



Planting ideas for
Spring
Quick colour combinations

MUST DO

This week!
**Plant onions
and garlic**

- Plant out forced Xmas bulbs
- Start feeding pond fish
- Get on top of weeding
- Protect new shoots from frost
- Plant lilies in pots & borders
- 'Harden-off' young plants
- Pot weeping fig houseplants

Amateur Gardening



CHRISTINE WALKDEN

**How do I grow
cauliflower?**

**Buy a
new cold
frame**

We test six to
bring you the best



**Clean out
pot ponds**

It's a great time to
tidy water features



**Sow & grow
cauliflowers**

Expert tips from
Christine Walkden

**Repot your
blueberries**

to boost crops
and keep plants
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Perennials**

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4 Money-saving tips



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Tim Rumball Editor's letter

SOMETIMES gardening ideas just don't work. I planted a pair of apple trees in my front garden three years ago.

Apples are fabulous value plants offering stunning spring blossom and wonderful fruits in autumn. The two trees, pollinating partners sourced bare root from a reputable nursery, were planted as an experiment just 24in (60cm) apart. My aim was to grow 'one' tree when mature, with the stems touching and the branches interweaving to offer two varieties on a single crown.

Both grew vigorously the first year, but in the winter of 2015/16 canker appeared on a branch of one variety. It was a structural branch, but I cut it out completely for the sake of the tree's health, and planned to

train another branch to replace it.

Both trees gave their first crop – a good one – last autumn. Then I spotted more canker on the pruned tree – this time on the trunk in two places, with signs of a third infection at the graft point. With single or minor canker infections on otherwise healthy trees you can cut out infected tissue and the tree will recover. But the number of weeping sores, and the proximity of the other tree focused my attention.

The infection could spread to the healthy tree it's cuddling up to, so my only course of action is to remove and dispose of the sickly tree. It ruins my experiment, but I'd rather have one healthy tree than two dead ones.

Have a great gardening week.

Get in touch!

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Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



TopTip

If a neighbour has a plant you admire, ask if you can take a cutting, or swap it with one of yours that they like!

Compost, cuttings and seeds – simple ways of saving pennies

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Gardening on a budget

Ruth suggests some simple ways of making sure your horticultural habit doesn't break the bank

HAVE you seen the price of plants, fertiliser, pesticides and compost these days? For a supposedly relaxing pastime, gardening can give the bank balance a bit of a beating.

But it need not be like that, and there are many simple ways to save money without cutting corners, and still get great results from your plants.

Reusing and recycling materials doesn't just make environmental sense, it is a sensible economic approach too.

Plastic food containers are excellent seed trays, polystyrene can be broken up to use as lightweight crocks at the bottom of containers, and the protective fleece around new electrical gadgets can be used to warm soil and protect tender plants.

Charity shops are a fertile hunting ground for old clothes to garden in, as well as tools.



Washing up water can be used in times of drought

And just as we're advised not to go food shopping when we're hungry – so we don't buy food unnecessarily – we should never buy plants on impulse (what, never?!).

Look around your garden, see what you need, and then buy. Even better, grow from seed and cuttings – it takes a bit longer, but saves you pounds.

Similarly, if you're growing veggies, only grow ones you know you'll eat. Choose crops that store well (onions, potatoes), that have long harvesting seasons (cut-and-come-again salads), and are versatile and relatively easy (tomatoes, cucumbers).

Another easy way of saving cash is by never missing out on our weekly advice and seasonal free seeds. You can take out an annual subscription to AG for as little as £1 an issue. Call 0330 333 4333, or go online at magazinesdirect.com and search for Amateur Gardening.

Step by step

Dividing kitchen herb pots

Two plants from a supermarket one!



1 Remove the plant from its protective packaging, water it well and leave it standing, to drain.



2 Put a layer of fresh multi-purpose or John Innes No 2 compost in the bottom of two 5in (12.7cm) pots.



3 Using your thumbs, carefully tease apart the herb's rootball, making sure there are roots in each division.



4 Set each new plant in a pot, infill with more fresh compost, water again, and stand on a light windowsill.

Important test: Avoid wasting money on plants that won't thrive in your soil, by doing a simple soil test in the area you're going to plant.



Nine easy ideas to save you money

Reuse, recycle, and grow your own, to keep your pennies safely in your pocket!



1 Compost is expensive, so make your own from garden waste, and fresh fruit and veggie peelings. It will soon rot down and create a nutritious, crumbly mass.



2 Take cuttings. Here, I'm taking 'basal' cuttings from lupins in spring. Cut a piece of growth from the base, just under the soil, with roots attached, and pot it up.



3 Collect seeds from your favourite plants. Take them when they are ripe, dry them, and store them somewhere cool and dry, until next spring.



4 Divide overgrown perennials to make more. Dig them up and split them, making sure each section has healthy roots attached. Replant, firm in, and water well.



5 As long as the compost is fresh, seedlings and cuttings are happy in any pot. Last year I raised courgettes from seeds planted in old coffee pouches!



6 Install as many water butts as possible, especially if you are on a water meter. DIY stores and water companies do good deals, and butts come in different sizes.



7 Shop online – many garden centres will deliver for free if you spend more than a certain amount, and have discount codes for first orders, as well as loyalty schemes.



8 Get to know the plantsmen at your local market. The plants are often cheaper than elsewhere, and the stallholders will have a wealth of knowledge to share.



9 Save money on pest control. Catch slugs and snails in beer traps, deter them with crushed egg shells, ash or coffee grounds around vulnerable plants.

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Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



Deadhead regularly for more flowers

Restart regular watering and feeding of houseplants

TopTip

Temperature can still drop below zero, so don't leave plants on windowsills overnight, as drawn curtains will trap cold air.

Greenhouse care

Watch out for re-emerging pests



Hang traps for whitefly and aphids

■ As the days grow (hopefully!) warmer, the mercury will be starting to rise in the greenhouse, so check plants that have been overwintering there.

■ Water any that are starting to wilt, and don't forget to feed your citrus plants, making sure you don't overwater them.

■ Pests will start to multiply as it gets warmer, so hang flypapers around the greenhouse, and check for other unwanted residents.

■ Don't be caught out by the apparent appearance of spring. You can open doors, windows and vents on warmer days, and unwrap fleece from around plants, but remember to shut openings and re-wrap sensitive plants at night when temperatures can drop sharply.

Preparing houseplants

Check your houseplants before spring growth, says **Ruth**

A PART from varieties grown to be in flower over the Christmas period, most houseplants go into dormancy in winter, requiring little water and no feeding.

As the days begin to lengthen and temperatures rise, they start back into growth, and it is worth giving plants a once-over now to check they are healthy and pest free before they really get into their growing groove.

Houseplants can be susceptible to a

wide range of pests including aphids, mealybugs, scale insects and glasshouse red spider mites. Most of these can be countered by spraying with insecticide, but scale insects can be more tricky as the adults are protected by a hard shell. Pick off leaves if not too many are affected.

Resume regular watering, and feed plants once a fortnight. A liquid fertiliser added to water is best - never apply it directly to dry compost as it will burn the plants' roots.

Step by step



Let the leaves die back naturally so the bulbs reabsorb their nutrients



1 Cut away any remaining fading flower heads. If you keep them intact, the plant will waste energy setting seed.



3 Infill with a mix of soil and fresh compost. Water well, and don't let the bulbs dry out while the greenery dies back.



2 Dig a hole as deep as the bulbs, and wide enough to take all their roots. Gently tease out the roots before planting.



4 Mulch the bulbs. This adds nutrients to the soil to feed the bulbs for next year's flowers, and helps retain moisture.

Planting out spent forced hyacinths

Finally label the bulbs, so that you won't dig them up accidentally when the leaves have died back.

Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

Spruce up hard surfaces

It's time to tackle grime and moss on your patios, steps, and paths, says **Ruth**

A WINTER of wind and rain has left our patio looking anything but inviting. Moss and weeds are starting to grow in between the paving and at the sides where it meets the house, and dangerously slippery green algae is developing in more shaded areas.

Debris is also starting to gather in drainage channels, which could cause blockages and flooding in heavy rain, and provide a refuge for unwanted pests.

There are several ways of tackling patio grime. A wide range of cleaning agents and weedkillers are available from homeware stores and DIY merchants, or you could also use the organic option of water pressure and elbow grease.

I'm going down the latter route as I prefer not to use chemicals. I started by using a hoe to uproot weeds and dislodge moss in between the paving bricks, and then ran it along the edge of the patio, and in the drainage channels, collecting the rubbish as I went.

The debris went on the compost (after I had fished out any lurking slugs, snails and other unwanted pests), and I finished the job using a small domestic pressure washer. These are excellent gadgets that come in a range of sizes and prices, and can also be used to clean decking, paths and steps, cars and garden furniture.



TopTip

There are effective chemical treatments for algae on paving and wood patios, but they take time, and you'll still need to clear weeds and larger debris.

Pressure washers get rid of most of the grime

Protect young shoots as they emerge



Plastic cloches protect individual plants

THE milder weather heralds the re-emergence of border perennials from their dormancy and protective piles of mulch.

They are a welcome reminder that spring is on its way, but young shoots are extremely tender and need protecting from late frosts and pests.

Plastic cloches are a good way of protecting new shoots, but they need to be anchored as they can blow away in windy weather.

Tunnel fleece cloches can be used to cover more than one plant but, again, should be firmly secured.

You can also protect new shoots by mulching around the crown of the emerging plant. This will keep the soil slightly warmer, help retain moisture and

feed the soil too. Don't cover the whole crown, as this can cause moisture to sit, and cause the plant to rot.

Penstemons are left uncut through winter to protect new shoots. It is still too early to cut them

back unless your garden is extremely mild and sheltered, so leave them standing until late April.

Young shoots are a tempting feast for pests, including slugs and snails, rabbits, deer, pigeons and mice.

You can deter slugs with pellets or a protective circle of gravel or other rough materials. Cloches and netting can be used to keep away larger predators, but remove them once flowers start to form to allow pollinators to get to them.

Mulch shoots to feed and protect them

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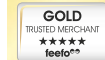
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Your Gardening Week

with Peter Seabrook, AG's classic gardening expert

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Begonia 'Dreams' is an example of how branding will be using more descriptive names.

Gerbera join peace lily (Spathiphyllum), spider plant (Chlorophytum) and dracaena to be sold as plants that absorb polluting chemicals in the air

Coming your way soon

Keep an eye out for new plants and new ways of marketing them that could change the way we garden, says **Peter**

EARLY every year the IPM Horticultural Trade Show is held in Essen, Germany to display all that is new and best in plants, cut flowers and horticultural production. This year there were 1,600 exhibitors from close on 50 countries packing 13 cavernous halls. Here we find the latest trends, ideas and novelties that gardeners can expect to find in outlets over the next year or two.

