll be quite happy. Even in fairly small containers, compact blueberry cultivars, like the dwarf variety 'Tophat', will fit around your outdoor living spaces. But in the summer, you'll be blessed with the sights of attractive bell-like flowers, too.

Raspberries, blackcurrants, white currants and red currants grow perfectly well as ornamental plants in your border - it gives you leaf, colour, and you get the fruit as well so it's a triple treat. Gooseberries are a very easy-to-grow soft fruit, so a perfect place to start when it comes to a lovely shrub that's also a production plant. The variety 'Careless' will do well in many types of soil and can be grown in containers or into garden borders, so you can't go wrong.

Crops that climb

When it comes to climbers, don't worry about climbing roses or clematis, put production plants on your fence panels and walls instead. Things like fan-trained cherry trees, cordon pears and espalier apples not only cover up a fence and make it look fantastic but produces fruit too and the beautiful spring flowers come through as well, so it's a double plus. These offer some architectural and ornamental interest at eye height to bring your garden to the next level.

This kind of planting, with edible crops covering a boring wall and turning it into a garden feature, also turns it into a productive area. Growing vertically like this will cut down on using up valuable floor space - try



tayberries, loganberries, raspberries and blackberries on fences and walls.

Trees to fruit

When you're choosing trees for the garden, don't just think about ornamental cherry trees, small dwarf willows or Japanese maples, think about planting in attractive looking trees that also produce fruit. Figs are fantastic for this, the unusual shaped leaf is beautiful, and the fruits are great for eating straight from the tree, or for making jams and preservatives. The other noteworthy productive tree is the small mulberry. If you're looking for a compact tree with big impact, you can't go far wrong with a mulberry, which is easy to grow and hard to kill, being fairly hardy.

Apple trees are often grown because they are very pretty trees that also provide you with food for your family. Another like this is the almond tree, for producing nuts. The variety 'Macrocarpa' is a spreading

deciduous tree with very pale pink or white flowers produced on bare shoots in early spring, followed by velvety fruit containing edible almonds. One of the most spectacular flowering trees, however, are *Pyrus* (pear) trees which display incredible clusters of white flowers come spring.

Herbs to have

Don't forget herbs, they work so well in any garden space. Grow rosemary, which is great for regular harvesting and can be incorporated easily into your meals at home. It's very high in vitamin B6, which particularly helps the immune system. But don't stop there, basil, thyme and sage are all ornamental shrubs that give an extra bang for your buck by providing you with a fresh harvest of herbs to take to the kitchen table.

Herbs can be very versatile, able to be grown in pots or window boxes to add in some interest wherever it's needed. But they also look really good. Lavender is particularly

stylish to look at, it's striking blueish purple hues add a pop of colourful interest. But most people don't think of lavender as a really productive plant. Not only can the stalks be harvested for decoration or homoeopathic uses - when made into soaps, essential oils and the like - but English lavender has a multitude of culinary uses, too. Jams, jellies and cakes can all be sensationalised with lovely floral lavender tones, with the added benefit of high vitamin A content, for eye health - decorative and dietary benefits all rolled into one!

When it comes to the world of garden plants, these are just some of the many varieties which have awesome ornamentation as well as functional and productive qualities to tap into. So next time you want to introduce something new to your plot, plump for productivity as well as splendour and you'll double-up on what your outdoor space has to offer you and your family.

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Charles Dowding's

Monthly Tasks

A political approach to no dig gardening this April



Gardening can sound political, especially this month. It's time to strike judiciously, and work undercover. Be radical in your lack of cultivation, too.

No dig is your best method for an easier time in the garden. It means that fewer weeds grow, and you have a softer surface to pull any weeds from, and to hoe very shallowly.

Furthermore, if spring is wet, no dig ensures quick drainage. Water can flow between topsoil and subsoil. There are no intrazonal boundaries between layers of different density, which mainly occur after cultivations.

You don't get muddy boots either. We are often transplanting when other growers cannot, because cultivations have damaged their soil structure, and made it sticky.

STRIKE

The strike is about doing a clever job on weeds. You look to hoe, rake or dislodge them in any way possible, during dry weather. This disturbs only the immediate surface of beds and paths, which is where new weeds are happening.

You need to catch the weeds when tiny and almost invisible, called the white-thread stage. Go looking for these almost invisible weeds now, rather than being overwhelmed once

they have become larger in May.

Weeding like this is fun, because it's creative. You are deciding when to weed, rather than weeds doing that for you. Weeds can overwhelm your garden aspirations if not dealt with. Staying weed free means you have time to be productive, all season. Be sure to strike a few times in April.

PATHS

Important yet often overlooked. Weedy paths spoil the appearance of a garden, then cause problems as the weeds root and seeds spread into adjoining beds.

Better results come from having no wooden sides, and weed free paths. There is no need for membrane either, it is definitely best avoided because of horrible threads in soil, the cost, and even its disappearance below the surface level.

Instead lay thick cardboard over path weeds, with about 3cm of wood chip on top. If you remove any wooden sides on your paths (which is recommended), push with your foot along the bed edge. This creates a diagonal side rather than a vertical, and your beds become mounds.

One difference you will notice is fewer slugs. You have removed one of their main hiding places, rotting wood, so they will need to find somewhere else to live.

UNDER COVER

April has a fantastic surplus of light, and a relative shortage of warmth. Amazingly, it's easy and cheap to balance these two by using covers. Especially when laid flat over plants, fleece can hold the warmth close to ground level where it's most needed.

I recommend the thicker grade of fleece, around 30gsm so that you can reuse it several times. Avoid the commonly offered 17gsm which is fragile and splits too easily.

Fleece creates warmth by converting light to heat. Plants then grow in the surplus light which is converted to warmth, instead of being wasted. A formidable bonus is that fleece also keeps most pests off, too.

Now is a good time for more sowings under cover. In mid-April sow courgettes, squash, basil, sweetcorn, and cucumbers to grow in a polytunnel or greenhouse. Cucumbers to grow outdoors are best sown mid May, to transplant early June.

All March sowings profit from added warmth, even up to 30°C at germination stage.



Your Plot ESSENTIALS

This month's jobs on the vegetable patch and patio

WORDS: Sally Nex

GROWING TECHNIQUE: SUPPORTING PLANTS

When seedlings are ready for planting, you want to get them straight into the ground - so it's frustrating to have to leave them in their pots while you fiddle about erecting supports. Get them up ahead of time, though, and you can plant out without a hitch.

Tailor your structures to suit the plant you're supporting. For giants like courgette 'Tromboncino', squash 'Sweet Dumpling', runner beans and tall maincrop peas including 'Telephone' and 'Alderman', reserve your sturdiest supports including wall-mounted trellises, and 'A' frame supports. Make these from hazel beanpoles 3-5cm thick, set 50cm apart so they cross at the top. Lash another pole across the apex to lock them in place.

Smaller plants such as early peas, sweet peas and dwarf French beans need only light support. Peas do well scrambling up jute pea netting; for dwarf beans and compact early peas just poke twiggy prunings into the ground between your seedlings after planting.



GYO
says

If you're struggling, have a look online for how to make plant supports

87%

of all plant species on earth require pollinators such as bees, butterflies and hoverflies

Source: Journal of Insect Conservation

DON'T FORGET:

Water drills before sowing

Outdoor sowing is really taking off now the soil is warmer and the days are lengthening. But spring can also be surprisingly drought-prone - and if you sow into dry soil, seeds will simply sulk instead of germinating. Water into the bottom of the drill before you sow and your seeds go into damp soil from the start. Wait for the water to drain away, then sow and backfill with dry soil to lock the moisture in.

Top tip!

Considering growing Tudor veg?

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TRY TUDOR ROOT VEGETABLES

Most heritage vegetables date back to Victorian times. But there's a small, select group which have been around since the 16th century. They've seen out successive monarchies and countless gardening trends and are now finding a new lease of life in environmentally-conscious 21st century gardens as useful perennial vegetables in permaculture systems, which don't rely so heavily on resowing each year.

Skirret looks like a skinny parsnip, but tastier (it's been compared to sweet potato). Salsify is similar but with a more delicate, savoury flavour. The young leaves and spectacularly pretty flowers are also edible. Another closely-related root vegetable is scorzonera, making clumps of slender, black-skinned roots.

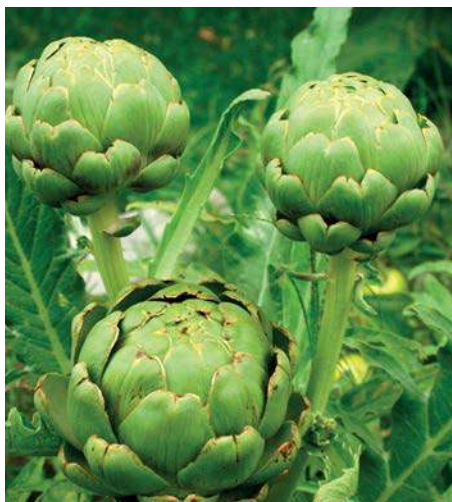
All are grown the same way: sow now from seed, direct into well-prepared soil (but be patient - they can take up to three weeks to germinate). Thin seedlings to 15cm apart and allow to grow for a couple of years to let the roots thicken up. After that you can harvest as many roots as you need; just leave some in the ground to grow back and provide next year's crop.



30 minute job:

Plant globe artichokes

- There's a whiff of the 1970s about globe artichokes: then they were a dinner party delicacy, served boiled as a whole head for you to peel off the leaves and dip the fleshy base in vinaigrette.
- Delicious enough; but that was half a century ago. Nowadays you can peel off the outer leaves and stem, then remove the hairy 'choke' for artichoke hearts to barbecue or preserve in oil and herbs for antipasti. Or harvest the heads young, at tangerine size, to simmer in white wine. The end result is absolutely scrumptious!
- Artichoke plants are perennial, and straightforward to grow given a sunny spot in rich but free-draining soil, plus a fair bit of space - mature artichokes can be 1.5m tall and wide. If you garden on heavy, poorly-draining soil plant into a raised bed filled with a mix of topsoil, compost and grit.
- You can buy in ready-grown plants but there's a better choice, including rare and heirloom varieties, if you grow from seed sown now in a cool greenhouse or coldframe. Grow young plants on until they are about 25cm tall, then plant out 90cm apart. Give them a season to get their roots down before you start picking; then you can expect to cut 10-15 delicately-flavoured flowerbuds from each plant.



VARIETIES TO TRY

NEW VARIETY:

Beetroot 'Morello'

Beets aren't just a pretty root: the top growth also provides tasty, good-looking salad leaves with just a tang of beety flavour. Until now, you've had to plump for one or the other, with 'Bulls Blood' the best of the leafing varieties. But this little looker, as happy in containers as in the ground, combines both. The sweet burgundy roots grow fast, ready in just 12 weeks, and stay tender with none of the woodiness of larger varieties. But you can also pick the red-stemmed leaves like baby chard - ideal where you don't have space to grow both.

(thompson-morgan.com)



HERITAGE VARIETY:

Squash 'Queensland Blue'

The best winter squashes are the keepers - varieties with fruits that stay as good as the day you picked them for six months or more. This beauty, bred in Australia about a century ago, keeps as well as any; it romps about the garden producing huge, handsome, deeply-ribbed fruits with striking slate blue skins and richly-flavoured orange flesh. Ripen on the plant for as long as possible, then bring them into a warm, dry greenhouse or conservatory for another fortnight to cure. They'll stay in perfect condition for up to a year.



EXOTIC VARIETY:

Stevia

We're all being told to eat less sugar, but it's hard to resist your favourite treats. This unremarkable little green plant may be the answer. To look at, it's just a mound of soft green leaves, but each leaf delivers the ultimate sugary hit: stevia is about 200 times as sweet as sugar, yet without the calories or the sudden spike in blood sugar levels. Protect it from frost and you should have the plant for several years; dig it up to bring indoors or grow in containers to move under cover for winter.



HOW TO AVOID... WIREWORMS

When you've been looking forward to lifting a hefty crop of potatoes all season, it's crushing to find when you dig them up that creepy-crawlies got there first. The most devastating damage is often caused by wireworms, drilling neat 2mm holes right into the heart of every spud.

Wireworms are the golden-brown larvae of click beetles and often appear in new veg patches converted from grass, and in established gardens next to pastureland, especially if your soil is damp or chalky. They do most damage in late summer, so you'll avoid them altogether if you only grow earlies and second earlies. Protect maincrops with the biological control *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*: water on from May, repeating the treatment in July, and you should lift a blemish-free set of spuds this year.



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SOW YOUR BONUS SEEDS!

Grow a rainbow of colour with these staple veg varieties

Beetroot 'Boltardy'

As the name suggests, beetroot 'Boltardy' is no ordinary garden beet, but is instead brilliantly resistant from bolting. Bursting with antioxidants, potassium and folic acid, this beet is a celebrated superfood with a plethora of uses, including but not limited to roasting, pickling or thinly slicing into fresh summertime salads.