“There are scores of new begonias that flower non-stop”

There is a definite move to simplify plant naming as growers and marketing people are going for branding with descriptive names. Good examples include:

■ 'Easy Care', for a new range of house plants that survive with little attention;

■ Begonia 'Dreams', providing colour in the garden we could only dream about before!;

■ Air cleaning Gerbera 'Pure';

■ Duo's and Trio's where you get several different plants in one pot;

■ Herbs that come in Barbecue Mix and Pizza Mix, consisting of three appropriate herbs to give dishes a fresh flavour. They will go on sale this spring.

The improved garden performance of many new plant introductions is remarkable. There are, for example, scores of new begonias that flower non-stop, are easy to grow, will thrive in partial shade and three series are sweetly scented. Begonia 'Dreams' comes with two information labels one showing a lady the other a man – it is time more flowers were given to men apparently.

Inter species crossing of helleborus is increasing the range of flower colour, getting Christmas roses to flower for Christmas, with larger, face up blooms on stiff stems. Meanwhile research at NASA has shown that gerbera are the best flowers, either in pots or cut, to reduce polluting chemicals in the home. Hence the new brand Gerbera 'Pure'.

Peter's top tips for the shops



1 Trios are specially selected plants of similar vigour that grow together in one pot like these hydrangeas.



2 Men enjoy flowers as much as women so male models are to feature on flowering plant labels



3 Garden pinks have been bred with large carnation size flowers and named ReCarnation.

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Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



This is the last chance to prune blueberries before buds open

TopTip

Plump blueberry buds will produce flowers and fruit, while the smaller, flatter buds will develop into shoots and leaves.

Looking after blueberries

Ruth prepares her container shrubs for flowering and fruiting

I LOVE blueberries, but have to grow them in containers on the patio because they thrive in acidic soil, and our garden is extremely alkaline.

However, this isn't a problem, because the bushes are attractive plants, with deep blue berries in summer, and striking russet foliage in autumn.

Blueberry bushes don't need pruning for their first couple of years, and it's now the last chance for cutting back older plants – the optimum time is November to early March. If you need to prune now, remove dead, diseased and weak growth, plus any

dead twiggy growth at the ends of branches. But don't do any more radical pruning now as sap will be rising. Leave any hard pruning until next autumn.

Early spring is a good time to re-pot container blueberries if they have outgrown their space, before they resume growth. Always pot them in ericaceous compost, with plenty of crocks at the base for improved drainage.

Water with rainwater, as tap water will raise the pH of the compost. Fleece the plant during late frosts, in case flowers are damaged and fruiting is reduced.

Step by step

Repotting a container blueberry

Always use ericaceous compost



1 The new pot should be one size larger than the old one. Add crocks, and half-fill with ericaceous compost.



2 Gently remove the plant from its container and check the health of its roots. Vine weevil can be a problem.



3 Gently tease out the roots, and place the plant at the depth of its rootball. Infill with fresh compost.



4 Water well, and stand the pot on feet. You can add a mulch such as composted pine needles, or leafmould.

It's time to sow celeriac!

■ Knobbly celeriac is hardier, more disease resistant and easier to grow than its cousin celery, and just as tasty.

■ March and April are prime months for sowing it. As part of my 'budget week', I sowed mine in tin cans, and covered the seeds with a sprinkling of vermiculite.

■ When the seedlings are large enough to handle, they will be potted on into individual pots and kept at 15–18°C (60–65°F) to prevent bolting. They will be planted out in early summer.



Tasty celeriac is an under-used veggie

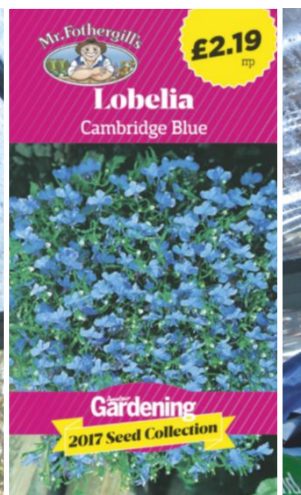
Sow celeriac now for a tasty crop



Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

Cover lobelia seeds with clingfilm until they germinate



TopTip

Always use fresh seed and cuttings compost, and water with fresh tap water, not water drawn from butts that can be contaminated with fungal spores.

Sow your free lobelia

Ruth shows an easy way of sowing your bedding seeds

THIS week's free Mr Fothergill's seeds are for a popular bedding container stalwart – lovely lobelia. 'Cambridge Blue' is a wonderfully vibrant shade that will complement pinks and peaches beautifully.

It trails, and because it has quite a compact habit, also makes a good edging plant for beds and borders.

Plant in full sun, and trim after the first flush of blooms has faded, and it should flower right through the summer until early autumn at least.

Lobelia seeds are as fine as dust, and care should be taken when sowing. Fill a seed tray with fresh seed and cutting compost, and dampen it, leaving it to drain.

Dampen a fingertip, and lift a few seeds from the packet and scatter them thinly over the surface of the compost. Alternatively, mix the seeds with a little

sharp sand, to make them easier to sow.

Do not cover the seeds with compost or vermiculite. Instead, simply stretch a length of clingfilm over the seed tray, and place the tray somewhere light and warm.

Seeds should germinate within 2-3 weeks, and you must remove the film after germination to allow air to reach the seedlings.

Transplant clumps of seedlings into individual pots or modules when the seedlings have developed 'proper' leaves, as opposed to their first 'seed leaves'.

Let them grow before hardening them off after the threat of frosts has passed, then plant them out.

■ Some earlier free seeds, such as calendula, may be ready to prick out (right). Always pick them up by leaves, never the stem, and provide good ventilation to ward off fungal diseases such as damping off.



Pricking out calendula

Transplant 18 Feb seeds into pots



1 Water the seedlings. Fill 3in (7cm) pots with John Innes No 2. Make a hole in each pot of compost.



2 Using a thin piece of wood or plastic, lift each seedling from its compost, holding it by its leaves.



3 Lower the roots of each seedling into a hole in a pot, and firm them in so the plant stem is supported.



4 Water with a fine rose, and keep them in light and warmth, where they can grow into robust young plants.

Your Gardening Week

with AG's indoor plant expert Anne Swithinbank



The pot's a bit big but with ties loosened, woody roots running deep, a well-aerated compost and careful watering, this fig will flourish

TopTip

Take care when handling *Ficus benjamina* as sap can irritate skin or cause allergic reactions. Wear gloves if you're susceptible.

Step by step

Potting on a weeping fig



1 Always have a really good look at the plant you are about to pot. The woven pot and several close stems shows how this weeping fig started out.



2 Make sure the rootball is moist before teasing a few roots out. Choose a pot just a couple of inches (about 5cm) wider than the original.



3 Using a 50:50 mix of JI No 2 and a multipurpose compost with a little added grit, the plant is settled at the right height in the pot and firmed in.

Popular fig's a strangler!

Weeping fig can be a deadly parasite, says Anne

YOU'LL have heard of strangler figs which in tropical forests, germinate in the branches of other trees.

Aerial roots grow down into the soil around the trunk and the fig encircles its host, strangling it and robbing it of water, nutrients and light. Eventually the host dies, leaving the 'strangler' embracing a hollow space. We might have stranglers in our homes, as the popular weeping fig (*Ficus benjamina*) sometimes behaves this way.

More often, this native of the warm, moist forests of South East Asia and Australia just grows as a large tree to 100ft (30m) tall.

Indoors and restricted to pots, weeping

figs reach heights of 6ft (1.8m) or more and are often sold as tall specimens. Their slender shape occupies little space and long, tapering, slightly twisted leaves are plain green or variegated. My young plant is only 18in (45cm) tall and needs a larger pot.

This plant has several stems growing out from a tiny web-like module within the pot. It might have been one cutting hard-pruned to throw up several stems, or more likely several tucked in together. This technique produces a good-looking potfull but could affect the long term prospects of plants doomed to share space. I'll just have to hope they won't strangle each other.

Caring for a weeping fig

■ Stand plants in good but not direct light, so close to a bright window in winter and further away in summer. Those with plain green leaves tolerate shade better than the variegated sorts.

■ Weeping figs are happy in normal room temperatures and tolerate a minimum of 50°F (10°C). Where



air is hot and dry, raise humidity by grouping with other plants or standing the pot on a tray of moist pebbles.

■ Overwatering/standing plants in water can prove fatal. Let surface dry out between waterings (pictured). Give established, active plants a balanced liquid feed every 2-3 weeks in summer, monthly in winter.

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Your Gardening Week

with Lucy Chamberlain, AG's fruit and veg expert



Lucy is a former AG gardening editor, and edited a national Grow-Your-Own magazine. A BBC Essex radio gardening expert, RHS author and lecturer, she's also Head Gardener at East Donyland Hall, Essex



TopTip

To warm up a large area of soil, cover it with black plastic sheeting weighed down with bricks. Black warms faster and suppresses weeds. Clear plastic works but encourages weed growth

Step by step

How to use different cloche styles



1 I use rigid plastic cloches a lot for covering short rows of veg. Glass is more insulating but also more costly. Peg lightweight designs down.



2 Being a cat owner, I also have lots of wire mesh cloches, too. While keeping moggies off your precious plants, they let air circulate.



3 Root flies and cabbage white butterflies are a menace. Keep them off with tunnel cloches of butterfly net or Enviromesh (above).

Cloche early crops

Warm the soil to speed seed germination, says **Lucy**

MARCH is a good month to tackle early sowings and transplants, and cloches can help with this no end.

In the first instance they help to warm up the earth, allowing young veg seeds to quickly germinate and establish. Others offer protection from pests by providing a physical barrier. You can buy tunnel cloches to cover whole rows, or bell cloches that sit neatly over

individual plants. Your cloche can be made of glass or rigid plastic – both offer excellent cold protection, but glass is heavier and more fragile. Put these in place a fortnight or so before you plan to sow or plant out to allow the warmth to really penetrate the earth. Alternatively you might use one made of fine mesh netting to organically keep aphids and root flies off your precious crops. Here are three of my favourites:

Harvest citrus fruits

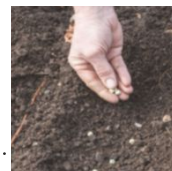


HAVE you been lucky enough to sniff a citrus in full bloom? The scent of those creamy-white flowers is exquisite!

They often bloom in winter, and because the pollinated flowers take around ten months to develop into fruit, you'll often see trees laden with a crop as well as blooms at this time of year. People often ask me "how do you know when the fruits are ready to pick?" and the answer is straightforward.

The skin will gradually turn from green to completely yellow, orange or whatever colour the mature fruit should be. Once ripe, fruits can hang on the tree for many weeks more, so you can 'store' them there till needed. When that time comes don't pick them – cut them with secateurs as the stalks can be quite tough.

Next week: Lucy explains how to divide perennial herbs, sow peas (right) for shoots and pods, grow seeds for healthy eating, and hand pollinate peaches



Sow now for herbs to pick through spring and summer

Grow herbs from seed

FOR flavour, there's little to beat herbs. Where would our curries be without coriander, how would fish taste devoid of dill and (heaven forbid) imagine tomatoes without basil!

Many perennial herbs like oregano, mint, thyme, chives and sage are propagated by cuttings or division (we'll cover this in another week). Annual and biennial herbs, however, should be started off from seed.

Chervil, basil, coriander, caraway, dill, parsley, fennel, summer savoury – all these herbs bring their own unique flavours to your kitchen and all can be raised from seed this month. All you need is a heated propagator, some modular trays of good-

quality seed compost and a well-lit position. Apart from parsley which I sow in seed trays due to its slow germination, all other herbs I've mentioned can be sown into modules. Just water these well, make a small dent in the top of each cell with a pencil or dibber and sow four or five seeds per dent. Cover the seeds with a little more compost, water them in lightly and place in a propagator at 18°C.

Positioned in a well lit spot germination should take 7-10 days. There's no need to thin the seedlings – just pot the clump up when large enough and gradually harden them off in late April or early May, ready to plant in a sunny, warm spot outside.



There are still good apples to eat from store

Use what's left of stored fruits

REGULAR readers might recall me filling up this fruit store way back in October, and it's been offering us a steady supply of apples ever since.

The 'Bramleys', 'Coxes' and 'D'Arcy Spices' have been slowly mellowing in flavour, the mice have had the odd nibble or two, and any mouldy fruits have been removed as soon as they appear. But as time passes, quality deteriorates, so the day has now come for me to use up the best of what's left, and to dispose of the rest.

These spares won't go to waste. I'm throwing them out on the lawn so that ground-feeding birds such as blackbirds can have a final feed. Let's hope they remember my generosity when the cherries are ripening!

Pick purple sprouting

EVEN though this vegetable can take around a year to mature, I just wouldn't be without it. These plants were sown in the last week of March 2016 and are only just beginning to yield their tasty purple spears now, but they're worth the wait.

I've got two varieties here to extend the harvest period – 'Claret', an F1 hybrid which crops this and next month, plus 'Early Purple' which began to produce spears a full month earlier. But I needn't have stopped there because plant breeders have now given us summer- and autumn-cropping varieties that don't need exposure to a big chill in order

to produce their harvest (e.g. 'Summer Purple', 'Santee' and 'Rudolph').

Gone are the days when purple sprouting harvests were confined to the spring garden. Having said that, I will always think of this as a spring veg, invaluable for filling what's known as the 'hungry gap' during April and May.

Because the spears are produced over such a long period you only need three or four plants to get an impressive yield. Snap off the tender shoots with a good length of stem attached, while the florets are still tight in bud. Then be ready with the seed packet to sow next year's crop!



Harvest purple sprouting spears while the buds are still tight (inset)

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Your Gardening Week

with Bob Flowerdew, AG's organic gardening expert



Give your shallots, onions and garlic a head start by planting sets (inset) and cloves. Do it soon for a tasty harvest this autumn

All Time Inc

Let's talk about sets

Plant onion sets, garlic cloves and leeks now, to give them as much growing time as possible before summer, says **Bob**

AS with so much in gardening, when to start each crop depends on just what we're after. If it's show-winning exhibits or super-early harvests then we've missed the window by about three months. But then those crops also require the finest conditions under warmed cover and (probably) artificial light.

So which vegetables should you make a start on first in the open ground? Many would suggest potatoes; however, other than a batch of earlies under cloches, spuds are better off waiting till the soil is significantly warmer. Parsnips, carrots or peas are possible first sowings, though again these are hard to germinate in cold, wet soil. Broad beans are the best candidate and indeed well worth sowing now.

But without a doubt it is the alliums – onions, shallots, garlic and leeks – that you need to get going as soon as possible to give them lots of growing time before summer. Once mid-summer arrives, the first three wither back to their bulbs, while leeks are simply slow. Thus, we need to sow onions and leeks as soon as our soil is friable. This can be right now in sheltered southern

gardens, but further north not for another month or more, which may be rather late.

Of course, sowing seed asap direct in situ is first choice for good bulbs. However, sowing in cells or modules under cover then planting out later is a much safer option, and one that is more likely to give a successful – albeit smaller – crop.

“It's alliums you need to get going as soon as possible”

Fortunately, we also have the option of planting out onion sets, along with shallot sets and garlic cloves.

Small bulbs that grow into much bigger ones, these steal a huge march on the seeds and because they do not require such warm soil, they can go in much sooner. So buy yours today and get them in the ground straightaway! ■

Bob's to-do list for the week



1 Last opportunity to prevent leaf curl disease by spraying copper mixture (try Vitax) on outdoor peach trees.



2 Spread, a handful of lime per square yard, where you plan to be growing brassicas later this year.



3 Leave all shoots on early potatoes but for main crops leave only the best three so you get bigger tubers later.



4 Change the food you put out for birds as nuts can choke chicks, give them bread crusts and fat balls.

Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening wildlife expert Graham Clarke

What's On

4th March
– 11th March

■ **7 March:** RHS Spring Lecture 'The World of Hepaticas' with nurseryman John Massey at Ashwood Nurseries, Ashford, Kingswinford, West Midlands, DY6 0AE. RHS members £20, non members £25. Refreshments included. Limited tickets, booking essential.

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■ **8 March:** Willow weaving. RHS Garden Wisley, Wisley Lane, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. 10.15am.

☎ 0203 1765 830,

📧 rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisely

■ **10 March:** Spring Pruning. RHS Garden Wisley, Wisley Lane, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB; ☎ 0203 1765 830,

📧 rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisely



Spring pruning at Wisley

■ **10 March:** Winter walk. RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Crag Lane, Harrogate, North Yorks HG3 1QB;

☎ 0203 1765 830,

📧 rhs.org.uk/gardens/harlow-carr

■ **11 March:** What Now? Your garden in March and April. RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creepthedge Lane, Rettenden Common, Chelmsford CM3 8ET

☎ 0203 1765 830,

📧 rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall

■ **11 March:** Starting from Scratch: How to Garden. RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creepthedge Lane, Rettenden Common, Chelmsford CM3 8ET;

☎ 0203 1765 830,

📧 rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall

■ **11 March:** The Productive Greenhouse in Spring: RHS Garden Wisley, Wisley Lane, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB; ☎ 0203 1765 830,

📧 rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisely

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The common lizard is coming out of hibernation around now

Slow worms will eat garden slugs

Lizard lowdown

Lizards are common abroad but there's always a chance that you'll find one in your garden too, says **Graham Clarke**

WE don't think of lizards as something to see in Britain, as they are mainly indigenous to warmer countries.

There are, however, three types that can be found here with some, like the Sand Lizard, being particularly rare.

■ **Slow Worm:** Lives in damp places where there is lots of lush vegetation. If this sounds like your garden then you may well find them living under stones, where they like to spend most of their time, only venturing out at dusk and after rain. The good thing for gardeners is that slow worms eat slugs although their appetite also extends to worms. Moving very slowly across the ground they are common in gardens with long grass and can be encouraged by placing black plastic or a piece of tin on the ground, under which they will live happily.

Unlike other lizards the slow worm grows up to 20in (50cm) and doesn't have legs. It's easily distinguished from a snake because it blinks with eye-lids; snakes don't. The tail is fragile and is easily broken; hardly growing back again.

Smooth, shiny and grey-copper in colour, the female often has a stripe along the back, while males may have some bluish spots. Females give birth to active young. One of the biggest dangers in gardens for slow worms is the domestic cat.

■ **Common or Viviparous Lizard:** By comparison this lives in dense vegetation in fairly sheltered and therefore humid places, particularly grasslands, heathland, sand dunes, bogs – and roadsides. Up to 2½in (6.5cm) long; the tail is twice the body length, and is relatively stout. The body is grey, brown or olive green, with a variable pattern of streaks and spots, while the head and legs seem disproportionately small. Underneath the colours can be white, yellow or brick-red and it gives birth to live young, which are bronzy-black. You are more likely to see this lizard now, as it is coming out of hibernation.

■ **Sand Lizard:** Rare in Britain, this egg-layer grows to 3½in (9cm) long. It is stocky with short legs and a deep head. The typical male has green sides (brighter in the breeding season) and a brown back with a darker central stripe. Females are grey or brown and only rarely have green at the sides; the dark stripe along the back is usually fragmented. In Britain it's mostly seen in the south, the north-west and Wales, on roadsides, brownfield sites, sand dunes, heathland and rough pasture.

All lizards are reptiles, and carnivores, and they have tough, waterproof skins clothed with scales, a feature that readily distinguishes them from newts – which are classed as amphibians.

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Your Gardening Week

with Martyn Cox in his city garden



Keeping the bed in good shape will help bulbs to prosper



All Time Inc. unless stated / Alamy Images

Bulb spectacular

For a great spring show it's all about looking after your bulbs before, during and after flowering says **Martyn**

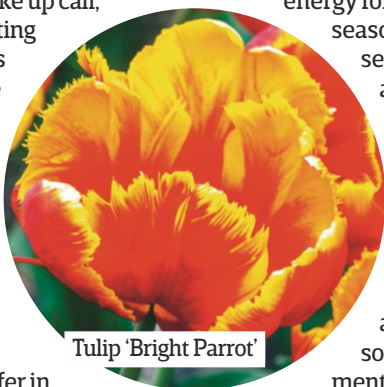
LAST year the display from spring flowering bulbs in my front garden was pretty disappointing, largely due to them being smothered by vigorous perennials, self-seeded foxgloves and shrubs that were in dire need of being pruned. The poor showing acted as a wake up call, so I ruthlessly set about editing my beds to ensure the bulbs could prosper this year. The signs are my plan is working and I'm looking forward to daffodils and grape hyacinths in the early part of the season, followed by tulips and alliums. Still, I can't rest on my laurels and will aim to maintain the bed more effectively so they don't suffer in quite the same way again.

Keeping the bed in good shape will help them thrive, but it's important to give bulbs themselves some attention. When flower buds appear it's a good idea to feed them

with a fertiliser high in potash, such as liquid tomato food – reapply several times during their flowering period. If the weather is dry, water to prevent a check to growth.

Deadheading will keep the plants looking tidy and ensuring they conserve energy for blooming the following season, rather than producing seeds. It may not always look attractive, but you should allow leaves to die back naturally as they help to make sugars that build up bulbs and form offsets.

It always surprises me how many gardeners automatically carry out some of the jobs I've just mentioned, but very few bother to feed the bulbs, loosen the soil surface or mulch before they've started to flower. Don't ignore them in early spring, give them some care and they'll perform even better. Follow my tips (right).



Tulip 'Bright Parrot'

Step by step

Tips for the best bulb display



1 Soil around bulbs can cap over stopping moisture reaching roots. Use a trowel to fluff up the surface and break through this hard layer.

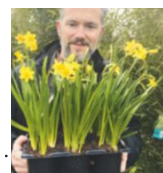


2 Scattering some general-purpose fertiliser around emerging clumps will ensure your bulbs always put on the best display possible.