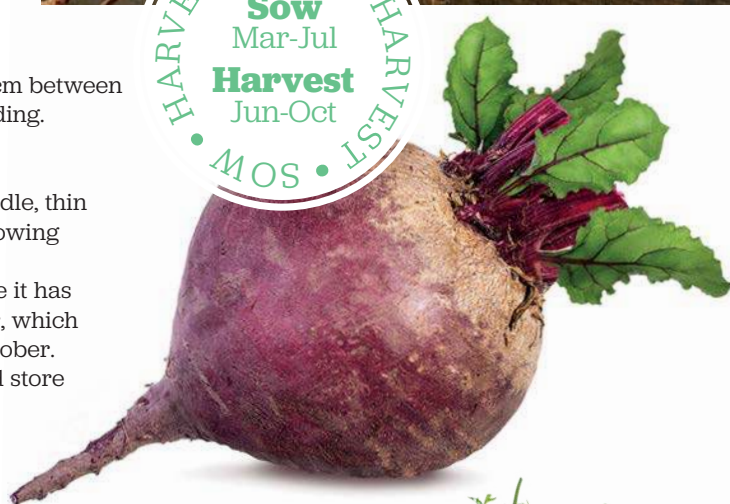
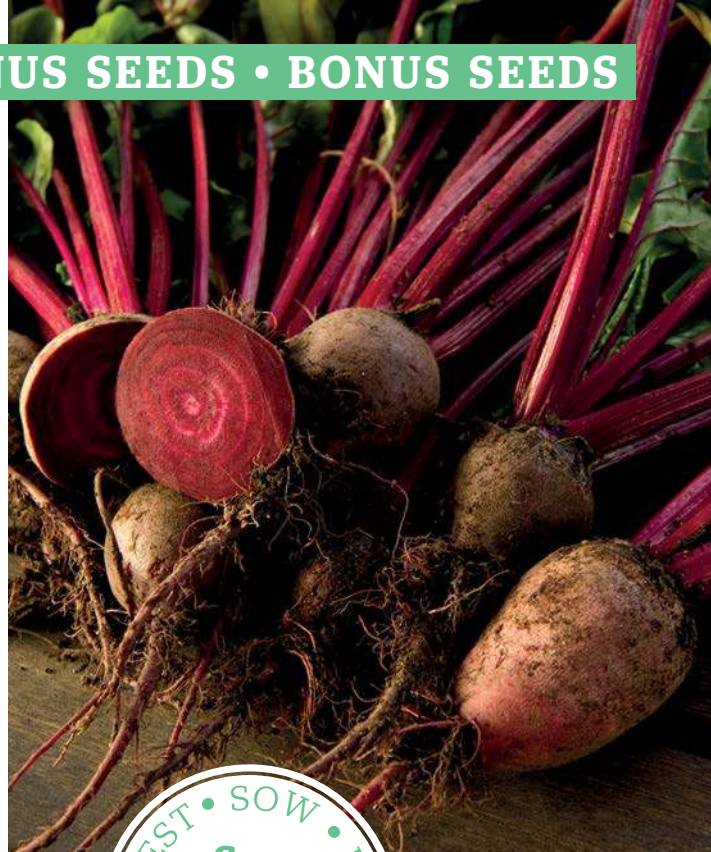
1 Sow seeds thinly outside from March to July where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Make sure to sow seeds in weed-free, fertile, light and well-drained soil.

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

3 Seedlings should appear within 12-14 days.

4 When large enough to handle, thin to 5cm or 10cm apart if growing larger roots.

5 Harvest your beetroot once it has reached 2.5cm in diameter, which is usually between June to October. Pull roots from the ground and store in boxes of damp sand and in frost-free conditions.



Carrot

'Cosmic Purple'

Unless you've already seen the packets of purple carrots that are called 'witches' fingers' and sold in supermarkets around Hallowe'en, then yes – carrots can be purple, too! Carrot 'Cosmic Purple' has medium-length tapered roots that get up to 18cm in length. With a coreless, tender and bright orange centre, these carrots are fantastically fun to grow with children as well.

1 Sow carrots thinly outside from March to June where

they are to crop, at a depth of 1.3cm. Make sure to plant in an open site and in moist but well-drained soil.

2 Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each to prevent overcrowding. Seedlings should appear within 10-20 days.

3 When large enough to handle, thin seedlings to 2.5-5cm apart. Thinnings might not be required if growing 'baby roots'.

4 Cover with enviromesh or erect a 50cm barrier around the plants to protect against potential carrot root fly attack.

5 Harvest from June to November.





Chilli pepper 'Anaheim'

Named after Anaheim, the Southern Californian city where this chilli was first commercially grown (although, as this pepper originates from New Mexico, it has other original names too), this popular pepper, scoring a modest 500-2,500 on the Scoville scale, tends to be eaten when green but it can be left to ripen to red.

- 1 Sow seeds thinly inside from February to June on the surface of good seed compost and cover with a light sprinkling of vermiculite.
- 2 Place inside a propagator or seal inside a polythene bag and keep at a temperature of 25°C until after germination. Seedlings should appear within 14 days.
- 3 When large enough to handle, transplant seedlings into 7.5cm pots and grow on at a minimum temperature of 15°C.
- 4 If growing indoors, plant two plants per growbag or one plant per 20cm pot. Alternatively, acclimatise plants to outdoor conditions before planting in a sunny, moist site 45cm apart.
- 5 Harvest from July to October. Stuff with cheese and roast, or use to make salsa.

Basil 'Sweet Green'

Take a break from traditional basil and have a go at growing basil 'Sweet Green'. Growing on neat bushy plants, the large, lustrous, dark-green leaves boast notes of mint and clove, making the specimen a lot more aromatic than regular varieties. What's more, basil 'Sweet Green' is super simple to grow, either outdoors, or on the windowsill at home.

- 1 Sow seed thinly inside from February to June on the surface of good seed compost and cover with a light sprinkling of vermiculite.
- 2 Place in a propagator or seal inside a polythene bag and keep at a temperature of 20-25°C until germination occurs. Seedlings should appear in 14-21 days.
- 3 Make sure not to exclude light as this helps speed up germination and do not over water.
- 4 When large enough to handle, transplant seedlings into 7.5cm pots. Grow on in cooler but not cold conditions for 10-15 days before planting out 30cm apart.
- 5 Alternatively, grow in 7.5cm pots on the windowsill from April to October. Harvest from July to October, as and when required.



Leek 'Musselburgh'

Imported from France before being grown in Musselburgh, Scotland, in 1834, this leek is the giant of the vegetable garden. With short, stout stems and a superior strong flavour, leek 'Musselburgh' has a developed disease resistance and stands well even in the chilliest of winters.

- 1 Sow seed thinly outside from March to April where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Make to plant in soil that has been raked to a fine tilth.
- 2 Plant in rows, allowing 23cm between each to prevent overcrowding.
- 3 When large enough to handle, transplant seedlings into their final positions, 23cm apart.
- 4 Water the ground regularly, especially during periods of drought.
- 5 Harvest from September to December by carefully levering the leeks out of the ground with a fork.



Lettuce 'Valmaine'

Lettuce 'Valmaine' is an outstanding 'cut-and-come-again' crop that all gardeners should try, since the glossy green leaves have a fine, fleshy texture, and it's also extremely versatile – the leaves can be picked young for non-stop salads and sandwich fillings or left to mature to produce large conical heads that have a crunchy, crisp bite.

- 1 Sow seeds thinly outside from March to July where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Make sure to plant in a sunny or semi-shaded spot and in fertile soil that has been raked beforehand 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.
- 4 Water regularly and cover with protective netting or fleece to prevent attack from birds or insects.
- 5 Harvest from June to September, as and when you need it.



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Mustard

It's time to take cress off the windowsill in order to make room for mustard, a spicier and more moreish sandwich filling. If you can't choose between the two, then you're in luck, since cress and mustard can still be grown together. Mustard does, however, grow quicker, so make sure to sow cress three days before it. That way, the little green leaves will be ready to harvest at the same time.

- 1 Sow seeds thickly indoors all year round on the surface of moist tissue paper, kitchen paper or in pots.
- 2 Move to a spot on a sunny or semi-shaded windowsill. Seedlings should appear within two-three days.
- 3 Make sure to keep the tissue, kitchen paper or soil moist at all times.
- 4 If you're sowing mustard and cress together, sow the cress three days before the mustard so that the plants will be ready to harvest at the same time.
- 5 Mustard will be ready to pick five days from sowing.



Spinach 'Medania'

Fancy stocking up on your levels of vitamin A and vitamin C and harnessing the power of the beloved cartoon character Popeye? If the answer is yes, grow spinach 'Medania' this season. A good tip to remember is to keep on sowing, as this will make sure an on-going supply is to hand throughout the season.

- 1 Sow seeds thinly outside from March to July where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm. Alternatively, sow seeds under glass or cloches in September.
- 2 Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each to prevent overcrowding.
- 3 Seedlings should appear within five-seven days. When large enough to handle, thin plants to 5cm apart. These thinnings are suitable for use in fresh salads for an extra crunch and a super sweet flavour.
- 4 Keep well-watered during dry, hot weather.
- 5 Harvest leaves as and when you require them, usually between September to May. A regular picking will ensure a continuous supply of fresh, young growth.



Spring onion

'Performer'

Performing well all year round, spring onion 'Performer' is one of the most reliable bunching onions you can grow.



- 1** Sow seeds thinly outside from March to September where they are to crop, at a depth of 1.3cm. Make sure to plant in a sunny, sheltered spot and in fertile soil that has been well-drained in advance.
- 2** Plant in rows, allowing 30cm between each. Seedlings should appear within 10-14 days.
- 3** Thinning shouldn't be required but if they look over-crowded, thin quickly.
- 4** To increase their blanch, draw soil up to their stems and keep well-watered during dry periods.
- 5** Extremely versatile, you can harvest individual leaves for fresh garnishes or pull up the entire plant for its leek-like stem.



Tomato

'Moneymaker'

This tomato amassed popularity in the 60s and 70s due to its uniformity, flavour and early ripening. Grow it in the garden this season, and you'll also be surprised at its smooth, medium-sized fruits, growing on heavy trusses.

- 1** Sow seeds thinly on the surface of free-draining compost from February to March and cover with a fine layer of vermiculite. Place in a propagator and keep at 18-20°C until germination.
- 2** Seedlings should appear within seven-14 days. When large enough to handle, transplant to 7.5cm pots. Plant outdoors when tomatoes are 20cm high in a sunny, sheltered spot and in fertile, moist soil.
- 3** You can also sow seeds thinly outdoors from March to April where they are to crop, at a depth of 1cm.
- 4** Drive a cane into the soil next to each specimen and tie the main stem to it using garden twine.
- 5** Harvest your tomatoes when they have turned from green to red, from June to September.



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Huw Richards: SIMPLE WAYS TO BEAT SLUGS

Huw Richards tells us how to stay one step ahead of these pesky gastropods

The war between gardeners and slugs is one that is yet to see any major shift in power. Every year both sides suffer casualties, and some years lean more one way than another, yet neither side has had the breakthrough required to claim victory.

I believe recently the focus has been too much on how to attack slugs once they advance for our prized seedling. Instead, I believe the best way to mitigate issues is by switching our focus primarily towards prevention in the first place. Abraham Lincoln had an excellent quote; “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today” and I implore that you grasp this saying for anything to do with

slugs. The more prevention we do today, the less we have to suffer losses and deal with the aftermath in our gardens or on our allotment plots in the near future.

I wish to mention that the following three-part prevention checklist is free and requires no nasty chemicals. I believe chemicals have no place in a garden that grows food.

Task 1

Keep all the grass around your garden or allotment short. This is often the task that makes the most noticeable difference. Long grass retains moisture and slugs will use it as a hiding spot during the day and then make their way to your plants. Reducing

this means there are fewer hiding places for slugs, and therefore makes your garden less appealing. Also keep down on weeds for the same reasons.

Task 2

Remove unneeded objects lying around. Pots, planks and other items all serve as extra hiding places for slugs. Once or twice a month, scout around the garden for anything that slugs can hide underneath but is not serving a purpose and remove it.

Task 3

Use brambles as protective fences. When I was clearing away some brambles it suddenly dawned on me that I could use the spiky canes as a protective fence around my slug-prone plants. Cut the brambles into 30cm long sections and stack a couple on top of each other and you have yourself a fence where if I was a slug I wouldn't even bother! It won't be 100 per cent slug-proof, but it does make a huge difference.

Eggshells

Many people specify using eggshells - but don't waste your time! Instead put these on your compost heap and use brambles instead as a protective barrier.

Growing advice



Top tip

If you want to give plants the best start possible, start them in pots and modules out of the reach of slugs and grow them as large as possible before transplanting. This way, they are far more likely to survive an onslaught.



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

Once you have undertaken the three slug-prevention tasks, the next thing you need to do is to be prepared to strike when you see signs of damage. Preventing slugs is not 100 per cent effective, but it makes the world of a difference. If you wish to invest in a very effective way of reducing slug issues, then I suggest you explore using nematodes. They work a treat and I have heard many a success story, however the two downsides are costs and the fact that they also need to be re-applied every six weeks.

The following three methods are ones that I use, and feel are the most effective ways of attacking slugs.

1) The plank/cardboard trap

As previously stated, objects lying around with no purpose make great slug habitats, but this can be used to our advantage.

If you notice some nibbled plants, water a section of your raised bed in the later afternoon and place a plank down over the watered section and slightly propped up to allow slugs to crawl underneath. The following morning lift the plank and pick off any hiding slugs.

2) Three-Night Pick

This is a little tedious but makes a huge impact and can even be done when you aren't experiencing many issues always be one step ahead. For three nights in a row, venture out to the garden armed with a torch, bucket and a pair of gloves and collect as many slugs as you can find. This is so effective because the more slugs you remove, the less there are to breed.

3) Ducks

If you have the space, consider recruiting some ducks to your army. The top two breeds to get are Indian Runners and Khaki Campbell; for they are professional slug busters. I have a flock of the latter and once a week during the growing season I herd them up to the garden and let them get to work for an hour or so. This works a treat for raised bed gardens as they simply go around the sides looking for anything they can get their beaks into. I always potter about in the garden when they are working to keep an eye, but they are well behaved usually. Once they get bored they may go for some plants. A quick remedy is to create seedling protection out of some old chicken wire to use as a make-shift fence whenever the ducks are about.

Slugs have caused us gardeners too much pain, and I hope that these ideas and tips will help you get the upper hand this year so you don't have to spend many nights in bed worrying about your plants (as I used to). Continue using the checklist and take necessary action as and when needed.

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Plug plant *perfection*

Enjoy a fuss-free season with these handy plants

It goes without saying that there's something special about raising fruits, vegetables and flowers from seed. But for even the most experienced gardeners, there are, unfortunately, drawbacks to this ancient method. For example, growing fruit and veg from seed takes time and effort, there's a need to remember to sow the seeds at the right time, and it carries with it the risk of failed germination and of growing sickly plants. All of these factors have the potential to jeopardize your growing efforts - especially when time is at a premium. This is where plug plants come in!

What are plug plants?

Plugs are young plants or seedlings that have been grown in individual cells of compost in module trays. You can purchase

a wide variety in garden centres or online, including small ones that will need to be grown on until they reach a good size, those for hanging baskets, to larger ones that, after a few weeks of hardening off, can be planted straight into the soil. Unlike the seeds we sow ourselves, these plants have been raised in a greenhouse by professionals who make sure that these selected plants are all high-quality specimens. Plants that are in great plant health and have established roots will take less time to grow on, will produce bigger yields, and will even have greater resistance to pests and diseases.

Why buy seedlings?

By eliminating the risk of failed germination and thus the need to nip back to the shops for repeat seed packet purchases, plug

plants are one of the easiest, and not to mention economical, ways to build up a brilliant selection of fruit, veg and edible flowers at home. What's more, plug plants aren't expensive (an individual plug plant can cost less than 50p!), allowing you to create an impressive kitchen garden for a minimal price tag. You can also order a vast selection of fruits and vegetables that might not be available from seed. Some hybrid plants, for example, can only be propagated from cuttings, and are therefore only available as plugs.

Plug the gap

As soon as the plants hit the doormat or you arrive home with you in your shopping bag, open up the package straight away to improve air flow and ventilation and move to a well-lit frost-free area for at least 24 hours to allow them to adjust to the change in temperature. Unpack the seedlings and check to see if the compost is in need of some moisture. If it is, either stand them in shallow water or mist over with a spray bottle until the soil is moist but not sopping. You'll need to transplant the plug into larger pots filled with good multi-purpose compost and grow on in a greenhouse before beginning to leave them outside for a few hours each day.

Easy guide



Advertorial feature



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Delfland plug plants

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Growers organics plug plants & herbs

With over 100 varieties of quality certified organic vegetable and herb plants, you are spoilt for choice! Most of Growers Organics' plug plants, such as lettuces, beans and brassicas, are sold in packs of five. However, tomatoes, courgettes, squashes and more are grown in 9cm pots and can be purchased individually. You can select exactly the mix of varieties you require. To check out the full selection visit its website at growersorganics.com

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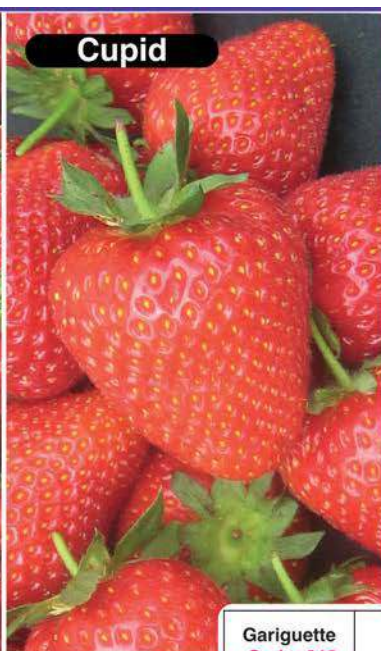
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WEEDS MASTERCLASS

Q What weeds are most likely to cause a problem on a UK site and how do I deal with them?

Elise Rogers, via Twitter

Blake says: “Unfortunately, there are a number of weeds that are common in the UK. The annual types include nettles, chickweed, groundsel, shepherd’s purse and hairy bittercress, while perennial species are field horsetail, ground elder, Japanese knotweed, hedge bindweed, dandelions and woody perennial weeds. Each plant has different tendencies so it’s important to identify what you’re dealing with before you put control methods in place. There are many books and online resources that will help you to do this. Once you have weeds under control you will have much more time to complete more satisfying and essential jobs on the allotment or in the kitchen garden.”

Q What are the best ways to keep weeds down in late spring?

Should I be mulching my veg patch around crops?

Charlie Scott, via Facebook

Joshua says: “The best way to keep weeds at bay is a sharp hoe. A hoe is essentially a knife on a stick so in order for it to work correctly it must be sharp. By late spring the sun should be hot enough to dry out the severed weeds where they lay and as a result break down and add nutrients to your soil. I mulch in early spring as it saves fussing around too many plants. But the best time to mulch is whenever you have time to mulch. However, ideally spring and autumn are advisable.”

Get to grips with our Tried & Tested weeding tool roundup on page 101.





Q I recently got some hens that I'm keeping near to my veg patch. Which crops that I'm growing can I give to them to eat if I have too many? Should I also be trying to save their manure to add nutrients into the soil? Tim McGregor, via email

Lorraine says: "Chickens will love any excess vegetables from your plot, including lettuce, cabbage, spring greens, cauliflower leaves, sweetcorn, herbs and soft fruit. However, don't give them the hard parts of any leaves, as these may block their crops - and do be aware that rhubarb leaves are poisonous. Hens will eat virtually all pests, so if you are able to let them out into your plot, that can help, too. Their poo can be a valuable addition to the soil, but don't put it straight onto the garden. Let it break down first in a composter, with the rest of your garden waste."

Q Where I live, I seem to have a problem with rabbits, especially when I've got young crops coming up. Is this normal and how might I deter them and lessen the damage?

Sophie Palmer, via email

Jonathan says: "Rabbits seek out new plants close to their burrows, as young plants are both tasty and nutritious. Fencing is one option depending on area, time and resources, then maintenance. An increasingly popular alternative to dissuade rabbits, is Grazers, a natural solution, popular with many nurseries and growers. The products contain nutrients (specifically calcium) and other plant extracts that work with any plant, edible and ornamental, making it unappealing to grazing pests. Rabbits are clever and quickly learn if they don't like a certain area and move on. It's good to know that there are solutions available that don't cause harm."

advertorial feature



Q I'm planning on starting up a herb garden. My friend has said I can take some sections from some of her plants (like rosemary, lavender, sage). How should I go about this? Harry Smith, via email

Mike says: "You can take semi ripe heel cuttings during late spring/early summer from healthy, new, young shoots. These shoots should be 10mm long that are soft at the tip but firmer nearer the base. Hold the cutting at the

base, gently pulling it away from the main stem with a sliver of bark that forms the heel. Trim the wispy tail off the heel, removing the lower leaves but leaving some at the growing point. Place the cuttings around the rim of a 9cm pot filled with a gritty cutting compost. Protect the cuttings against drying out with a plastic bag or propagator cover, keeping them out of direct sunlight. You can use a rooting hormone if you want but the heel of the cutting is alive with growth hormones. The cuttings should be ready to pot up in four weeks and to plant out after mid-summer."



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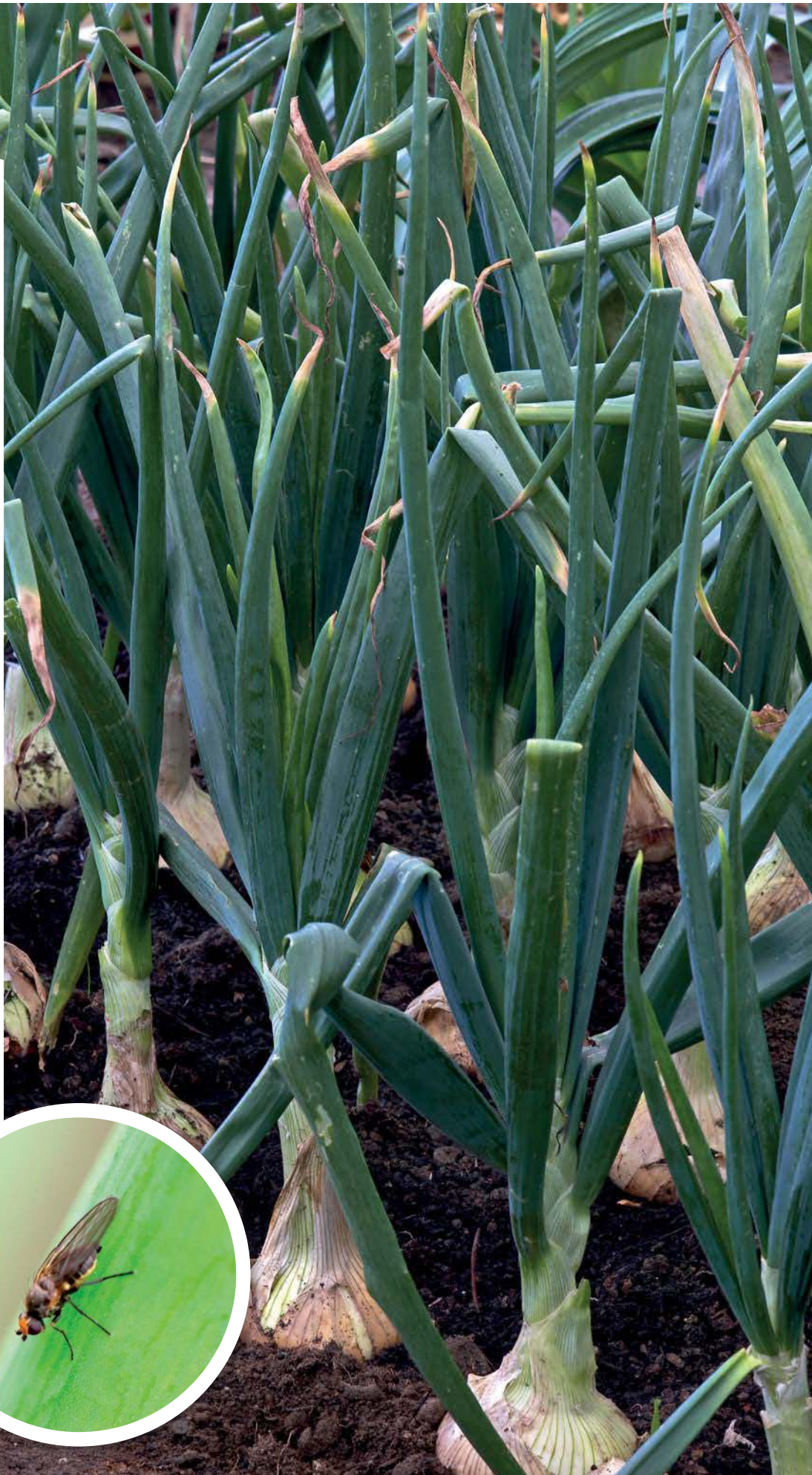
Allium leaf miner

This pest causes damage to some of the more common crops in the garden, such as onions, shallots, garlic and leeks. The maggots tunnel into the leaves, causing initial signs of damage, but this is usually followed by fungal infections, which are the cause of rotting.

If you see allium leaf miner on your crops, it will usually be the adults, which are approximately 3mm in length and a grey/ brown colour. You may also see the larvae - cream coloured maggots, which chomp holes in the leaves of the plant, as well as the stems. Once the crops have been under attack from these pests, you will notice rotting on your edibles, which will show itself in the form of brown patches where the tissues have been damaged.

Keep under control

Covering your plants with a horticultural fleece, or a fine-grade netting can go some way to offering protection against these bugs, as well as making sure you practice crop rotation as adults may surface from pupae under the covering if grown in the same places year on year. By rotating crops to a new patch of land, this lessens the risk of them taking hold of one particular piece of ground.





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SMART NEWS

The only pages modern gardeners need for brilliant growing ideas

GYO Spotlight Grow natural sponges and ditch the plastic

The National Trust is advocating that gardeners try growing their own household scourers, rather than buying plastic ones from the shop. The loofah-growing initiative has been started at one of the Trust's properties, Knightshayes estate in Devon, with the site's kitchen garden supervisor Bev Todd stating: "We know people are looking for ways they can live more sustainably. We hope what we are doing at Knightshayes will inspire others to think about creative, simple ways they can reduce their everyday impact on the environment." *Luffa cylindrica* are part of the same family as cucumbers, and grown in a similar way, with seeds available online. If you've tried cultivating these before, or are giving it a go this year, tag us in your growing snaps on Instagram @growyourownmag to let us know how it's going.



LET US INTRODUCE YOU TO...

Courgette 'Eclipse'

Gardeners wanting the productive tendencies of courgettes without the monster-sized veg should consider trying this appealing variety. The fruits are small and round with attractive, pale green stripes. With regular picking, these plants will produce heavy yields throughout summer. Seeds can be purchased online from Thompson & Morgan by visiting thompson-morgan.com



'Akebia Quinata' chocolate vine

This climbing plant forms beautiful, violet flowers in May from which edible, cucumber-shaped fruits develop. The shrub of Asian origin (Japan, China and Korea) grows to approximately 6m in height- ideal for arbours, trellises, pergolas or fences. Bear in mind that it may take up to two years for the crop to establish. Purchase plants from lubera.co.uk



Starting up ...RUNNER BEANS SUPPORTS

It is necessary to create a frame in order to provide structure to your plants as they climb. There are a variety of methods for training beans, but most gardeners use a double row of inwardly-sloping bamboo canes that are around 2.4m tall, tying these near the top to form an A-frame. These are then secured to a horizontal cane across the top.

● This method can be modified by tying the canes at a lower point to create an X-shape - this has the potential to make it easier to pick these tasty beans.

● For added protection, you could use 10cm polyethylene netting supported by tall posts, or placed over a frame. Wigwams are another option - these are formed of three or more bamboo canes, and do not require a lot of construction. They also make good use of space, so are ideal for small garden areas.

● Plant out pot-raised beans in late May and early June - one crop per cane. Otherwise, sow two seeds, spaced 15cm apart, before thinning to one seedling per cane.





• SMART FACT •

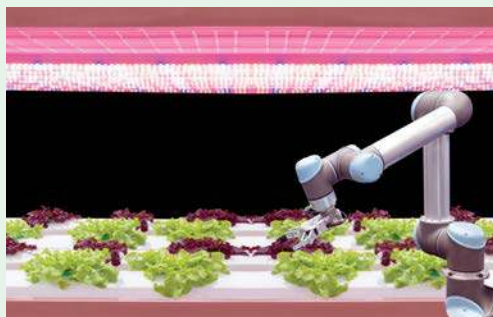
More than half of adults ‘enjoy’ being surrounded by greenery, according to research by the RHS

• SMART FACT •

A key theme at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show will be using horticulture to tackle loneliness, with Zoe Ball being commissioned to work with horticulturalist Jo Thompson to design a Friendship Garden. This focal point of the show will shine a light on the importance of front garden growing, and the positive impact that gardening at the front of the house can have, leading to more social interactions and conversations. Thompson commented: "Being in the front of your garden gives you an excuse to meet with people, we need to celebrate the front space. This space can be a social hub and help you to connect with your neighbours."