3 A 2in (5cm) layer of composted bark or leafmould around bulbs (with a gap to avoid rotting) will help retain moisture and set off the flowers.

Tip: If you forgot to plant spring bulbs in autumn, snap up some ready grown bulbs in pots or cell packs. They're more expensive than loose bulbs but provide a quick fix of colour and will flower again next year.



Cleaning out the raised pond

CONTAINER ponds like mine really shouldn't need cleaning out that often because they generally don't attract as much debris as those that cover a larger area. There are fewer plants within its confines and any leaves that drop from above are spotted easily. Soil, stones and other materials are unlikely to find their way in as the surface is raised above the ground.

Unfortunately, my pond has a thick layer of sediment on the bottom that is clearly visible on a

bright day – most of it is made up of compost and grit, a result of my aquatic plants getting knocked over when my dog uses the pond as a drinking bowl.

To get things back on track I use a bucket to remove all of the water so I can scoop out the sludge from the bottom – it's not a hard job, but it's certainly a chore. Once it's removed I'll use clean water to scrub the sides and bottom, bailing out the dirty water. After it's clean, all I need to do is pop in my hose and refill.



Old pond water needs to be removed so that cleaning can commence

Exotic lilies for small spaces



Bulbs should sit about 4in (10cm) below the top layer of compost

SUMMER flowering? Check. Blousy blooms? Check. A whopping scent? Check. Relatively easy to look after? Check. Let's face it, lilies tick all the boxes. Fortunately, there are plenty of compact lily varieties that are perfect for container growing – a container that's 12in (30cm) wide or more is ideal.

Cover drainage holes in the base with a layer of crocks, then half fill with compost – specialist bulb planting compost or gritty John Innes No.2. Space three to five bulbs on top then cover with more compost, so bulbs sit about 4in (10cm) below the surface. Leave a 1in (2.5cm) gap between the top and the lip

of the container. Water regularly during the growing season, feeding with a high potash fertiliser once buds appear. Compact lilies don't need staking, but if you want to try taller ones in pots, then their stems will need supporting with a cane.

Deadhead fading flowers to prevent seed heads forming, and cut the main stem to ground level when it turns brown in autumn. Lily bulbs can be left in situ once they've done their thing, but put pots in a greenhouse, front porch or provide some other type of protection from excessive winter rain to prevent the bulbs from rotting.

3 good lilies for pots



■ **Lilium formosanum var. pricei:** Knee high stems are topped with huge white flowers packing a big scent. Boundary Nursery (📧 boundarynursery.co.uk).



■ **Lilium 'Night Rider':** A fairly recent introduction with 2ft (60cm) tall stems carrying near black flowers. Thompson & Morgan (📧 thompson-morgan.com).



■ **Lilium 'Elodie':** An Asiatic variety that boasts stunning baby pink flowers on thigh high stems. J Parkers (📧 jparkers.co.uk).

Your Gardening Week

with Martyn Cox in his city garden

Sowing sweet peppers

FIERY chilli peppers have grown massively in popularity over the past decade, threatening to completely overshadow their milder relative...sweet peppers. What a shame. These docile capsicums add an ornamental look in the garden and are equally versatile in the kitchen. Seeds will germinate easily indoors resulting in young plants that will be ready to go outside in late spring.

I'm sowing a variety called 'Gourmet', which produces squat bright orange fruit but there are plenty of other great ones to try. 'Bell Boy' has blocky, red and green fruit, while 'Corno di Toro Rosso' is a classic long, tapering pepper from Italy.

My method for sowing is easy. Fill a small pot with good quality seed compost, flatten it down to leave a level surface,

then sow a few seeds on top. Cover with a fine layer of vermiculite, water and place in a heated propagator. If you don't have one, cover the pot with a plastic bag. Remember to add a label, especially if you're sowing more than one variety.

When seeds have germinated, remove the pot from its protected environment and place on a light windowsill. Give each seedling its own 4in (10cm) pot when about ¾in (2cm) tall. Move them into a slightly bigger container if you spot roots poking through the drainage holes in the base.

At 8in (20cm) tall, or before if plants start to lean, stake with a pea stick. Pinch out the tops when they are about 12in (30cm) tall to encourage lots of branches. Plants will be ready to go outside when all danger from frost has passed.



I'm looking forward to 'Gourmet' peppers (inset)



Remove dead, diseased and dying growth

Thinning out congested shrubs

I WAS recently coerced into helping a friend prune some overcrowded deciduous shrubs. He had no idea what to do, so I explained that it's best to start by removing the three Ds – dead, diseased and dying growth.

After this it's much easier to see what you're doing. I cut several larger branches back to ground level, leaving a reduced framework that light and air could penetrate more easily.

Feeding fruit in pots

THERE'S nothing better and more satisfying than picking fruit that has ripened to perfection on your trees and bushes.

Now is the time to feed those growing in pots. This will ultimately help to encourage healthy growth, plenty of flowers and a bumper crop when it comes to harvesting time. Sprinkle a general granular fertiliser over the surface and work lightly into the surface. Follow the instructions on the packet to avoid giving the plant an overdose.



Use a general granular fertiliser

Next week

with Tamsin Westhorpe

AG's country garden expert



Planning a fernery

Preparing to move established ferns to a favoured spot.

Sowing sweet peas

Tamsin is keen to try out a local variety she has found.

Potted blueberries

Care tips that will help you grow the most delicious fruit.

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Lily beetle is a major gripe for gardeners



Brian Shumstock



Wine weevil is one of the worst plant pests

Garden nightmares probed

RHS to compile national chart of worst plant-wreckers

AMATEUR Gardening readers are being asked to help draw-up a nation-wide picture of the plant pests and diseases that are plaguing their gardens.

The Royal Horticultural Society has teamed up with the Royal Holloway University of London to launch the study, which will result in an up-to-date chart of the most damaging problems that gardeners currently face.

It will allow scientists to prioritise their research efforts by focusing on the most troublesome bugs – especially new pests

and diseases, or those that are less likely to be wiped-out by harsh winters.

Drill deeper

RHS head of plant health, Dr Gerard Clover, said: "The RHS is fortunate to already have a bank of rich information about the pest and

"We need to get the full picture"

disease problems gardeners face every year.

"This new research is designed to drill down deeper to get to those core, persistent problems. When considering the question of what are the most important pests and diseases to commercial horticulture, the focus is on the economic impact, but for gardeners the picture is more complicated."

Quality of crops

Dr Clover added: "For domestic gardeners the scope is much broader, ranging from impact on aesthetics, through the services plants provide such as lawns for recreation and hedges for privacy – to the negative impact of pests on the quality of fruit and vegetable crops.

"It is this variety that we need to capture to get as full a picture as possible of the challenges facing gardeners."

According to the RHS, there are 27million gardeners in the UK. The society is urging gardeners of all expertise to take part in the online poll. Go to survey.monkey.co.uk/r/the-garden-survey to have your say. The poll should take five to 10 minutes to complete.

Butterflies suffer huge decline in urban areas



In decline: small copper butterfly

Butterfly Conservation

IT was once a common sight in high-summer: beautiful butterflies fluttering over borders and garden ponds.

But now butterflies are declining more rapidly in urban areas than in the countryside – with some species in danger of dying out.

A study by Butterfly Conservation, the University of Kent and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology looked at 28 butterfly species in urban and countryside environments. Over a 20-year period, urban butterfly abundance fell by 69 per cent, compared to a 45 per cent decline for butterflies in rural areas.

The small copper and small heath butterfly declined more dramatically in towns and cities than in the countryside.

From 1995 to 2014, small copper abundance fell by 75 per cent in urban areas compared to a 23 per cent fall in rural locations.

The small heath suffered a huge decline of 78 per cent in urban areas, but just a 17 per cent fall in the countryside.

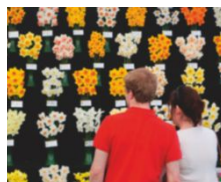
Lead researcher Dr Emily Jones said: "We used sophisticated techniques to reveal that practically all butterflies we assessed were found to be struggling in urban areas, most likely due to the combined effects of habitat loss, climate change and intensification of land use."

The study revealed that the majority of butterflies in towns and cities are emerging earlier and are on the wing for longer than the same species living in rural areas.



Give it some welly!

Organisers of the Harrogate Spring Flower Show (20-23 April) are appealing for donations of old wellies. Stand-holders will plant-up the boots.



RHS Flower Show Cardiff

The RHS Flower Show Cardiff (7-9 April) will embrace Wales' Year of Legends 2017, with themed gardens. Go to rhs.org.uk/cardiff for details.

White House veg plot 'safe under Trump'

THE White House kitchen garden has won a stay of execution – after first lady Melania Trump hinted at a love of gardening.

It had been feared that President Trump, a keen golfer who owns many golf courses, would order the veg garden, created by Michelle Obama, to be ripped out (AG, 24-31 December 2016).

During the US election campaign last year, President Obama said: "I guarantee you he'll dig-up Michelle's garden. You think I am joking?"

Kitchen garden

But in a statement to CNN, Stephanie Winston Wolkoff, senior adviser to the First Lady, said: "The First Lady has a deep personal commitment to her role as caretaker and nurturer, beginning with her family. Mrs Trump is committed to the preservation and continuation of the White House gardens, specifically the First Lady's kitchen garden and rose garden."

The comments came after Mrs Trump accompanied Akie Abe, the wife of Japanese



prime minister Shinzo Abe, around the Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens.

In a statement, Melania Trump said: "Both our countries' history and cultures are steeped in the nurture and nature of gardening."

Lettuce rejoice: no panic buying here!

THERE is no shortage of lettuce seed, contrary to national press reports, say suppliers.

Newspapers reported that lettuce seed had been stripped from garden centre racks due to panic buying as lettuces ran out at supermarkets due to supply shortages at farms.

But commercial director at seed and young plant firm Mr Fothergill's, Tim Jeffries, told AG: "We do not have seed shortages for lettuce or any other vegetable, and are restocking garden centres promptly."

"Seed sales are generally running at

higher levels, including lettuce, which may reveal more interest in grow-your-own."

Thompson & Morgan said it had noticed a "slight upturn in lettuce and courgette top-up orders but nothing to indicate panic buying" at garden centres.

T&M's veg expert Colin Randel said: "It is not a lettuce seed shortage that has caused rationing or issues with supermarkets."

"It is due to fresh produce fields suffering climatic disasters in southern Europe with huge losses of certain crops," Colin added.



Spring smells bloomin' lovely this year

SCENTED plants filled the air with fragrance during the 12th annual Valentine's Flower Count, held at National Trust gardens in the south west.

Gardeners recorded 1,737 plants in flower – down by 34 per cent on last year's figure of 2,644. While numbers were lower than in 2016, they are still higher than the previous three years.

Conditions this winter have

been regarded as closer to normal, compared to a mild winter and early spring in 2016.

National Trust gardens advisor Ian Wright said a lot of scented flowers were in bloom on Valentine's Day this year.

Ian explained: "We had reports of daphne, mahonia, winter-flowering honeysuckle and witch hazel to name a few, all of which gave off sweet, heady aromas."



Fewer flowers were recorded on Valentine's Day this year

A BLOOMIN' GOOD WEEK



Veg crop planning

Thompson & Morgan is to make 12 April National Pumpkin Sowing day. The firm says it is asked, every Halloween, when the best time is to sow pumpkins.



Choosing a new shed

Website whatshed.co.uk says it has helped over 10,000 customers buy the right shed. The consumer site boasts over 2,000 reviews.



Public parks

Parks are in a state of neglect not seen since the 1980s, a group of MPs has said. Budget cuts of over 90 per cent have been blamed.



Landmark tree

A 100 year-old plane tree in Birmingham's Centenary Square could be felled to make way for concrete anti-terror barriers.

A BLOOMIN' BAD WEEK

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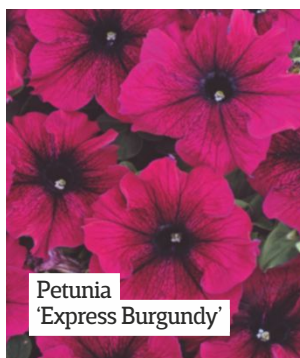


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Banana plants (*Musa* and *Ensete*) need winter protection in the UK, while the palm *Trachycarpus fortunei* is a hardier alternative. Underplant with red-leaved coleus, *Persicaria* 'Red Dragon' and *Ricinus communis*



Part 1

How to create an Exotic garden

Whether you want to update a border or are planning a drastic transformation of your whole plot, **Hazel Silver** has the lowdown on achieving a bright, bold jungle look

LUSH foliage, explosions of colour and a sense of the exotic – there are few planting styles as exciting as the jungle look. If you want to overhaul a border and inject a real sense of drama, this is a great style to go for.

Done well, jungle planting creates a feeling of escapism: dense foliage produces layers of green and forms shady pockets in which exotic flowers bloom in parrot-like colours. And if the planting is tall, there is that Alice-in-Wonderland sense of being small in a surreal, oversized landscape. That is

certainly the effect at the Exotic Garden at Great Dixter in East Sussex, created by the late Christopher Lloyd and head gardener Fergus Garrett. Hidden beneath a canopy of immense leaves, you find yourself drawn into a strange paradise of bizarre foliage, flowers and scents.

Visit Dixter in September or October, when the Exotic Garden is at its best, and you will come across weird and wonderful plants you may not have laid eyes upon before: the spidery green *Cyperus vegetus*; the palm-like *Begonia luxurians*; the fabulous *Colocasia*

esculenta 'Black Magic', whose immense black leaves are the stuff of dreams. But in among these aliens are more familiar sights. Offsetting the lush greenery, the likes of *Verbena bonariensis*, 'Hillcrest Royal' dahlias and *Canna* 'General Eisenhower' provide splashes of vivid colour.

And while creating a jungle border may sound tricky, it is, in fact, highly achievable. Tender specimens aren't always as difficult to grow as you might imagine, and you can even produce a fabulous jungle border using only hardy UK garden plants.

Many plants we know and love – when teamed with other exotic-looking specimens – can create a jungle effect. For height, choose the 12ft tall giant reed grass (*Arundo donax*) or umbrella bamboo (*Fargesia murielae*). Slightly smaller is the variegated grass *Miscanthus sinensis* var. *condensatus* 'Cosmopolitan', which reaches 6ft, while biennial *Angelica archangelica* and annual *Nicotiana sylvestris* will each provide verdant exotica in a compact (4ft) package.

Similarly, colour does not have to come courtesy of tender species: the shocking pink



This exotic-looking combination of purple cotinus and orange day lilies (*Hemerocallis*) is easy to replicate



Bold blues and soft pinks work well in a tropical scheme. Team agapanthus with *Canna* 'Erebus' for a striking duo

blooms of sweet pea 'Prince Edward of York' fit effortlessly into an exotic border, while good old zinnias flower in a riot of shades.

That is not to say you cannot grow tender exotics in your new jungle border. Many are not as fiddly as you might think – all you need is good planning and the right indoor space. Bulbous tender plants like cannas and *Colocasia* can be lifted at the end of autumn and overwintered in a garage; fragile exotics (such as palm-leaf begonia and the lovely maroon banana, *Ensete ventricosum* 'Maurelii') can be transferred to a warm greenhouse or conservatory for the winter.

Even if you don't have the right sort of storage areas for overwintering, you can still

grow tender 'jungle' plants as many can be protected in situ, without being lifted. The wonderful blue-green *Melianthus major* and the orange-flowered *Hedychium* 'Tara', for example, can be wrapped in a good thick layer of winter protection, such as bracken, until the frosts have passed.

Alternatively, many tender exotics can be grown as annuals: sow the burgundy castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis* 'Carmencita') indoors in February or March and it will produce scarlet flowers in July. Or try fiery climbers *Ipomoea lobata* (Spanish flag) and *Eccelemocarpus scaber* (Chilean glory flower). Both are perennials in their native hot climes, but will produce excellent results when grown as annuals here.

Many sensitive plants that look great in a jungle border – such as the honey spurge *Euphorbia mellifera* – will do fine as long as they benefit from the shelter of a warm,

“Plants we know and love can give a jungle flavour”

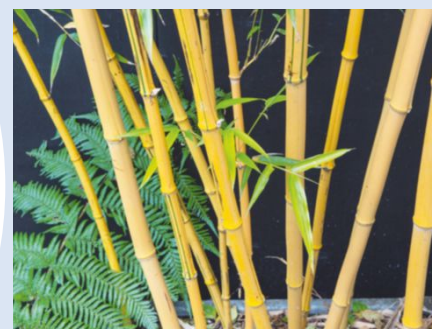
Key tips

Transform your plot!

Expert pointers from Fergus Garrett, head gardener at Great Dixter



1 “At Great Dixter we designed the Exotic Garden to peak in September and October, but you can create an exotic garden or border to perform at any time. There are exotics and tropical-looking plants for every season (like late spring flowering rhododendrons above).”



2 We grow many tender plants such as banana and *Colocasia* by moving or protecting them over winter, but you can easily create an exotic garden without using a single tender plant. Ferns, figs, hostas, yuccas, euphorbias and bamboos (above) are hardy, and they look exotic.”



3 “People often focus on flowers, but in an exotic garden foliage takes centre stage, so it's important to get it right. Consider leaf size, shape and colour. Go for contrast.” Here fiery canna leaves make a great backdrop to variegated nasturtium and *Tropaeolum peregrinum*.



Growing tender exotics like *Musa* (banana), dahlias and fuchsia 'Thalia' in containers makes it a lot easier to move them under cover before winter arrives

Marianne Majerus

◀ south-facing wall.

When planning your jungle look, first ask yourself what sort of effect you are hoping to achieve. An exotic border can be an unapologetic riot of colour or something more subtle and refined.

If you fancy a no-holds-barred explosion of bold shades, good choices include the scarlet *Crocsmia* 'Lucifer', the yellow dahlia 'Moonfire' and the purple *Gladiolus communis* subsp. *byzantinus*.

For something less in your face, stick to a soothing palette of green, silver and white with the likes of *Arundo donax* var. *versicolor*, white spider flowers (*Cleome hassleriana* 'Helen Campbell') and *Dicksonia antarctica*. Or create an elegant, urban look via the dark tones of *Angelica gigas*, *Gladiolus* 'Black Star' and *Colocasia esculenta* 'Black Magic', alongside the paler hues of *Canna* 'Erebus', whose soft pink flowers bloom above huge glaucous leaves.

Whatever your chosen approach, your jungle patch is certain to add some otherworldly exotica to your garden. ■

2 container choices



both MFM

■ **Ficus carica** Christopher Lloyd's favourite fig, 'Brunswick' (above) has handsome leaves and sweet fruit. Grow in sheltered sun and provide winter protection.

■ **Canna 'Phasion'** (left) Blazing orange torch-like flowers complement big bronze-purple leaves. Needs full sun and winter protection.

6 essential jungle plants for beginners

Try it!



Fatsia japonica AGM

It may look like something from the rainforest, but this evergreen is hardy. Glossy palmate leaves and white autumn flowers. Grow in a pot or border.



Dahlias

Hot-coloured dahlias like the red-tinged yellow 'Spasmacher' add to exotic schemes in late summer. Plant tubers in pots under cover now.



Miscanthus sinensis 'Strictus'

This upright zebra grass adds movement, sound and privacy; for arching growth, opt for 'Zebrinus' instead.



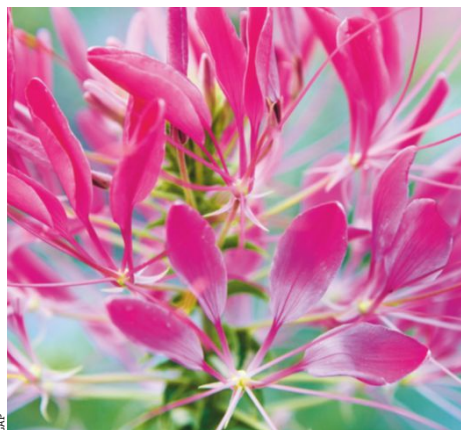
Ipomoea tricolor

A climber with azure blue trumpet flowers in summer. Grow as an annual in sheltered sun. Sow seeds Feb-May under cover.



Yucca filamentosa 'Bright Edge'

Towers of white bells bloom above sword-like gold and green evergreen foliage in summer. Plant in spring. Likes a sunny spot and can cope with drought.



Cleome hassleriana 'Violet Queen'

This gorgeous annual produces handfuls of strongly scented, pea-like magenta blooms atop tall stalks during summer. Sow indoors Jan-Mar. Deadhead for maximum flowers.

What to do now

Be inspired

Flick through *Exotic Planting For Adventurous Gardeners* by Christopher Lloyd (£20, greatdixter.shop.co.uk) and *Encyclopedia of Exotic Plants For Temperate Climates* by Will Giles (£35; Timber Press).



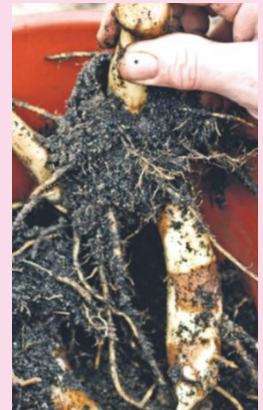
Sow Zingy green

Nicotiana glauca 'Lime Green' and *Euphorbia oblongata* need sowing in March, in the greenhouse, as do fiery *Ipomoea lobata*, *Tithonia rotundifolia* 'Torch' and aptly-named *Cosmos sulphureus* 'Bright Lights'.