As part of its work into exploring how food can be developed for consumption in space, The European Space Agency has partnered with horticultural influencer, **@shегrowsveg** (aka Lucy Start). The rising online gardening star will report on research related to growing plants both in space and on earth and explore how to make food more appetising given the impact that gravity has on taste. Lucy commented on the project, saying: “This is such an unusual project, I’m incredibly excited to get started and showcase the mind-blowing work being done! The results could have a huge impact on the ESA’s ongoing work into space travel, plus a wider impact on sustainability and food consumption on Earth. It’s such a rare opportunity and I’m honoured to be part of it.”



Support your peas

This pea support frame from is made from 12mm plastic coated tubular steel, its easy to assemble and offers complete support for peas and other climbing plants. The frame is arched and therefore gives you two vertical sides to grow up. This complete kit is easy to assemble, as shown in the photo. To find out more or to purchase, go to easynets.co.uk



The unique formula of Vitax Q4 all-purpose feed has been trusted by generations of horticulturists, professional and amateur gardeners as the perfect spring feed. As it is lower in nitrogen, it helps avoid sappy growth whilst enriching the soil with vital plant food and trace elements essential for bigger, brighter blooms, healthier plants and bumper crops. For more information visit gardenworld.co.uk



The Harrod Horticultural Standard Wooden Raised Beds have been awarded Which Best Buy since 2010! Featuring a 3-year structural guarantee, they are available in five heights and 10 widths/lengths and include pre drilled planks, fixing posts and screws. Perfect for allotments, flower gardens or controlling difficult soil or pest conditions. Prices from £34 GDN-472, save 10 per cent by quoting code TYADGY6. Call **0333 400 1500** or visit **harrodhorticultural.com**



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Smart step-by-step: Create a bed in THE GROUND

Grow in the middle of your lawn in these four easy steps, says **Huw Richards**

By turning an area of lawn into a bed you can grow an abundance of annuals, such as beans, squash, potatoes, brassicas, and beetroot. You just need a spade's depth of soil, good preparation, and enthusiasm.

Things to consider

● Soil saturation

Plants can suffer when sitting in wet soil that drains slowly after periods of prolonged rainfall. On the plus side, they won't need as much water in hot, dry spells. Adding quantities of homemade compost will improve both drainage and water retention.

● Grass invasion

Spend some time edging and maintaining your bed to stop grass infiltration. One low-cost solution is to bury planks from dismantled pallets around the perimeter, or cover the area around the bed with cardboard and then woodchip.

● Gardening at ground level

To state the obvious, beds in the ground are low down. If you suffer from back problems, raised beds and containers might prove a better option.

Maintenance

Once the bed is set up, it will need an annual mulch of at least 5cm (2in) of compost every autumn or early spring to keep it productive. Remove any invading grass and remove weeds as soon as they appear. When compost is in short supply, give plants a liquid feed and spread fresh comfrey leaves over the surface for a quick nutrient boost.

● Slugs and snails

Beds without edging, especially those surrounded by grass, allow slugs and snails easy access.

● Expansion

If you want to extend your range of crops, growing in the ground opens up opportunities. A system of beds with enough space between them to get a wheelbarrow through will allow you to make the most of the space.

Preparing the area

Stripping turf off the surface is usually advised if you don't want lots of weeds, but you can create a bed without digging by covering the grass with a thick sheet mulch. You will need a rake, cardboard, enough compost or well-rotted manure to create a 5cm (2in) mound, and enough woodchip to cover the compost. If you don't have a good compost supply, wait until the following year. Start in autumn so the bed has time to settle and is ready for planting in spring.

Smart gardening

1 Cut the chosen area of lawn as short as possible, and cover it with at least three layers of cardboard to prevent the grass growing through.



2 Spread a 5-7cm (2-23/31/4 in) layer of compost over the cardboard. If you have a plentiful supply of compost, add up to a 15cm (6in) layer.



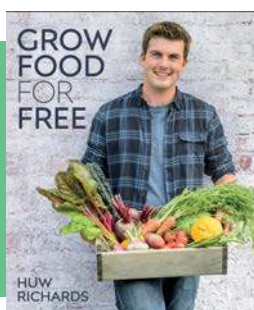
3 To protect the bed during winter, spread 7-10cm (23/31/4 in) of woodchip over the compost.



4 Leave the woodchip in place until you want to plant crops in the bed, as this will prevent weeds taking hold. Rake off the woodchip before planting - you could use it to make a path around your bed.



Extract taken from *Grow Food For Free*, by Huw Richards (DK) £16.99, dk.com





Smart guide: Natural, low-maintenance **DESIGN**

Kim Stoddart explains how to create a lovely outside space with minimal time and effort

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder it is said and when it comes to our gardens, veg plots or patios, I think the more we can make it our own unique space, the better it will be. The more we can also throw aside this picture perfect image of the primped and polished, the easier and arguably more enjoyable your grow your own efforts will become. Working with nature, rather than meticulously trying to control it, is also becoming an increasingly sensible option in the face of climate change weather extremes.

Here's how to create a more robust, down-to-earth and productive growing area with little to no effort at all:

Provide all weather access

My veg patch was prone to flooding before its current design and the use of simple raised gravel pathways in and around my raised beds enables me to have access all year round should I need it.

They are easy to weave in; just a layer of weed suppressing membrane with gravel spread over the top. They



can be laid on top of existing grass or weed areas and the porous nature of the membrane and gravel means water will simply leach away and you'll avoid mud on most commonly used areas.

The other reliable long term option is to use paving slabs with gravel in-between (and around the edges) to allow water to leach away. Such stepping stones can become very slippery over winter however, whereas gravel does not and is much cheaper to buy. Wood chip also works but only for a couple of years before it needs replacing.

Raised beds

These are highly recommended for veg growing as they make it simple to plan your growing space. Sitting as they do above ground level, their addition means that plants (and their roots) have better protection from an excess of winter rain and can be easily accessed. Just use lots of ground cover in your beds (fill them to the maximum with filler plants like salad leaves) to avoid soil drying out so easily come the summer months.



Thrifty tip

You can make raised beds yourself if you have a drill, as wood can be sourced 'cut to size', or if you are feeling more adventurous why not experiment with other materials you might have to hand. Old stones, timber joists (as pictured on my veg patch) or roof slates have all been used by me previously to great effect on the veg patch.

● Use natural, local or salvaged materials in your design

It's not just raised beds – you would perhaps be surprised how many free-to-source items you have already, which could be used in your garden design. They can be fun and very satisfying to work with, knowing that you are turning something unloved, into a practical, rewarding way.

● Old tractor or car tyres

Although you wouldn't want to plant anything edible directly into these, they make an attractive, quirky addition and can house useful planting such as comfrey or borage.



● Stone

I love working with stone. From my gravel rockery to pathway or raised bed borders, to the rocky surround for a wildlife pond, this material has much exciting potential.

● Getting creative with salvage

I've turned an old Belfast sink into a pond, made planters out of cracked Wellington boots, and most recently made a planter out of an old toilet. The sky's the limit in terms of the creative fun you can have with waste.

● Sustainable garden design full circle

As well as working with salvaged items, the waste products from your garden can also have their own full circle usage. From tree pruning being used to create natural fencing (pictured), to the addition of a small compost heap for kitchen and garden waste, this way everything has its place.

● Growing wild

Allowing space for nature and wildlife to lend a helping hand has to be one of the best things you can do. This way you are creating a more balanced eco-system which has the potential to be more sustainable for the longer term with less intervention from you, its custodian.

● Wildflowers

These beauties will readily re-seed and can provide a delightful splash of colour on the veg patch, as well as being useful for pollinators. Edible flowers such as calendula, nasturtium, and chamomile will spread and create useful ground cover around existing planting in the same colourful way if you let them.

● Wildlife magnet

Allowing even a small area of your garden to grow some brambles or nettles has the potential to attract a wide range of beneficial wildlife and predators. Hang out bird feeders, make a small pond and don't meticulously weed and tidy and watch how your garden comes alive to the benefit of the natural pest control of your now more bio-diverse patch.

EXCLUSIVE DISCOUNT

Grow Your Own readers can get a copy of Kim Stoddart's *Climate Change Garden* book for a specially discounted £12 including UK P&P (RRP £16.99) using code GYO20 before the end of April via climatechangeagarden.uk

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Plot design essentials

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MY TASKS THIS MONTH

Rachel Barclay is reclaiming her under cover growing space and kickstarting her plot into action during April

“April. The weather is starting to warm up, but five little hens are giving me the cold shoulder. On wet winter days they’ve taken refuge in the greenhouse and now they’ve been served an eviction notice. Don’t feel too bad for them – they’ll still have free range of the garden and, in all honesty, they weren’t the most respectful tenants when it came to my seedlings.

“But I need the space back because this month I’ll start to pot up my dahlia tubers, keeping them safely protected from any late frosts. And as we all know, there’s no such thing as too many dahlias.

“Elsewhere in the garden the climbers will really start to kick on, and I’ll make sure I keep tying in the climbing roses, clematis and honeysuckle while dreaming of summer blooms.

“On the allotment I’ll be eagerly awaiting the first spears of asparagus while checking if the soil is warm enough to start sowing seeds direct. I find April weather can sometimes require a gardener’s judgement, but by the end of the month I hope to have sown beans, beetroot, summer and autumn cabbages, as well as planting out any salads, spinach and radish. I find it’s the perfect time to sow kohlrabi, which can be ready to eat in as little as eight or nine weeks – meaning that planted now, it will be perfect for crisp summer coleslaw.

“I’ll be planting out any peas – both of the sweet and standard variety – and putting peasticks in place for them to scramble up. Over the next few weeks I’ll continue to stagger sowings of peas, to ensure we can keep enjoying them in the coming months.

“Depending on where you live, April is generally a good time to get your spuds in the ground. I’ve previously opted for trenches, but this year I’ll be growing in deep pots to free up ground space. Last year’s best early potatoes grew in any garden containers we could use – think bins and deep canvas bags – making them an accessible crop for anyone in a small space too. So there’s lots to do, and plenty of time to win back the hens’ affections.”

Follow Rachel’s growing antics on Instagram – [@thegoodlifeainteasy](https://www.instagram.com/thegoodlifeainteasy)



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Once you have clubroot in your soil, you are stuck with it and unlikely ever to be clubroot free, however these recent introduction of resistant varieties mean you can still continue to grow brassicas successfully.



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Cherry tomatoes are the easiest type of tomatoes to grow, whether in the greenhouse, or growbags or containers on the patio. The bite size fruits grow quickly, ripen early and will crop in abundance. Check out our range of over 43 varieties - prices starting from just 79p.



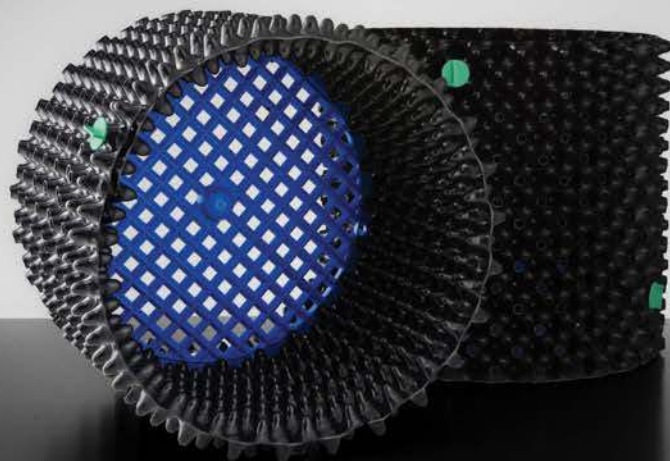
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Rose's top 5 for APRIL

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

Read this

Here at *Grow Your Own*, we could chat forever about growing fruit and veg. Sometimes, however, we like to talk about other garden stuff, such as garden design. *Small Garden Style* by Isa Hendry Eaten and Jennifer Blaise Kramer is a book about bringing elegance, class and happiness to the teeniest of outdoor spaces - be it a patio, a patch of grass, or even a pot! Take their quiz to find out which small garden style is yours (who doesn't love a quiz, after all!) and learn landscape lingo.



Get this

There's a huge houseplant buzz in the air at the moment, from how to grow award-winning succulents, to whether or not these plants do have air-cleaning properties. There are hundreds of houseplants that can bring a slice of the outdoors into your home. Want to grow something edible? Chillies, herbs and salads will all do well on a warm windowsill.



Insta this

I recently landed upon [@thefrenchiegardener](https://www.instagram.com/thefrenchiegardener), aka Patrick, who's currently residing in Berlin. I've loved looking at pictures of his 17 pots and four containers on his urban balcony and he writes wonderful captions to go with each post. His website has lots of useful information on growing fruit and veg from scratch, including picking pots, choosing soil and growing seedlings - check it out! (thefrenchiegardener.com)



Plant this

April is prime time to put in strawberry plants - and the good news is it's so easy to do! Strawberries do best in a spot in full-sun that has fertile but well-drained soil. Pick a spot and dig in a generous helping of well-rotted organic matter such as a homemade compost to increase the nutrient content. Plant in holes 35cm apart and in rows 75cm apart. For more information, see the RHS guide to growing strawberries on page 24.



Nominate in this

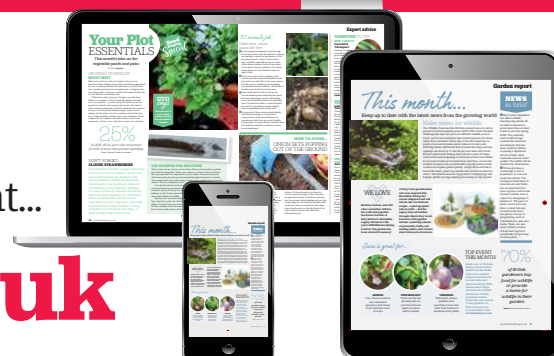
The Royal Horticultural Society's (RHS) School Gardeners of the Year competition is now open for nominations. Celebrating the nation's most dedicated young gardeners and the inspiring adults who teach them, the organisation is asking the public to nominate their heroes in three esteemed categories. Find out more - including how to put your own young garden heroes forward at rhs.org.uk



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*This photo was sent in by
steven_landscaping on Instagram*



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W I N N E R



Up your composting *Hotbin*

Get top-quality compost, quickly,
with the fantastic Hotbin Mini

HOTBIN has long been a trusted name in the horticulture industry, and now this brilliant product is available to small space growers, too, with the HOTBIN Mini (priced at £150). It is a slimline version of the original hot composter, designed for smaller gardens and for keen composters who have less waste - in fact, it is the perfect size for one or two person households. The HOTBIN Mini is a 100 litre unit which benefits from all of the features on the Mk.2 model but on a smaller scale. It is like no other compost bin on the market, and it will quickly chomp through all your food and garden waste turning it into rich, organic compost, perfect for

helping you on the way to brilliant harvests from your garden every year.

The innovative design and insulating nature of the material keeps the HOTBIN hot, creating a natural environment which quickly digests the contents, making hot composting easy - all without having to add any composting accelerators or activators!

If that isn't enough, HOTBIN reduces the amount of waste sent to landfill by composting more types of food waste, too! It allows you to compost nearly all food and garden waste, and turning it into healthy compost for your plot.

To find out more about the UK manufactured HOTBIN, visit hotbincomposting.com

When the HOTBIN Mini was tested by Simon Akeroyd last year, he said "This compost bin won 'product of the year' at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2019, and I'm not surprised. Its compact size makes it ideal for a small garden, taking up little space and it looks so much nicer than the open compost heaps. One of the best aspects of this HOTBIN though is the speed it will compost kitchen and garden waste, taking just 30 to 90 days. This is due to the unique insulated walls and air vents, enabling the compost to reach optimum temperatures (40 to 60 degrees). Other fantastic features include two temperature gauges, a raking stick, bulking agent and a kick start bottle. Unlike most composters, you can add all kitchen waste, including cooked food. The secure system reduces the attraction of rodents, flies or odours that open compost systems can have. And there is no need to turn the heap. What is there not to like? This has to be the future of composting!"



APRIL

UNDER COVER

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

WORDS: Sally Nex

Dos & Don'ts

- **DO** test whether sweetcorn seeds are viable before you sow by pre-germinating them. Lay them on damp kitchen towel in a plastic lunchbox with a lid and pop the whole thing in the airing cupboard. Start checking for germination after three days, and as soon as you spot an emerging shoot pot up the seed in its own 8cm pot for a guaranteed seedling every time.
- **DON'T** leave the ground bare beneath newly-planted greenhouse crops. Cover every inch of soil with herbs and flowers instead and you'll keep out the weeds, lock in moisture and help tackle pests. Heat-loving annual herbs like basil make a great second harvest and can help deter whitefly; carpets of French marigolds or calendula will attract in pollinating insects for bumper crops of tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers, too.

Top tip!

To grow giant gourds, enrich the soil with horse manure, and give them plenty of sun and water

How to avoid: Mealybug

Pests are emerging earlier in greenhouses these days as warmer spring temperatures follow close on the heels of wet but mild winters. Among the most persistent are sap-sucking mealybugs, so tiny they're almost impossible to spot until they've reached epidemic proportions. Often the only signs they're there are the tell-tale

clusters of fluffy white wax they leave on stems and leaf joints.

*You can put them off with chilli water, made from steeping hot chillies in water for a few weeks then decanting the liquid into a spray bottle. Spray plants regularly and you make them unpalatable to all sap-sucking insects. You can release the biological control *Cryptolaemus*, a parasitic ladybird which eats adults and eggs.*



Sow now: Pumpkins

Life can get a bit serious on the veg patch from time to time what with all those potatoes to plant and cabbages to cultivate. So lighten up a little and plant a pumpkin: as well as a dash of fairytale magic, you get a satisfyingly lush, jungly plant and spectacular fruits to turn into soups, pies and Hallowe'en lanterns.

Pumpkins are a favourite with growers who are up for a challenge. The current UK record-breaker, grown by the Paton twins in Hampshire, weighed in at just over a tonne and had to be lifted into place with a forklift truck. Though it's fun to have a go at growing your own giant pumpkin you will need lots of space – a single plant can scramble three metres or more in every direction.

If your garden would struggle to accommodate such a triffid, though, you can still grow pumpkins. The medium-sized varieties are easy to keep in bounds if you gently guide the stems round in a circle rather than letting them head off across the garden. You can also grow vertically, trained onto sturdy supports; and if you pick one of the dwarf varieties bred for more compact spaces, they're even happy in a roomy container.

3 VARIETIES TO TRY:

- **'Baby Bear'** is more compact at 1.8m across but still produces large, round fruits weighing in at around a kilo each (mr-fothergills.co.uk)
- **'Rouge Vif d'Etampes'** is the one to go for if you believe in fairytales: each slightly flattened, richly-coloured fruit is deeply ribbed, just like a Cinderella pumpkin (chilternseeds.co.uk)
- **'Dill's Atlantic Giant'** is well-known for producing prize-winning pumpkins, giving you your best shot at the record books. It's a behemoth of a plant with massive, forklift-sized fruits to match (nickys-nursery.co.uk)

Step by step: Pricking out seedlings

All that industrious seed sowing last month is paying off now in a forest of baby seedlings. They won't stay happy in a seed tray for long, though, so move them on as soon as they're big enough.



Seedlings have two types of leaves: the seedling leaves, then 'true' leaves which look like little adult leaves. Seedlings are ready to prick out once they have one pair of true leaves. The exceptions are the onion family, which look like blades of grass; prick these on when the seedling straightens out.



Use an old dining fork to break loose clumps of seedlings, then gently pull away one seedling at a time, handling them by the leaves only to make sure you don't damage the stem. Concentrate on pricking out the largest, healthiest seedlings as these are the ones that make the best plants.



Transfer the seedling to the pot, lowering it gently into the hole - you can use the end of a pencil to tuck in all the roots. Bury the seedling so the lowest pair of leaves sits just above compost level for short, sturdy stems and a stronger plant. Gently firm the compost back around the plant and water in.

TECHNIQUE



Make newspaper seedling pots

Making pots out of newspaper is good for the planet since it reduces the amount of plastic you use in the garden. But it's also good for your plants: seedlings grown in newspaper and planted out without having to remove the pot grow better and establish more quickly than those confined to root-squishing plastic.

You can buy a special wooden paper potter to create your newspaper pots (netherwalloptrading.uk) or just use a straight-sided shot glass, about 5cm wide. Cut strips of newspaper and roll them round the potter, leaving about 5cm overhang at the end. Fold this across the bottom of the potter, then crush it to make the base. Slide the pot off and it's ready!

You can use paper pots for sowing, just like modules, or for pricking out seedlings. Once you see roots emerging through the paper it's ready to plant, pot and all; the paper simply rots away, leaving the plant to grow on happily and unchecked.

Weekend Project: Set up soaker hoses

As summers get hotter and drier it's even more essential to set up automatic watering in the garden, unless you enjoy spending hours of precious gardening time spent trudging up and down with watering cans.

Soaker hoses are a great choice for larger areas as they deliver a higher volume of water along the length of the system. They're usually made of recycled rubber, with a porous surface which oozes water slowly into the soil without losing any to evaporation - so it's a really efficient way of watering. You'll need a filter, plus a pressure regulator to make

sure water is delivered at an even rate. Link these to the soaker hose via a length of ordinary hose. If you have mains water, fit an automatic timer to the tap, but if not attach the hose to a water butt pump then plug the pump in to the external electricity supply via a timer.

Lay your soaker hose in wide S bends alongside each row and cover the hose with mulch to lock in the moisture. Spend the first week or so tweaking the timing until you're happy the pipe is delivering enough water. Then leave it to do its job, while you get on with some proper gardening - be it sowing, or harvesting!





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Polytunnels *paradise*

Find out why polytunnel-growing can elevate your potential and discover the best products on the market



With the British weather being notoriously unpredictable, using a polytunnel is a great way of keeping crops protected from the elements. These under cover havens allow you to grow earlier and later in the season, too, so you can get the most from your edibles. Here, we showcase the benefits of using one of these brilliant structures in your space.

Grow for longer

Growing under cover in polytunnels means that your crops are protected from severe weather such as heavy rain, snow, ice and wind. These weather events could negatively affect the crops, but with the tunnel protecting them it means that your growing effort isn't wasted. These structures also allow you

to cultivate crops earlier and later in the year, as they can be used for growing winter hardy veg or shielding young plants, which have been transferred outside early on in the season.

Perfect planting conditions

Temperatures in polytunnels are warmer than the surrounding area, so they keep your crops nice and toasty during colder weather. It also means that developing plants get an optimum temperature to grow in – tomatoes and cucumbers do especially well in these types of environment. Polytunnels allow you to have control over a growing microclimate so that your crops can prosper.

It is important, particularly during hotter summer weather, to make sure that the tunnel has air circulating inside. To do

this, open the front door of the structure. Remember to follow good watering practice and don't install automated sprinklers that water from above, as it is far more beneficial to deliver this resource to the roots. Aerial watering can also encourage diseases such as tomato blight.

Pest barrier

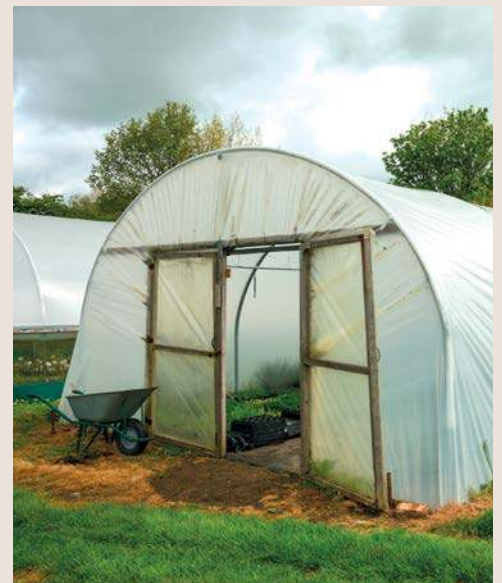
Creatures that devour your plants and eventual harvests are a nuisance and it can be disheartening to have a crop you spent time and effort looking after be ruined by pests. Polytunnels create a physical barrier to pests on the plot, such as squirrels and woodpigeons. They can also assist in minimising the spread of weeds, helping to reduce the time consuming task of weeding around growing veg.

Bigger and better harvests

Polytunnels are a lot like greenhouses, but are often referred to as the cheaper alternative as they are made from polythene as opposed to glass. Unsurprisingly, in terms of crops you can keep in them, those suited to greenhouse growing develop well in polytunnels, too.

Tomatoes are a prime example as they benefit from the warm conditions. Cucumbers also prosper in these tunnels, but extra supports may be needed to help this crop develop. Aubergines are another crop that thrives in under cover structures, and polytunnels provide the warm environment that they desire. Along with crops that love the summer sunshine, hardy specimens can also be overwintered in these structures.

With many different types of polytunnel available it is worth browsing a catalogue to see which one would suit your garden before making a purchase. Over the page, we've rounded up some of the best polytunnels on the market, so read on...



Advertorial feature



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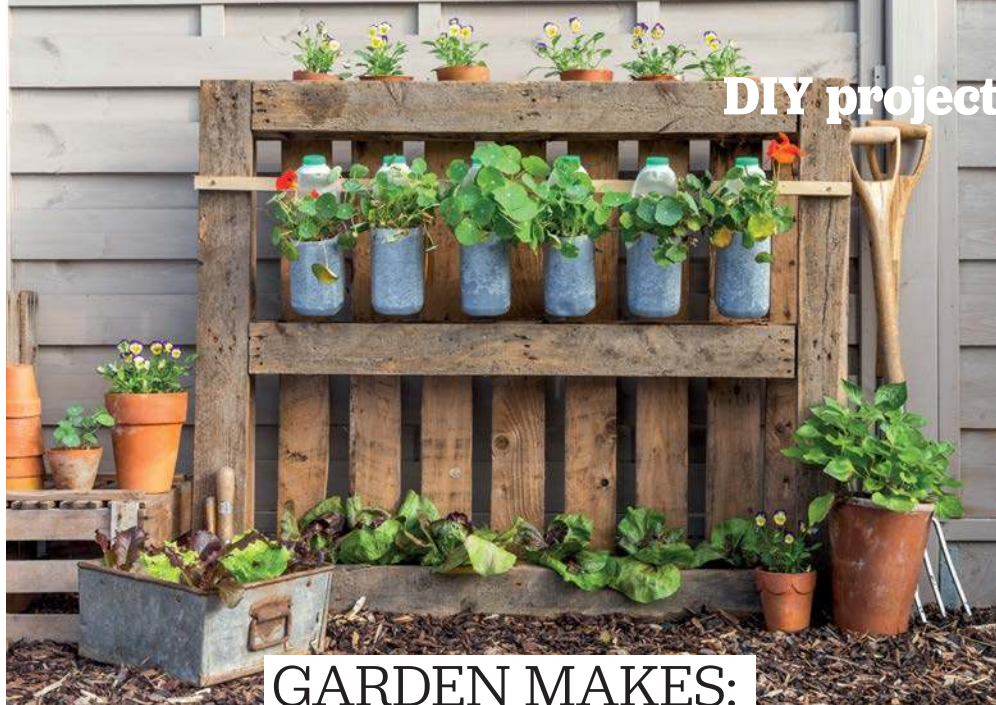
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- Watering can

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Pallet and milk carton planter

Create a decorative and useful planter from common household objects



1 Make sure your empty milk cartons are clean and dry. Carefully cut out a section of the carton, on the opposite side to the handle, which will be where you sow your seeds, so make sure you can fit a scoop of compost in there.



2 Saw a piece of wood to the same length as the width of the pallet, this will serve as the holder for the cartons, being threaded through the handles. Screw this baton of wood to the frame at the height you would like your planters.



3 Fill the cartons with a potting mix, and sow the seeds of your chosen crop. Nasturtiums look great in this kind of planter, as they will cascade down, attract pollinators to your plot, and the petals can be used as a peppery addition to garden salads.



4 Water the containers. You will need to keep an eye on moisture levels to make sure the soil doesn't dry out, but the plants don't like being waterlogged either, so regularly checking this helps to keep them healthy and happy.



5 Keep an eye out for germination - usually seven to 14 days after sowing for nasturtiums. Remember what you have sown in each container so you can check the individual care requirements for the plants throughout the season.



6 Add another decorative element to this planter by sitting some small, colourful pots onto the top 'shelf' to add more interest. We'd love to see what you plant in your pallet and carton planter, so do get in touch!