Pot up Get tender

corms (such as the burgundy *Gladiolus* 'Black Star') and rhizomes (like the orange *Canna* 'Durban', which has striped maroon leaves) into containers in a warm greenhouse or conservatory during March.



Plant Spring is the

time to plant hardy perennials, grasses and shrubs for your exotic border. Try *Fatshedera lizei*, an evergreen cross between *fatsia* and *ivy*, and golden yellow bamboo *Phyllostachys aureosulcata* f. *spectabilis*.



Suppliers of 'jungle' border plants

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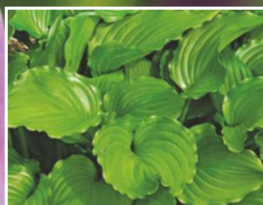
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Ask Christine!



Christine Walkden's Masterclass on growing cauliflower



Harvest curds while they are still small

Growing cauliflower under insect-proof mesh will help to deter cabbage white butterfly, which can wreck crops

Christine's expert cauliflower tips



■ Check your soil pH. For growing cauliflower, soil should be between pH 7.5 and 8. This will help to control club root disease.



■ When curds begin to form, bend older leaves over the centre of the plant to prevent curds from discolouring due to exposure to sunlight, frost or snow.

How do I grow cauliflower?

Q My cauliflowers last year were a disaster. The few plants that survived formed small, loose, discoloured curds. What am I doing wrong?

Ben Watkins, Solihull

Cauliflower is not the easiest of crops to grow but good soil preparation and a bit of experience can help.

There are four main groups: spring, summer, autumn and winter, but many from each group overlap the seasons.

Sow successionally to ensure regular cropping all year-round. Sow early-summer cauliflowers in mid-autumn and leave to over-winter under cover. Plant out from mid-spring. Space plants 20in (50cm) apart and allow 24in (60cm) between rows. Harvest in mid-spring.

Sow summer cauliflowers in early-spring (now!) under cover and transplant in mid-spring to harvest in mid-summer and autumn. Space plants as above.

Early-autumn cauliflowers should be sown in mid-spring for transplanting in early-summer; harvesting in late-summer to early-autumn. Space 20in (50cm) apart.

And autumn cauliflowers are best sown in late-spring for transplanting in mid-summer; harvesting from mid to late-autumn. Leave 24in (60cm) between plants and rows.

Cauliflowers need a sheltered, sunny site on deep, moisture-retentive, free-draining soil. Dig in organic matter in autumn before planting. Soil should be firm but not compacted. Start the crop off under protection of a cold frame or cloche and

thin seedlings after germination to 2in (5cm). Grow on in the seed bed or transplant to small pots. Plant out after hardening off if necessary when young plants have five or six leaves.

Cabbage white butterflies are a problem. Check undersides of leaves and remove egg clusters, and grow under insect-proof mesh to keep the butterflies out. Keep crops weed-free. Water well throughout the life of the crop, as checks to growth will spoil curd formation.

Harvest successionally while curds are small. If you wait until they all fully mature you will have too many at once. If heads become brown or start to open, you've left them for too long.

Check caulis are planted firmly

ENSURE that cauliflower crops are firmly planted. If you grip a leaf and try to pull the plant out, the leaf should break but the plant should remain anchored in the soil.

If the plant moves in any manner, it is not planted firmly enough. I use the handle of a sledge hammer to firm the plants in, ramming the soil around the plant. This looks excessive, but it works!





Ask Christine!

With her team of experts John Negus, Anna Toeman, Dr Jane Bingham

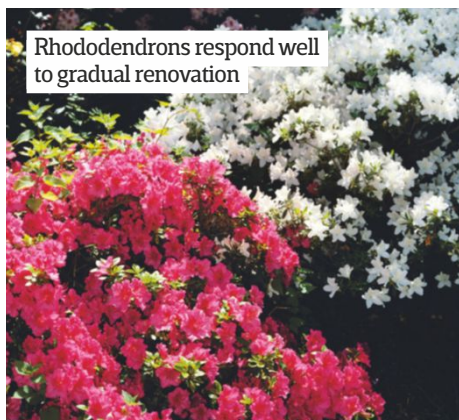
How can I renovate my old rhodie?

Q My old rhododendron is now a very large shrub, and is looking sick, with bare branches. Would I be able to cut the branches back and try to transplant?
Rita Morgan (via email)

A It is possible to renovate old, straggly rhododendrons. Most respond well, but be cautious, and stage renovation pruning over three or more years.

Firstly, keep your plant in its pot. Top up the pot with ericaceous potting compost, without burying the trunk, and keep the compost moist, not wet, throughout the summer. Feed with an ericaceous fertiliser once a month from March to July.

Secondly, prune out one quarter of the branches after flowering. Choose the worst-looking parts – you might not



Rhododendrons respond well to gradual renovation

have to take them off at the base, maybe higher up – until the plant has a pleasing shape. Do this each year and see your rhododendron transformed.



Lilies grow well in containers

Compost for lilies

Q I want to grow Oriental lilies in containers, but I don't know what type of compost to use. Could you help?
Christina Feltham (via email)

A Happiest in acid, humus-rich and free-draining soil in sunshine or light shade, lilies have great appeal.

If growing them in containers, set bulbs in loam-based ericaceous compost and nourish their growth with Miracle-Gro Azalea, Camellia & Rhododendron Continuous Release Plant Food. One application feeds for up to six months.



Annuals such as cosmos and Sweet pea thrive in deep soil

Will annuals grow in raised beds?

Q I am sowing early-flowering annuals in raised beds as cut flowers for my daughter's wedding at the end of June. What soil depth do I need?
Christine Wilton (via email)

A If raised beds are used for other plants, I would recommend making them at least 18in (45cm), but ideally 2ft (60cm), deep, so the plants root deeply and are less likely to dry out.

However, as they are only going to be used for growing annuals, they can be much shallower. Hardy annuals can survive in quite inhospitable

environments, sometimes with little soil!

The beds may need supplementary watering, even if we have a lot of rain, as the soil in them is limited to the moisture that comes from above.

Sweet peas need a deep root run to produce long-stemmed flowers, but plants grown in containers will still flower, just with shorter stems.

It might be best to choose plant varieties that are recommended for container-growing, or are of short/medium stature, but I don't think this is too critical, as the plants aren't expected to perform until the end of the season.



Phormiums don't like the cold

Cold Phormiums?

Q My huge *Phormium tenax* and 'Purpurium' collapsed and have mould around them. Did the weather do it?
Verity Zikking, Gloucester

A Their decline can probably be blamed on winter weather.

Phormium and cordylines are not fully hardy, and resent winter wet, so they have probably succumbed to prolonged cold, and wet soil.

Remove dead and diseased leaves and wait and see if any regrowth appears in the spring.

Let pots drain: Whatever you are growing in containers, stand them on pot feet to allow excess water to drain away more easily.



Are plum trees OK for pot growing?

Q Can a 'Victoria' plum be successfully grown in a pot in Manchester, even though it's quite far north?

Mrs Marlene Sawyer, Manchester

A You should certainly be able to grow this tree in a pot in Manchester, but I would add a couple of provisos to this.

Trees in pots need more care than those in the ground, as the roots are restricted to the extent to which they can search for water and nutrients. Also, ensure the compost stays moist at all times during the growing season, and even if it has been raining it is worth checking to make sure that enough has got into the compost.

The plant will also need feeding. This could be achieved with slow-release fertilisers or by top-dressing with fresh compost each year, then mulching with organic matter such as well-rotted compost or manure.

Plants in pots are more vulnerable to cold conditions than those in the ground because the compost freezes more quickly and stays frozen for longer. If you experience deep or prolonged periods of cold weather it is worth taking some precautionary measures.

You could move the pot to a sheltered position for the winter, close to a house or other wall to protect the pot from the worst



of the weather.

Secondly, you could wrap the pot in a blanket or other material to keep some degree of frost off it. The tree itself is perfectly hardy, but if its roots stay frozen for a prolonged period it may have an impact on subsequent growth. However, don't cover the top of the pot as the compost needs to breathe.

Quick Questions & Answers

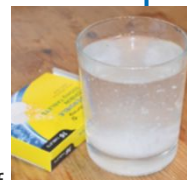
Q Is it true that diluted soluble aspirin solution is a good feed for broad beans?

Philip Evans (via email)

A Some reports suggest that diluted soluble aspirin provides a health boost to plants, especially if they are stressed in some way.

Diluted aspirin can also help seeds to germinate, cuttings to root and cut flowers to last longer in the vase.

It is important to take care when spraying with aspirin solution not to harm bees and other insects.



Q Last year I took a cutting of Buddleja, and it has grown out of control. How should I prune it?

Margaret Burgess, Exeter, Devon

A If the parent was *Buddleja davidii* (butterfly bush), all the flowered shoots should be cut back to within 4in (10cm) of the main framework in early March.

If your shrub is really 'out of control', keep it in check by shortening intrusive shoots by half.



Why are my seedlings already so tall?

Q I sowed French marigold seeds last Thursday in a heated propagator, and they are already an inch tall. Should I still keep them heated or not?

Chris Young

A I fear that the French marigolds you sowed last Thursday, which are now 1in (2.5cm) high, have, because they are too warm, germinated too quickly.

Hopefully, they do not have very thin stems and have not expended

their energy, which will cause them to collapse and die.

Too much heat leads to leggy seedlings



If they are very weak, discard them and sow another batch, germinating seeds at a lower temperature.

If, however, stems are reasonably robust and seed leaves are large and well developed, simply switch off the propagator, remove the lid and position containers in as much light as possible; a south or west-facing windowsill will help plants develop strongly.

Q Where can I buy a few plug plants from? I can't find any locally and had to order more than I need through the post.

Mrs I Peet, Ilford, Essex

A Most garden centres and nurseries will be well stocked with plug plants from now until much later on in April.

If you need to order plug plants by post again, I would suggest that you get together with friends before ordering, and see if they want some too, to share the cost.



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Ask Christine!

With her team of experts John Negus, Anna Toeman, Dr Jane Bingham

What's the problem with my Photinia?

Q We have a fairly large Photinia ('Red Robin'), which has developed black spots on the green leaves. I wonder if there is a way to treat this problem?
David Sheldon, Bramley, Hants

A I have looked closely at the photograph you sent, and I think I can reassure you that it is not a fungal leaf spot that is the problem. This is good, because as with all fungal diseases, fungal leaf spot is challenging to eradicate.

The spots are simply a reaction to the winter weather – cold, wet, windy conditions affecting cell growth. Cells get damaged and may die, hence the blackened areas.

Photinias like sunny and well-drained conditions, and struggle in shade and high humidity. If you can do anything to improve the growing conditions it might help reduce the spots, but there will inevitably be some winter damage if there has been cold and/or windy weather.

However, as the problem is not a disease it does mean that plant growth has not



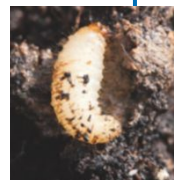
This Photinia is weather-damaged

being significantly weakened, and that the shrub will quickly grow through and mask the damage. The affected leaves are unlikely to show signs of improvement, but they are also unlikely to get worse, and any with extensive damage are likely to drop during leaf-shed in spring and summer. The new growth will hide the older leaves.

Give your plant a boost by top-dressing with granular fertiliser to encourage the new growth to be strong and healthy.

Quick Questions & Answers

Q In the autumn I discovered that some of my planters were infested with vine weevil. Can I still use the compost as a soil conditioner?
Edith Rutherford (via email)



A I suggest that you eradicate remaining larvae with BugClear Ultra Vine Weevil Killer, or a nematode.

Alternatively, spread the compost on a paved surface to expose the grubs, to hungry birds. Make sure, though, that you do not allow grubs to migrate back into an adjoining bed or border.

Q I have a standard magnolia that I would like to shape as a 'lollipop'. When should I prune it?
Margaret Wilkins (via email)



A Shape the 'lollipop' head by pruning lightly in mid-summer after the flowers have faded. Do not prune earlier, before the tree is in full leaf, as the cut surfaces will 'bleed'. Evergreen magnolias can be pruned in spring. After pruning feed with a general purpose fertiliser.

Q If I grow a pineapple top, would the pineapple be edible?
S. Brandon (via email)

A Yes. Root the leafy tops of pineapples in loam-based ericaceous compost. It is a tropical plant so a temperature of not less than 66°F (19°C) is required. Mist often with tepid water.

Once it is growing well, it takes around two years to flower and at least another six months for the embryo fruit to enlarge and ripen. It will then emit a sweet fragrance when it is ready for harvesting.



What can I grow with blueberries?

Q I have an ericaceous bed of blueberries that I want to edge with hellebores and hostas. Do you think that these will tolerate the ericaceous soil?
Gillian Rowancorner (via email)

A In their natural habitat hellebores are usually found on slightly alkaline soils. However, I grow them quite readily on my acidic soil, and the advice generally given is that it really doesn't matter too much whether the



Hellebores are happy in most nutrient-rich soils

soil is neutral or slightly acidic, as long as there are plenty of nutrients. Avoid poor, dry soils, peaty soils or waterlogged conditions.

With regard to hostas, the Royal Horticultural Society advises that liming to moderate the pH to 6.5-7.3 is advisable where soils are acid.

However, I can remember quite vividly the hostas growing at Wisley in the same part of the garden as rhododendrons and azaleas! I looked a bit further and the British Hosta and Hemerocallis Society suggests that 'Hostas will grow in virtually any soil but do best in neutral to acid loam, treated with humus and being well mulched every autumn'.

Blueberries require a soil with pH4-5, which is more than slightly acidic. I think you will find that hellebores will grow absolutely fine, but the hostas may not be so successful.

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Fans of busy Lizzies should consider the big and bold New Guinea types – which are resistant to downy mildew

Did you know?

If you touch the mature seedpod of an impatiens it will fire the seeds through the air, propelling them a distance of up to 6m/20ft. In parts of Asia impatiens petals were traditionally used to make a kind of homemade nail dye or polish.

Time to reconsider **Busy Lizzies**

If you love impatiens for their flowering vigour but are worried about powdery mildew, the growing range of disease resistant New Guinea types is the answer, says **Graham Rice**

NOT so long ago, impatiens were our most popular summer flowers. Then, about five years ago, downy mildew struck and almost wiped them out from our parks and gardens. The problem became so bad that some seed companies stopped selling them altogether.

Now, varieties of *Impatiens walleriana*, the susceptible species from which most of our garden Busy Lizzies were derived, are starting to reappear in seed and plant company listings. So does that mean that downy mildew is gone for good? Is it time to welcome busy Lizzies back to the garden once more, or should we still steer clear?

The answer is yes; and no. To clarify things, who better to speak to than RHS plant pathologist Dr Rebekah Robinson, who has been following the latest developments closely. “The disease has not disappeared and there are still no chemical controls available for home gardeners,” she explains. “The reduction in numbers of plants grown across the UK may well have reduced disease pressure, and the odd plant grown by a home gardener may remain

disease-free. However, if *I. walleriana* starts increasing in popularity again, I suspect the disease will become a problem once more.”

The good news for impatiens fans is that plant breeders have been working diligently to develop resistant varieties, and there is now an increasing range of New Guinea

flowers – up to two inches across – in more vibrant colours. The foliage is also bigger, and more glossy. Some even have brightly variegated leaves. Plants are happier in full sun than classic impatiens, though less suited to full shade.

Modern New Guinea impatiens make superb container plants; they’re especially effective as specimens or in a mix of colours without companions. They will also thrive in sunny borders that don’t get too dry, and their larger size means you need fewer plants to fill the space. They appreciate rich conditions and regular watering, and there’s no need to dead-head.

In autumn, as frost approaches, you can take cuttings and overwinter them indoors, in a conservatory perhaps, where they’ll often flower all winter. Just remember that they do not like a dry atmosphere.

So rather than bemoan the fact that – for the moment, at least – we’ve lost traditional busy lizzies, it’s time to embrace the many colourful New Guinea varieties you can grow in your garden. Who knows, you might find you love them even more. ■

“They tend to be larger, with bigger blooms in vibrant colours”

types that are not susceptible to downy mildew. What’s more, as Rebekah reveals, some of them are so good they hold an RHS Award of Garden Merit.

Available to grow from seed, plugs or young plants, New Guinea impatiens tend to be larger than traditional types, with bigger

4 New Guinea impatiens to try

Many are available as seed, but this is expensive, so stick to plugs or young plants



Mr Fothergill's

Divine Series

Makes substantial, well-branched plants without pinching and comes in 12 colours, some with rich bronze leaves. The four-colour Islander Blend is particularly pretty. Good in baskets and borders too.



Dobbies

Florific Series

New this year in four colours (red, white, violet and pink), the flowers stand above the foliage and the leaves are neater than those of Divine. Look out for the orange and white bicolor coming soon.



Alamy

SunPatiens Series

Holder of five Awards of Garden Merit (AGMs), SunPatiens plants come in three styles (spreading, compact and vigorous) so check the label before you buy. There are some bright variegated forms. They thrive in full sun but are less happy in shade.



Mr Fothergill's

Big Bounce Series

New this spring, this is the closest to traditional impatiens in colour, growth and number of flowers, but is more vigorous. Plants are naturally spreading. They are also more tolerant of drought – bouncing back quickly if you let them wilt.



Alamy

AG
loves...

Hardy impatiens for permanent plantings

For something completely different try *Impatiens omeiana*. This lovely hardy perennial impatiens has some of the prettiest foliage you'll see, as well as clusters of yellow summer flowers. Resistant to downy mildew, it's happiest in dappled shade, where it will spread steadily. Available from Plants For Shade (☎plantsforshade.co.uk; ☎01963 32802).



Alamy

Getting started

■ Order plugs or garden-ready plants by mail order – although more varieties appear in garden centres every year, you're never quite sure what will be available in your area. The best time to order is now.

■ More vigorous than traditional types, these impatiens grow quickly, so you'll need some guaranteed frost-free space in which to bring them on before you harden them off.

■ Seed is an option for the Divine and Florific Series, but it's not cheap and the seedlings are susceptible to chills. Seeds germinate best at 25°C (77°F), then cool down once they're through.

Suppliers

Brookside Nursery ☎ 0333 335 6789
☎ brooksidenursery.co.uk

Mr Fothergill's ☎ 0333 777 3936
☎ mr-fothergills.co.uk

Suttons ☎ 0844 326 2200
☎ suttons.co.uk

Thompson & Morgan ☎ 0844 573 1818
☎ thompson-morgan.com

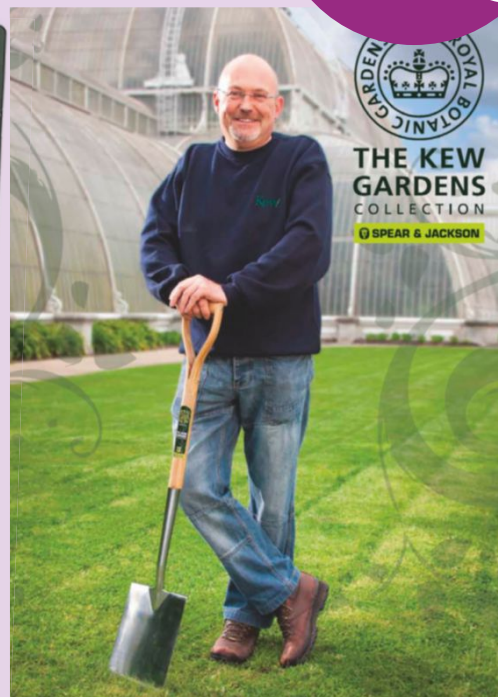
Amateur Gardening Competition

WIN

The Kew Gardens Collection by Spear and Jackson

Choose the Spear and Jackson tools that Kew gardeners love to use

Tools worth
£400



SPEAR & Jackson's products have become widely recognised for their heritage and high quality.

Now the company has teamed up with Kew Gardens to bring you an exclusive range of digging, cultivating and cutting tools.

Rigorously tested for performance and quality, they are genuinely 'used and recommended by Kew' horticulturists.

The Neverbend Carbon range of garden tools feature a hammer-finished epoxy

coating for improved resistance to rust, humidity and alkalis in the soil.

Harvested from FSC approved, well-managed forests, the weatherproof handles are made from the finest ash. Every Neverbend Carbon product also comes with a 15 year guarantee.

This week Spear & Jackson is giving seven lucky AG readers the chance to win the following:

■ A beautifully boxed three piece tool set from the Kew Gardens Collection (£29rrp)

consisting of weed fork, transplanting trowel and hand trowel in Neverbend stainless steel, with leather straps and FSC-certified ash handles.

■ A secateur and leather holster set (£28.49rrp) featuring carbon steel blade secateurs with metal anvil for improved durability, adjustable cutting width and ergonomic soft-grip handles for added comfort. There's even a belt clip so you can always have them close to hand for precision cutting of unruly growth.

How to enter

Spear & Jackson is giving away a boxed three piece tool set worth £29rrp plus a secateur and leather holster set worth £28.49 to seven lucky readers. All you have to do to be in with a chance of winning is answer a simple question on-line at

the AG address below. The winners will be chosen at random from the correct entries and contacted by email within four weeks of the closing date.

Closing date 1 April 2017. Full terms and conditions online.

Enter online at



amateurgardening.com/kewgardenscollection

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Good For You!

-



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PLUS P&P**
Price for
1 x 340g jar

A close-up photograph of a honeybee on a pink clover flower. The bee is positioned on the left side of the flower, facing right. Its body is covered in yellow and black stripes, and its wings are visible. The flower is a vibrant pink color with multiple petals. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting.

Feel the buzz! Contact us today!