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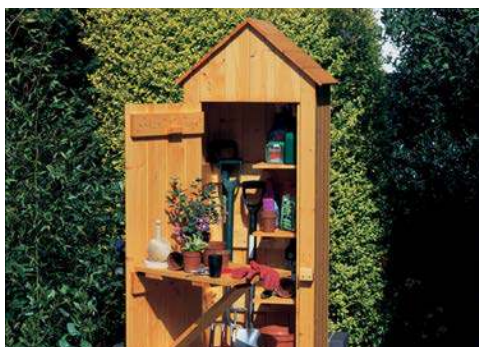
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G1 mini greenhouse (£849.00)

Safe, small and robust, this is the go-to greenhouse for urban living. With a simple building process, it can be unpacked and constructed within a single day - so if you've ever put flat packed furniture together, you're overqualified!

Evika



Gardeners Tool Shed (£159.95)

Invest in this smart storage unit this spring, perfect for people who love pottering about on their gardens, patios and other spaces.

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Garden Oasis



Multi-change tools (from £12.99)

WOLF-Garten's multi-change system comprises of 15 handles and over 60 tool heads to cater for all gardening tasks. After selecting the right handle for your height, the entire tool range can be interchanged with a simple 'click', saving heaps of storage space

WOLF-Garten



Balcony garden (£79.00)

This fabric multi-tier planter is ideal for those who want to grow their own but have just a patch of concrete to do so. With air-pruning fabric for healthy roots and good drainage, this planter is able to grow the maximum number of plants in one space

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PICK OF THE CROP

Space saving products

If you are short on space, but still want a productive plot, take a look at our top garden picks



Vegepod (from £129.00)

Grow your favourite fruits and veggies in one space with vegepod - complete with wheels, this vegepod trolley allows you to store the contained raised gardening bed in whichever nook or cranny on the plot

Vegepod



Compost bin (from £75.00)

Keen to recycle waste but don't have a big garden? This is one of the best compost bins for people without a ton of space but still want to help the environment. The closed sides prevent drying out and it requires no nails or screws to put together

Gardening Works



Lean To Greenhouse (from £111)

From city centre apartments, to courtyards - if your outdoor space is limited, and you still want to grow your own, Elite Greenhouses have a range of aluminium greenhouses and lean-tos. These structures look great and allow your crops to flourish

Elite Greenhouses



Robotic mower (from £949)

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Garden Organic masterclass:

Healthy spuds

Anton Rosenfeld shares his tips for getting the best from this plot favourite

Potatoes are one of those food crops that are easy to produce, but growing them well takes a little more effort and planning. Surprisingly, the humble potato can suffer attack from all corners of the biological kingdom including fungi, bacteria, viruses, nematodes insects and slugs. This should not make us afraid to grow one of our favourite foods, as a few simple steps can avoid most of these problems. In fact there are very few chemicals available to the amateur gardener to tackle them anyway, so organic methods will be the first choice for all of us.

A wide range of fungal diseases attack potato plants, but the one that we need to worry about most is potato blight as this can completely destroy the leaves and cause the tubers to rot. Most other fungal diseases only cause blemishes on the potato skin, but they are still edible, and not of great concern.



The most common bacterial disease is blackleg (*Pectobacterium atrosepticum*). You may have seen it and not been aware of what it was, but it causes slimy rots of the stem and tubers with a highly putrid smell.

Viruses are less easy to identify as there are a wide range of symptoms ranging from spots on the leaves, loss in yield and brown marks inside the tubers, to name just a few.

The humble potato can suffer attack from all corners of the biological kingdom

They are often transmitted by aphids, then carried in seed tubers.

And of course, we have to mention the inevitable slug, munching away at the tubers, leaving large holes and making them susceptible to rotting.

TURN
THE
PAGE ►

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.



Steps to avoid potato pests and diseases

Use healthy seed

Many potato diseases are transmitted through seed so there is a good reason to use healthy seed from a reputable source to avoid a build-up of problems. Potato seed tubers are grown at pest- and disease-free sites, and then tested. Although it is tempting to save a few quid by growing left-over eating potatoes or saving your own, these will not have been subjected to the same level of scrutiny as designated seed tubers.

Grow suitable varieties

Many of the well-known varieties that we find on our supermarket shelves have been bred to grow with high levels of chemical inputs so are susceptible to diseases. Choose varieties

such as Sarpo Blue Danube and Sarpo Kifli that have good blight and slug resistance and taste good, too. The Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board (AHDB) have a good database of varieties showing disease resistance (varieties.ahdb.org.uk).

Good hygiene

Rotate your plots so that you are not growing anything from the potato family (tomatoes, peppers and aubergines, too) on the same spot more than once every 4-5 years. It is also important not to leave stray potato plants growing in random places, including sprouting tubers from your compost bin as these can all act as sources of blight infection.

Top three potato pests and diseases



BLACKLEG is a bacterial infection first visible in the plants as a slimy rotting of the stems. You may see individual plants that are wilted, while others look fine. It is capable of killing off plants, but also tubers that may look sound can later rot in storage. The putrid-smelling liquid that the tubers exude can taint other tubers. Healthy seed, good rotation and good drainage all help to avoid this disease.



POTATO BLIGHT is a fungus that is transmitted through the air and from infected tubers. It usually strikes from mid-June onwards especially in humid conditions. The first signs are brown-grey spots on the leaves. It can rapidly spread to other plants and eventually to the tubers. Planting and harvesting early, and choice of variety are the main weapons against this disease.



SLUGS can seriously spoil a good crop of potatoes. There is no single magic bullet against this pest. If slugs are a persistent problem, it may be worth applying a nematode treatment, in mid-spring, when the soil has warmed up. It is also worth getting the tubers out of the ground sooner to limit damage.

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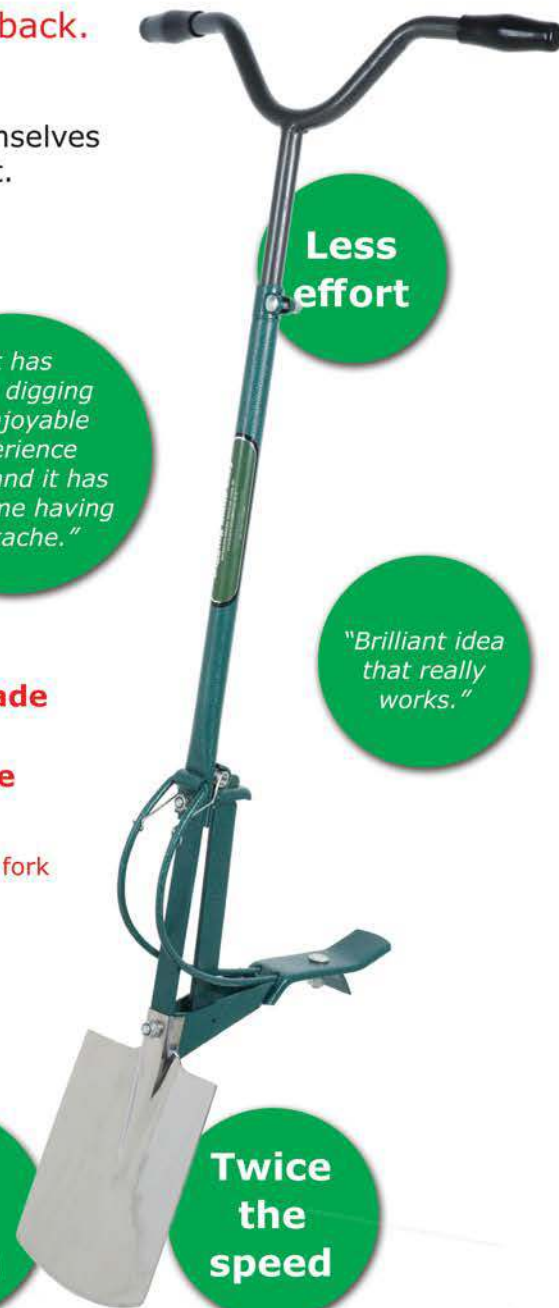
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GARDENING HEROES:

MICHELLE JONES

We chat with *RHS Gardening Champion* **Michelle Jones** about how she's inspiring the next generation of city growers

You've been described as a 'mum on a mission' – tell us a little about your school gardening project and why you've been given that label.

The gardening club at my son's school was non-existent in honesty. My children desperately wanted me to come to school and show other urban children how gardening was fun, challenging but also very rewarding. Living in a city can be very isolating; a lot of the families are in flats or tower blocks without access to outside space. The boundary of no funding didn't deter me from wanting to make this a success, so I got

to work pleading with companies to help us make this a viable project. My son says I never give up!

How did the initiative get started?

In the summer of 2018, I started gardening at home with my children in the untended community space we had in our flats. My eldest son Reece created a portfolio of everything we'd achieved and organised a meeting with the leadership team at his school. I wasn't an overly active person at school but this gave me a push to interact with other parents, and the wider community, to see who would like to become part of





team and make this idea a reality. Anna, Eleanor and myself soon became the gardening club leaders, we all wanted to offer a free club that was accessible to everyone at school, not just the children.

What did you hope to achieve with it at the start?

At the start of this journey I just wanted to be able to offer the urban children a space to help them learn where their food came from, to understand the growth process from germination to harvesting, to be more compassionate to the world around them; and appreciate food. I was extremely disturbed to know that some children really believed fruit and vegetables came from a packet or aisle at the supermarket. The main thing from starting this project was to remember just like a bulb or a seed it starts out quite small and dull but in the end something quite beautiful will come from it with love and attention.

As you've mentioned, people living in built-up urban areas often don't have access to a garden to grow in, how would you encourage people to find alternative ways of growing their own veg?

I'm an advocate for not giving up, "no" can quite easily turn into a "yes"! Living in a block of flats with a large piece of grass and no other use made me approach my local council in Islington to see if I could take over a small piece of that land to use to grow flowers, fruit and veggies, as allotment space in urban London is impossible to obtain. Local schools have a lot of space, even if its totally covered in concrete all space is space that can be greened and turned to good productive use. I started off growing strawberries on my windowsills and using recycled milk cartons to grow herbs and salad leaves. If a pot can fit in a gap, then you can grow something; that's my motto!

How important is it for young people to learn about the origins of their food?

I have always had parents that believed in understanding where food came from, they



always taught me that if you knew the process you will only respect it more. I find that many urban children are so far away from the agricultural spaces which grow our food they just don't understand the value and length of time it takes to grow and harvest. If all schools could offer an avenue to explore food growing there would be far less fussy eaters, less food waste and happier pupils. Society in general is so fast paced and far less interactive than 70-80 years ago, so gardening brings about a peace, it helps to educate in a relaxing manner and unites communities, too.

It's so great to get feedback from parents who don't have gardening space or actually do have gardening space but just don't use it to benefit them, telling you that their children are actively wanting to go outside and grow their own, and offer some produce to their neighbours. This inspires me to keep ongoing, that's how communities grow and benefit from this.

What sparked your own love for gardening? Is it something you were taught or taught yourself along the way?

I've always been fortunate enough to have access to gardening spaces as a child. My grandparents always loved gardening, they



came from the generation that used to grow food and swap with other people in allotments, and my father (being a Jamaican) always loved natural grown food, so our family had an allotment (before the space was made into flats). I will never forget going to my aunt's and being so helpful digging out potatoes from her back garden for tea, or walking the fields of Norfolk on holiday growing up and tasting fresh at its best, always in season just at the right moment. I've not been taught as such but I've learnt from a lot of great people along the way. The RHS Schools website has been my go-to place in everything 'gardening for kids' along this journey so far.

Do you still garden in your own time?

I can always find time to go into the garden. I prefer it to watching TV. In our community garden downstairs we grow many varieties of fruit, vegetables and flowers. Last year was fabulous, we grew corn from seed - which my children were very impressed about. We also grew cucumbers - I loved watching these spread over the upcycled bed and giving us an endless supply, and tomatoes - picking those fresh from the vine is delightful. The best thing for me is watching my children excited about not only eating, but tending and growing everything they eat.

You were crowned RHS School Gardening Champion of the Year 2019 Winner - how was this experience?

I still have to pinch myself when people say I'm the 2019 champion, I can't help but blush! It's been a total honour, I started as a novice and couldn't believe I was given such an amazing accolade for something I'm passionate about.

Being the 'Gardening Champion' to me means representing all the people who work so hard to educate the future generations and inspire kids to be more green-minded.

● Photography: RHS / Luke MacGregor



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SIMON AKEROYD'S

Flavour Garden



This month, **Simon** continues creating his drinking garden in Devon, by planting purple elderflower bushes

The aromatic flowers from the wild elder tree (*Sambucus nigra*) can be transformed into a gorgeous, elderflower cordial or sparkling wine, perfect for drinking on a hot summer's day. The elder is most commonly found in the wild in hedgerows, at the edge of woodlands or in open pasture. But even in busy towns, they can be found on the edge of parks and seeding into gardens.

But did you know that there are dark purple leaved versions of elderflower available that make a dramatic foliage feature in the garden? In addition, they produce gorgeous pink sprays of flowers that taste exactly the same as normal elderflower, but transform drinks into a beautiful, bright pink liquid.

Last year, I made the most sumptuous pink sparkling wine from their flowers, using sprigs picked from a friend's garden. This year, I'm going one step further, and creating my own mini grove of purple elderflower plants. I'm planting out hardwood cuttings that I took last year, and I'm also taking more cuttings, so that I can make even more pink sparkling wine in the future.

The most commonly found purple elder is called *Sambucus nigra* 'Black Beauty' which will grow to about 5m and produces a proliferation of pale pink flowers. There is also a variety with interesting dissected

foliage called 'Black Lace'. Both are wonderful for attracting wildlife such as bees, beneficial insects, birds and butterflies. The other added bonus of planting elder trees, is that in addition to the flowers, they also produce berries in late summer, meaning you have yet another opportunity to transform the trees' bounty.

Planting a mini pink elderflower 'champagne' grove

Elderflower isn't too fussy about its growing requirements; after all, it crops up just about everywhere in the wild. It prefers full sun but will tolerate dappled sunlight. It also requires moist but well-drained soil. Add some organic matter such as garden compost to be dug into the soil before planting. If planting more than one, give them a 2.5m gap between each tree. Prune them each year when they're dormant, removing some of the older wood, and retaining and encouraging young shoots that will produce future crops of flowers and berries.

The added bonus of planting elder trees is that in addition to the flowers they also produce berries in late summer



How to take a cutting

I prefer to take hardwood cuttings in late winter, early spring, as you end up with a larger plant faster than taking semi ripe cuttings later in the year.

- Remove approx 30cm sections of the new growth from the tree
- Cut to just below a bud
- Insert the cutting about two thirds of its length into a peat-free compost mix with 50 per cent sand
- Water the cutting occasionally when the soil is dry to the touch
- By late summer, the plant should be established enough to plant out the rooted cutting

Making pink elderflower sparkling wine

This is my recipe on how to make fizzy pink elderflower wine. It is alcoholic, so this is a drink for grown ups. Make sure you use champagne bottles, as they have to be strong enough to withstand the pressure from the fermentation occurring inside the bottle.





1 Heat the water up in a pan to near boiling point and add the sugar, stirring it until it has dissolved.

2 Add the lemon juice and zest, and the freshly picked pink elderflower heads. Leave it to simmer for a few minutes before leaving it to cool. Remember to give the elderflower heads a good shake beforehand to remove any lurking bugs.

3 Pour the liquid into a plastic or ceramic bowl, cover with a tea cloth and leave to naturally ferment for about four days at room temperature. Occasionally give it a good stir.

4 After four days, check to see whether the liquid is starting to fizz and froth. If so, the fermentation has started to occur naturally and you are ready for bottling and capturing that fizz inside the bottle. If the liquid isn't fermenting, try adding a sachet of wine yeast and waiting another couple of days.

5 Use a sieve to remove the flower heads and lemon zest from the water.

6 Filter the liquid through a muslin cloth and then use a funnel to fill the champagne bottles.

7 Push in the plastic corks and tie the wire cages around them.

8 Leave them in a cool place for two to three weeks. Avoid leaving the bottles in warm areas or direct sun as this can cause the fermentation inside the bottle to be too vigorous and explosive when you come to open the bottle.

9 The bottles are usually ready from two to three weeks after bottling. Serve them chilled in champagne flutes. Bottles should keep for about a year, but store them in a cool environment away from direct sunlight.



Avoid using standard wine bottles as there is a risk they will explode from the carbon dioxide pressure that builds up inside the bottles. Sterilise all the equipment before use to avoid contamination and the wine spoiling. Try to remove as much of the stems from the flowerheads as possible as too many can cause a bitter flavour.

To make approx six bottles of pink elderflower sparkling wine you will need:

- A large stainless steel saucepan (capacity at least 6 litres), large bowl, sieve, 6 champagne bottles, 6 plastic corks with wire cages, funnel, sachet of wine yeast, muslin cloth

Ingredients:

- 5 litres of water
- 700g granulated sugar
- Juice and zest from 4 lemons
- 18 freshly picked flower heads from a purple leaved elderflower such as 'Gerda' or 'Black Beauty'.



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

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GARDENING *for* **WELLBEING**



Ellen Mary grows magnificent magnolias and reveals her delicious recipe for preserving petals



To really absorb the feel good spring vibes, being outside is essential for the mind, body and soul. Breathing in the fresh air, catching some much needed rays on your face for a dose of vitamin D and smiling at the colourful spring bulbs will help you feel happiness, health and a boost of energy.

As you watch flowers starting to bloom, and the petals open up, consider the magnificence of this, how plants cope with so much from darker, cold days through dormancy and storing nutrients for bursting back into life when the time is right. This thought-provoking process can help us understand that we may also go through tougher times, but with rest and self care we can again bloom and enjoy the sunshine.

Magnolia

Magnolias in bloom are one of the most magnificent moments in spring, from the deep pink goblet shaped flowers of magnolia 'Susan' to the well known and loved star shaped flowers of the *magnolia stellata* 'Royal Star', they provide the most beautiful and charming colours to the eye. I fall in love with them all over again every year and see them as softly coloured but strong in appearance. Interestingly, it isn't just the flowers that make the magnolia such a treat but also the history. Fossil records have found that they existed about 100 million years ago meaning they were the first flowering plant on the planet, even before the evolution of bees. That is quite some history, so next time you pass by a magnolia, look up at the branches and beautiful flowers and remember just how incredible nature truly is.

Growing benefits

Firstly, there is a magnolia for everyone. Even if you are gardening on a patio you don't need to miss out because there are container grown varieties such as *magnolia denudata* 'Sunrise' which has the most beautiful cream goblet shaped flowers and streaks of red. Pollinated by beetles, they are also great for wildlife as well, so you will be sharing your garden with insects and birds all enjoying spring together. Mostly, they make a bold

spring statement and wandering around the neighbourhood, you are sure to see quite a few at this time of year plus there are a surprising number of medicinal uses from this truly marvellous and historic plant.

How to grow

Most magnolias will grow well in a sheltered position with plenty of sunshine in moist, fertile soil, although there are varieties that grow well in dry situations and with a little





HOW TO MAKE PICKLED MAGNOLIA GRANDIFLORA PETALS

The flavour is intense with a hint of spice and is quite remarkable. The petals can be pickled, fermented and made into a syrupy mix but this is by far my favourite and easiest way to enjoy the benefits – plus the jar just looks stunning as it turns a pretty pink.

Ingredients

- A sterilised airtight glass jar
- Enough magnolia petals to fill the jar (young or older are fine)
- Apple cider vinegar (to fill your size jar)
- One tbsp of salt
- Two tbsp of sugar

Step-by-step

1. Clean the petals (give them a gentle wash if needed) and put them into your jar
2. Pour the apple cider vinegar into a saucepan and allow to simmer
3. Add one tablespoon of salt and two or three tablespoons of sugar (depends how sweet you want to go)
4. Stir to dissolve
5. Pour the hot mix into the container and seal
6. Refrigerate for a week before using
7. Give it a shake occasionally

Serve on salads, noodles or anything needing a touch of fragrant spice

Stay up to date with Ellen Mary! Visit ellenmarygardening.co.uk and follow her on instagram @[ellenmarygardening](https://www.instagram.com/ellenmarygardening). Always check with your doctor before using any natural medicines.

shade, so just check which one is best for your garden. They can be grown from seed but be prepared to wait about 10 years before they flower, so cuttings in summer are generally the best way to propagate.

Magnolias can be grown in anything from smaller urban gardens to large landscapes – and both work equally as well. Pruning is best after flowering and keeping on top of pruning each year means even the larger varieties can be grown in smaller spaces. Mulch in autumn and ensure they don't dry out.

Making the most of the plant

As magnolias are native to China, it will be no surprise to know they have been used for centuries in Chinese medicine. Both the

bark and the petals are often used to help sleep, anxiety, headaches, allergies and asthma, plus much more. Extractions from the bark have been shown to be an activator of cannabinoid receptors which is being researched far more due to the CBD market but largely this plays a part in supporting the immune system, helping pain relief and preventing disease. Research has also found the bark may lower cortisol levels and therefore stress, plus fighting cancer. Supplements can be bought from the health food store and you can also make your own tea and tinctures. It is very potent, so make sure you go easy. It is also important to make sure you are safe to use it by checking with your GP first.



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April's ALLOTMENT INSPIRATIONS



On the plot news and advice for the month ahead



INTERNATIONAL ALLOTMENTS MOVEMENT

Phil Gomersall is President of the National Allotment Society

Are you aware that allotments are not just a British phenomena? The National Allotment Society is affiliated to the Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux which has a staggering membership of nearly three million members unifying the National Federations from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland. It produces an internet magazine called Hyphen with stories from across the membership and has compiled an 'International Good Sites Guide'.

The allotments in Northern Europe are very different to ours in that plot holders can purchase and erect chalets in which they can live for a good proportion of the year. Oddly enough, these National Federations experience all the same issues

that the NAS do in the UK. The further south you travel in Europe, the allotments become more like the allotments we know in the UK, with Germany and France being very similar indeed. However, where they differ to our allotments is that they receive much more Government assistance. Japan, however, is just developing its allotment movement and with land at a premium the small allotment plots are very expensive. They may also come with very short-term tenancy agreements.

The International Office also offers diploma awards to any allotment site fulfilling the award criteria. For example, Swinbrook Road Allotments in Carterton, West Oxfordshire, were awarded a diploma for their 'Innovative Projects'. Entry criteria for all awards is on the homepage jardins-familiaux.org



advertorial feature

Don't forget to compost

Who said composting can't be done with style? The attractive Beehive Composter is an eco-friendly way to recycle your organic waste, giving you a free supply of top quality compost to reuse in your garden. Made from long lasting pressure treated timber, the composter has a capacity of 386 litres and comes with a 15-year guarantee. Priced at £119.95 with free delivery. Order by calling **01543 889 900** or visit gardenoasis.co.uk

Q&As

This month we asked you...

Q What gardening jobs have you got planned for April?

I'm currently in the process of deciding on, and then sourcing, 400 seed spuds of the same variety. These will be passed to our local primary school for the children to grow on as a competition. Each child will be given a sack and two tubers just before the Easter holidays, with the brief that they plant them during that weekend. In mid-August, we'll be asking them to crop and then photo their haul.

**pikseinboots,
via the GYO website**

Up here with the permafrost barely out of the ground, we're probably a month behind



APRIL JOBS

- If you forced rhubarb crowns at the end of January or the beginning of February, then it's time to remove the forcing jars or other materials from the plants, as the stems should be ready around eight weeks after covering - so about now. Let them grow on in the light for a little while before gently pulling the stems from the bases of the crowns and removing the poisonous leaves

- Add slow-release fertiliser around the bottom of fruit bushes, raspberry canes and fruit trees to encourage a good crop. To help lock in moisture, especially if the weather warms up, make sure to mulch with a mixture of manure, leafmould and straw
- If the ground's warm enough, you can start sowing varieties of carrot, spinach, peas, radishes, lettuces and beetroot outdoors. Bear in mind, however, that the threat of frost has not passed, so new sowings might need some frost protection



middle England so we are in the midst of sowing and planting. We can get frost in early June so there's no rush to plant spuds until mid-late April. The polytunnel will be cleaned, dug and prepped for the show onions to be planted in May - it's a busy month!
Aberdeenplotter, via the GYO website



I will be setting up the supports for everything that will be growing vertically, ready for planting out in May. This includes pea and bean wigwams but also frames for my squash, pumpkins and cucumbers. The seeds will go into the heated propagator the first weekend of April as well.
Vegi potager, via the GYO website



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GROWING THE COMMUNITY



Shettleston Community Growing Project, Glasgow

Shettleston Community Growing Project transformed a neglected eyesore into an award-winning food growing project. It became a meeting place for people affected by social isolation and a place for local schools and nurseries to enjoy and to learn about nature and discover the benefits of being outdoors in a safe enclosed environment. Supporting local schools through all the stages of food growing, they grow, harvest and cook with the produce they have grown, to build their confidence and social skills and tolerance of other ethnic groups.

Ten years ago, local residents got together to discuss the possibility of transforming a waste area of ground, that facilitated anti-social behaviour, into an oasis for the local community. Since the gates opened eight years ago, the transformation has provided an area for local people to grow fruits and vegetables.

The garden has been a refuge to minority groups, working with the local Polish community, asylum refugees, women's organisations, mental health groups, epilepsy support groups, the NHS, and the local Job Centre to help people learn about the benefits of food growing whilst also upskilling the onsite volunteers - many volunteers take on a raised bed, which is given free to them for growing.

They have constructed a potting shed, a new glass greenhouse and repaired the raised beds, and made the kitchen accessible to carers and volunteers and plot holders.





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TRIED & TESTED:

Weeding tools



This month **Simon Akeroyd** is putting weeding tools under the spotlight and testing them in his garden



The removal of weeds in your veg patch is important to enable your vegetables to maximise the amount of nutrients and moisture in the ground, as well as preventing them from being shaded and smothered with rampant competition from neighbouring unwanted plants. It is estimated that a gardener spends 65 per cent of their time in the garden removing weeds. Thankfully, there are lots of wonderful products available that will firstly help provide you with more time in your garden for sowing, harvesting and planting, instead of weeding, and secondly, when you do have to do the weeding, it makes it a pleasure rather than a chore.

WHERE TO BUY

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

Hori Hori (Niwaki) £24

This is a beautiful piece of craftsmanship and oozes quality. The hori hori is a Japanese gardening tool that can be used for a wide range of gardening jobs such as weeding, digging, planting or sowing. It is used in a similar way to a traditional trowel, but the high quality blade slices beautifully through the soil, making light work of even the heaviest of ground conditions. It has a gorgeous beech handle and a 17cm blade made from carbon steel and a tough canvas sheath.



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

Fiskars Solid Weed Puller (Garden Oasis) £38.95

This is a brilliant tool for removing weeds with long tap roots such as dandelion, docks and thistles. I was really surprised when pushing the weed puller into the ground to discover that it lifted out a giant dandelion with the entire 25cm tap root attached to it with ease. It is very easy to use, and effortless to pull the weeds out, simply by using a pivotal motion with your foot to lever them out, and a mechanism on the handle to grab hold of the weed. The weed puller is of good quality and robust enough to pull out the biggest of weeds in my lawn.

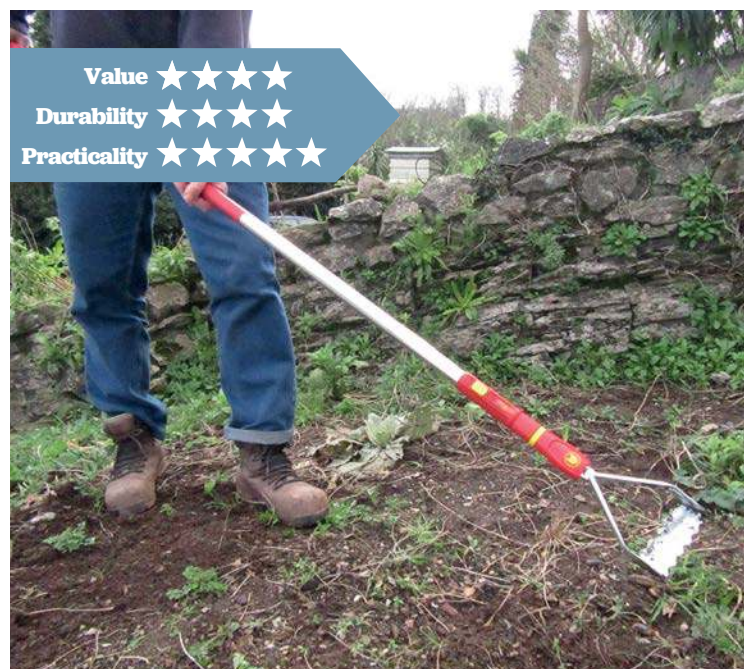


Value ★★★★★
Durability ★★★★★
Practicality ★★★★★

Planting and Weeding Knife (Spear & Jackson) £8.99

This traditional-looking planting and weeding knife with a hardwood handle is a high quality tool at a great price. It has a mirror polished stainless steel head which prevents the soil sticking to the blade and reduces weeds. It has a narrow blade meaning it cuts through the soil easily, while the serrated edge increases the cutting ability through roots.

There is also a chamfered notch for cutting through twine. One of my favourite aspects is the measurements readings on the blade so you know how deeply you are planting your bulbs. All in all, an essential tool, that every gardener should have in their armoury.



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

Multi-star system rake (Wolf Garten) weeder head £17.99 (handle sold separately)

The ingenious multi-star system by Wolf Garten provides gardeners with a fantastic array of 70 interchangeable tool heads and eight different size handles. I tested the hoe and soil cultivar heads with both a long and short handle and they were both easy to use, effective in clearing weeds and were of good quality. Changing the heads and handles couldn't be simpler; using just a button to release one head, and clicking another one on. The tools are robust and resistant to weathering.



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

Thermal weeder (Two Wests & Elliott) £37.69

Using a gas-fired thermal weeder is a far better method of controlling weeds than spraying chemicals all over the place. It works by eradicating the weeds through thermal shock with a flame, with the sudden increase in temperatures bursting the plant cells and causing them to perish. This thermal weeder is easy to use and is much lighter than other flame guns I've used in the past. It uses a gas canister which fits into the top of the gun. The flame lit first time, using the igniter button on the handle and quickly burnt away the annual weeds growing in my patio.



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

SpeedHoe Precision (Agriframes) £22.99

This is a really useful, cleverly designed hoe. Due to its short handle it is ideal for removing annual weeds in confined spaces, or raised beds. It has a stainless steel head, angled to minimise the movement of the blade when being pushed through the soil. There are twin points at the rear of the head which dig sharply into the ground helping to pull the blade downwards into the soil. The curved shape of the rear blades slices easily through the roots of plants. I've tried the long handled version in the past too, and I must admit, they make short work of removing weeds.

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The RHS organised with Kensington Palace for the Duchess of Cambridge to visit KHWG



working with the local Samuel Rhodes Special Needs secondary school. King Henry's Walk was delighted to hear that Samuel Rhodes is now offering horticultural qualifications to its students.

To make life easier for plot holders, there's a shared tool shed and manure is bought in bulk, reducing the need for people to drive to the garden. As with most urban plots, parking nearby is increasingly problematic. Heeding the council's previous issues with vandalism, KHW is gated for security, but it opens its doors to the public on Saturday afternoons all year round and also Sunday afternoons during the summer months.

Part of the funded initial build also included a hut, almost immediately extended to provide a building for teaching, and this is used by TGC, which, according to Phil, is now the child that has got bigger than the parent! TGC is a separate charity and uses several facilities throughout the borough, teaching around 8,650 children during

Growing together: King Henry's Walk Community Garden



Naomi Schillinger
showcases a fantastic
community plot in London

King Henry's Walk is a wonderful organic community garden in the borough of Islington in North London. Compared to most allotments, the growing areas are tiny (six square metres), but every time I visit, I am truly inspired by the level of productivity and the community spirit that oozes from these petite plots.

King Henry's Walk has been running as a community garden for 12 years now, solely relying on volunteers for its upkeep. Before that, the council had tried to transform derelict land into an open communal space, but found that vandalism was a problem, so they put a call out for suggestions from the community to manage the land. Locals put a

proposal together for a community garden, were successful in their application and the council awarded the garden a long lease and agreed to fund the initial transformation of the garden.

With little in the way of green areas in this neighbourhood, KHWG is a much-needed urban oasis. There are now 67 micro plots, a grassed area with benches, a wildlife pond, a woodland area with bee hives, a sizeable greenhouse, communal compost heaps, an outdoor pizza oven and an additional nine raised container beds. Some of these raised planters are used by people with wheelchairs with six used by their sister charity, The Garden Classroom,

With little in the way of green areas in this neighbourhood, King Henry's Walk Garden is a much-needed oasis



the year, many sessions taking place at King Henry's Walk. One of these courses is 'Every child a nature lover'. Typical sessions might include 'what grows in the garden', pond dipping, bug hunting, exploring the woodland area and the bee observation hive, and they do a 'plot to plate' session, using the open air pizza oven to bake the produce that they have grown in the raised beds and greenhouse. I love that within a relatively compact area, this community garden has so much to offer.

The plots always look productive and the garden as a whole well-tended and I asked how this high level of usership and upkeep is maintained. Phil says that they have monthly volunteer work mornings which build a great community spirit and during the sessions they always sit down for cake and coffee and a catch-up. Involvement in maintenance and helping with events is part of the agreement to being a plot holder and it certainly works in keeping this garden beautifully cultivated and ship-shape.

As well as being a strong community within itself, KHW has many imaginative ways in which they involve those in the community at large. Firstly, it offers the opportunity of being keyholders for £10 a year to all, which is a great boon for people without any outdoor space of their own and allows plot holders and key holders alike to sit and picnic on the lawn, wander in the woodland and commune with nature in a lovely calm setting.

Extra funding was obtained from Islington for 'Little Explorers', a free series of 10 half day sessions run by TGC for parents with young children to give the parents an idea of what's in the garden, thus enabling them to pass on wildlife and vegetable



growing knowledge to their children. These have proved very popular!

Additionally, the gardens runs eight to 10 workshops annually for plot holders and the wider public to attend. These are announced throughout the year and it's always worth checking on their website (khwgarden.org.uk) to see what's on offer.

Other ways of introducing the wider public to the gardens are also key events to help fund the garden. They hold three main events every year. The first two are a summer fete, akin to a village fair and an autumn produce show where they sell their own honey (200 jars last year!) and fruit preserves. Their third large event, the winter fair, includes wreath-making activities, more competitions and a visit to St. Nicholas' grotto in the woodland! Committed plot holders and key holder volunteers help to organise these events and there's a palpable feeling of goodwill

from everyone who's involved and those who attend from the nearby locality.

King Henry's Walk Garden's success has not gone unrecognised. It regularly receives a Green Flag Award, is a three-times winner of London's best community garden and has won numerous 'In Bloom' awards, as well as the Pattenden Award for wildlife diversity. These come with handy prize money too, which is ploughed back into the garden in the form of seeds and bulbs.

At the beginning of 2019, the RHS organised with Kensington Palace for the Duchess of Cambridge to visit KHWG to see how their project brings people together through gardening and food growing. TGC and KHWG sprang into action and organised for 30 school children to come along on the day to join in with January activities, such as making bird boxes and feeders, poetry, pizzas and planting up containers. During the visit, the Duchess also chose to announce that she would be co-designing the RHS 'Back to Nature Garden' at Chelsea Flower Show in 2019, which had families and childhood at the heart of its design and highlighted the proven benefits that nature has on physical and mental health. I'm sure she found plenty of inspiration from KHWG.

Before I left, I asked Phil what she likes best about the garden. She says that she loves the sense of community and working together towards a common goal.

From the micro to the macro, this garden seems to have got it right on so many levels, and I can only applaud all the members and volunteers for their commitment to making this garden such a much-loved, well-used and wonderfully maintained space for the whole community.

April's Giveaways

Get your hands on some great garden goodies this month

WIN! Garden on a Roll

Roll, plant and grow your own simple and beautiful garden borders. When planning a planting scheme for a border it can be difficult to work out how many plants to fill it with and which plants will look good together, this can result in over-spending on plants and a messy border that is tricky to look after.

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Planting the borders is a little like painting by numbers; simply, roll out and peg down the biodegradable paper plan provided and match 'lettered' plants with markers on paper. Remove the pots then plant through paper where indicated and cover paper with compost/mulch, water regularly and then sit back and watch your beautiful new border grow and flourish. For every border design there are four different widths and lengths (2m-10m) available. Prices start at £75.

Enter now for your chance to win one of two Garden on a Roll borders of your choice worth £250 each including delivery. To find out more about the products, visit gardenonaroll.com



WIN! A Gtech cordless mower

We have teamed up with Gtech to give one lucky reader the chance to win a Gtech Cordless Lawnmower 2.0 which makes light work of mowing the lawn! The Gtech Cordless Lawnmower 2.0 has a running time of 40 minutes and a charge time of just one hour. The simple three-step set up is easy and straightforward - you just insert the battery, push the activation button and pull the handle lever. The automatic controls adjust the speed to tackle thicker, longer grass and you have complete control over the variable cutting height. The large wheels enable you to move freely around your garden (not just in straight lines) and with no petrol to buy and store, no pull cord to snap or get stuck and no trailing cable, this lawnmower offers a low maintenance gardening solution. The grass bin has a capacity of 50 litres, and once you've finished mowing, simply charge the removable battery and fold the mower down. The lightweight frame and carry handle makes it easy to transport to the shed. Visit gtech.co.uk for more information.



WIN! Two places on our writer, Kim Stoddart's, popular resilient food growing courses



Kim offers a wealth of insight, new ideas and practical hands-on experience on her polytunnel growing and get climate change smart grow your own courses. With an emphasis on working with nature, the action-packed days cover everything from time and money saving tricks, including seed saving, mixed planting through to a demonstration of how to get the most out of your produce for longer. Plus, each course includes a lot on dealing with the greater extremes of weather we now face: from how to reduce the amount of watering required in a heatwave to how to protect the soil and plants over winter from an excess of rain - there are plenty of easy-to-employ techniques and practices which Kim covers in depth. Gardeners of all levels say they have benefited greatly from attendance. Run from her organically managed smallholding near to New Quay in beautiful Ceredigion, each day includes all refreshments, a tasty seasonal lunch, a copy of Kim's *Climate Change Garden* book and plants to take home. For more information, call **07796 677 178** or visit greenrocketcourses.com



WIN! A greenville bundle from Elho!

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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!*

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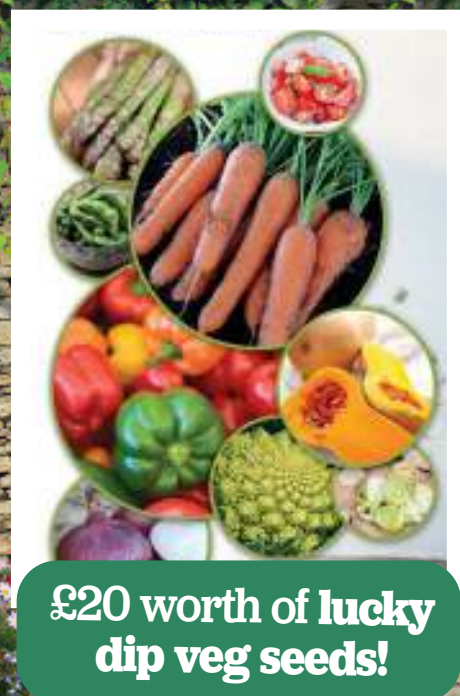
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One photocopied or handwritten form per person is acceptable. Alternatively, you can enter online at growfruitandveg.co.uk

Which crop features on page 22 of the April issue of *Grow Your Own*?

☐ Carrots ☐ Runner Beans ☐ Courgettes
(Please tick).

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- ☐ GARDEN ON A ROLL
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* To receive deliveries entrants must provide a daytime contact telephone number

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Gardening to overcome **ISOLATION**

Making connections with people through
horticulture can alleviate loneliness
– and even help you to live longer

Scientists have found that the more connections you make with others, the healthier you are and the longer you're likely to live, so keeping in contact with people is potentially the key to living a long, healthy life. Increasingly, health professionals are recognizing that gardening can be the perfect vehicle for people to connect. Research shows that those who belong to a community garden or gardening group, or who tend an allotment, feel less isolated and enjoy better physical and mental wellbeing.

Finding common ground

Many psychologists believe that our health depends on a number of key factors, and

feelings of belonging come right after our need for food, water, and shelter. Studies show that loneliness can have negative effects on physical and mental health, even affecting life expectancy. A study of more than 16,800 US citizens aged 25 years or older showed that feelings of loneliness contributed to a higher risk of mortality.

Research points to isolation as a factor in raised blood pressure and higher cholesterol levels, which can lead to heart disease. This may, in part, explain why those who are isolated suffer from poorer health than people who feel connected to family or their local community. Other research links the higher stress levels experienced by people who are isolated

with lower immunity and chronic inflammation – conditions that can, in turn, expose us to more illnesses. Scientists also believe that our health can be compromised when we have no one on hand to offer emotional support or help us with day-to-day problems. Studies have found that up to 20 per cent of general practitioners' time is spent on problems caused by social issues, such as loneliness and isolation. In response, doctors have started prescribing gardening as a way of alleviating the depression and anxiety caused by isolation.

Gardening for recovery

Social and therapeutic horticulturists and horticultural therapists help people to recover from, or cope with, a range of illnesses and disabilities through gardening programmes. Horticultural therapists run group and individual gardening activities, encouraging participants to deal more effectively with their problems.

Some schemes support those with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), using nature-based activities to increase feelings of wellbeing and, in some cases, aid rehabilitation and recovery. The skills participants learn can also bring respect, pride, a sense of belonging, and job opportunities. One scheme designs gardens set within spinal injury units at hospitals, offering a space for patients to take part in gentle rehabilitation activities outside. Similar programmes are on offer to those who have suffered a brain injury.

Gardening for community

A 2016 study of the health and wellbeing benefits of allotment gardening in the UK, and other research, shows how allotments and community gardens can link up people from different socio-economic, cultural, and religious groups, as well as help to integrate those who feel socially excluded. These green spaces are neutral territory, literally providing an area of common ground for people of quite different backgrounds to discuss growing techniques, share and compare knowledge, exchange skills, seeds, and plants, and work together to grow food, flowers, and resilient communities. A practical shared focus such as this can build life-enhancing connections and life-long friendships.

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