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Item	Price	Qty	Total
1 X 340G JAR	£5.95		
1 X 900G TUB	£12.95		
4 X 340G JARS	£19.95		
PLEASE ADD P&P FLAT RATE	£3.99		
YEAR SUPPLY OF 340G JARS (4x4 packs sent quarterly inc delivery)	£90.00		

■ for £

Grand Total £

☐ Or charge my Mastercard/Visa/Maestro/Delta, details shown below:

[illegible]

Last 3 digits on back of card

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EMAIL:

AMG/1

Tried & tested

We try before you buy



Cold frames

Consumer editor **Julia Heaton** looks at frames designed to protect against the weather

PROTECTING against frosts in spring, a cold frame allows you to make an early start on growing your vegetable and ornamental plants if there's no greenhouse to hand, giving you a longer growing season. Cold frames are also ideal for keeping delicacies out of the rain and provide somewhere to over-winter less-than-hardy plants.

Even if you have a greenhouse, a cold frame can still be an extra growing space

and a great area for hardening-off plants before they are finally put in place outside. Here's another thought: why not use a cold frame to help dry off the seeds of the peas and beans you want to save, or to ripen onions and shallots for storage?

Wooden frames are best placed on a gravel or concrete standing or raised on bricks so that the timber doesn't come in contact with the soil. Remember, timber frames will need treating with a suitable



wood preservative from time to time if you expect them to last.

By chance the weather provided a Force 9 gale to test

the strength of our cold frames – remember that frames should be secured to the ground to guard against such conditions!

FSC Wooden Frame Gardman

£57.99 RRP

☎ 01406 372227 🌐 gardman.co.uk for stockists

Features

★★★★★

Glazed with twin-wall polycarbonate, this attractive FSC certified timber frame has a hinged lid with locking stays to aid access and ventilation. Weighs 9lbs 2oz (4.2kg) and has two base plates for anchoring to the ground. W. 40in x D. 26in x H. 15.5in (100 x 65 x 40cm).

Performance

★★★★★

Fastest to assemble (less than 15 minutes) providing a surprisingly rigid, yet lightweight, structure. Fitting the base plates enabled the frame to be anchored to the ground with tent pegs (not supplied) so it didn't blow away in the wind. Two wing nuts allow the lid to be lifted, held in any position for ventilation, or secured shut.

Value

★★★★★

Not keen on flat-pack assembly? This is an easy one and it provides a decent growing space.



Score
13/15

Cold Frame 3 Spear & Jackson

£125.99 SSP

☎ 0114 281 4242 🌐 spear-and-jackson.com for stockists

Features

★★★★★

This upright, tanalised-wood frame, with twin-wall polycarbonate panes, measures: D. 20in x W. 30in x H. 47in (50 x 75 x 120cm) and weighs 28lbs 6oz (13kg). There are three shelves. Adjustable metal struts position and secure the lid.

Performance

★★★★★

Very attractive and took only half an hour to build. It offers flexibility – take out a shelf to accommodate taller plants for over-wintering. But while toggles held the doors closed in the gale, there is nothing to stop them from blowing shut when you want to let air circulate thoroughly.

Value

★★★★★

It will never replace the greenhouse but as a cold frame it saves bending – there's an advantage to having a shelved unit if you are less supple than you used to be.



Score
13/15

Next week: Got a small garden that needs watering and no outside tap? Check out our space saving waterbutts

Modular Frame with Extension Kit – Two Wests & Elliott

£157.99 purchased as package + £4.99 delivery ☎ 01246 451077 🌐 twowests.co.uk

Features ★★★★★

Rust and rot-proof aluminium frame measuring L. 94in x W.25in x H. 18in (24 x 64 x 48cm) with twin-wall polycarbonate panes. Hinged lid can be fixed half or fully open or secured shut. Choose frame with legs for soil anchoring or without legs for standing on a hard surface. Extra 48in (120cm) extension can be added. Weighs 26lbs 4oz (12kg)

Performance

★★★★★

More than 160 nuts and bolts were used in the construction and it was back-breaking work. Plus, as the instructions were difficult to follow it wasn't straightforward either. After three hours of head scratching, the result was a cold frame that looks the business. It is impressively rigid and yet light enough to move. Leg anchors ensured it was not blown away in the gale!



Value ★★★★★

Add extra lengths as required to ensure you have all the room you need. Expect the aluminium frame to outlive the twin-wall polycarbonate glazing.

Amateur Gardening
Best buy
14/15

Lacewing Wooden Frame Primrose

£64.99 + £4.99 delivery

☎ 0118 903 5210 🌐 primrose.co.uk



Score
12/15

Features ★★★★★

Comprises untreated FSC certified timber and 4mm thick polycarbonate glazing. The lid is hinged with non-adjustable stick-props and the base is slatted. Measures: W. 48in x D. 24in x H. 15in (122 x 61 x 38cm). Weighs 19lbs 8oz (9kg).

Performance ★★★★★

Had to buy timber preservative before work could begin. Staples used by the manufacturer to hold the planks together were loose and needed tapping down but then the build was quick – just 25 minutes. You'll need to buy a latch to stop the lid lifting in windy conditions – only the weight of plants on the slatted base stopped the whole frame blowing away during the gale.

Value ★★★★★

Annoying that the timber was not treated but on the plus side it leaves you free to choose your own colour preservative.

Go potty!

Get seed sowing underway in style

Potting bench

£130 + £9.95 delivery

Mia Fleur ☎ 0116 2986393 🌐 miafleur.com

An attractive and versatile piece that could be used for full-on potting up or simply displaying plants. It's made from FSC approved pine wood, painted grey with a zinc top, three drawers and three hanging hooks. Requires self assembly and stands W. 2ft 5in (78cm) x D. 1ft 2in (38cm) x H. 2ft 7in (83cm)



Potting sieve

£16.95 delivery from £2.85

☎ 0345 548 0210 🌐 annabeljames.co.uk

Sophie Conran proves once again that tools can be both functional and beautiful. Designed by her for Burdon & Ball this sieve is just the right size for providing a gentle sprinkle of compost over seeds without displacing them. Consists of a stainless steel head, brass ferrule and waxed FSC beech handle. 9½ in (24.5cm) long.



William Morris Potting

Gloves £16.99 + £3.95 delivery

The Oak Room ☎ 01992 501040

🌐 oakroomshop.co.uk

Go for gloves with a vintage design. This one is taken from a 19th century 'Bower' wallpaper pattern by William Morris. Pretty yet practical the gloves are 100% cotton and, as one size fits all, they're ideal gift-giving material. There's even a matching garden kneeler to go with them.



TopTip

Fix stakes and ties and all other types of support early for the likes of tall delphiniums, heleniums and some vigorous campanulas

Having lifted a decent clump of *Persicaria* 'Red Dragon', grown for patterned, reddish-purple leaves on plants 30in (75cm) high, I can replant the whole thing or divide into several chunks

How to grow... perennials

Perennials are springing into life, says **Anne Swithinbank**

THE scent of spring is in the air and hardy herbaceous perennials are returning to life after a winter rest.

The top growth of these non-woody plants dies back in autumn but rootstocks send up new shoots in spring, making the likes of coreopsis, monarda and rudbeckia a good investment.

Perennials like these have been enjoying a fashionable moment, with whole 'prairie style' gardens created by planting drifts of them alongside grasses and bulbs.

In smaller plots, they are used mainly as colourful gap fillers around shrubs. Action taken now will set your perennials up for the rest of the summer.

Add new plants

Choose your favourites but for low maintenance, match plants with positions so they get the sun, shade, good drainage or moist soil needed.

Whether divisions or from pots, I think new plants should measure at least 4in (10cm) across in order to hold their own and ensure that they establish well.

Buying them as smaller plug plants saves

money but pot them first into 50:50 John Innes No 2 and a soil-less multi-purpose compost and use your patio as a nursery. When ready plant them out into good, well-nourished soil.

Cutting back

The fashion for leaving spent flower stems in place for winter is now widespread, best for wildlife (more seed heads and insects) and creates good winter outlines. But last year's growth has to come off eventually and most gardeners cut back during February.

Lift and divide

After a few years, contented plants swell into large clumps. Forked up, divided into sections, cleaned up and replanted they form impressive drifts or repetitions.

Division also rejuvenates stock and improves flower quality. Drive two forks back to back through the middle of a clump, pull the handles apart and this prises the clump into two, then more.

Alternatively, cut through the clump using an old kitchen knife. Replant sections 12in (30cm) apart in their groups.



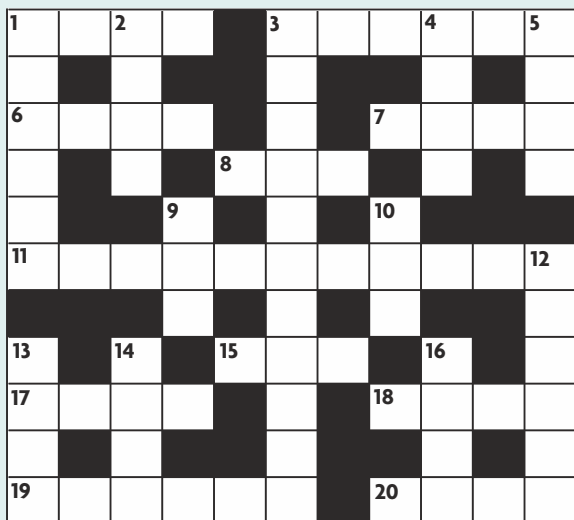
Division rejuvenates stock and improves flowering



Don't forget to mulch

FEEDING herbaceous perennials is not always a good plan because soft growth is more vulnerable to pests and diseases and liable to flop.

What perennials really like is a 2-3in (5-8cm) mulch of well-rotted compost or similar, spread between them but not mounded over their crowns.

Gardener's
Tea breakCrossword
...just for fun!

ACROSS

1 Secluded valley, as in the raspberries '____ Prosen' and '____ Ample' (4)

3 Tropical Indian fig tree, *Ficus bengalensis*, with many aerial roots (6)

6 A flower border with, say, lots of bright shades and hues could be described as being a ____ of colour (4)

7 Genus of up to 300 species of plants with showy flowers, taking its name from the Greek word for a rainbow (4)

8 To get out of a screen situation, press this on your keyboard, as in escallonia! (3)

11 These are variously also referred to as mandarin oranges, tangerines and satsumas (11)

15 Area for plants, as in the dailily variety '____ of Nails' (3)

17 Precipitation, as in the alstroemeria variety 'Purple ____' (4)

18 Intermediate class of edible cherry, set between the sweet, dessert cherries and the 'sour', culinary cherries (4)

19 A 60s model – off a tree or shrub perhaps! (6)

20 Alchemilla is the mantle belonging to one of these (4)

DOWN

1 Common name for *Allium sativum* (6)

2 Strawberries (and maybe raspberries) with meringue and cream, make a right public school mess! (4)

3 Hybrid cane fruit, from a crossed blackberry, red raspberry and loganberry (5,6)

4 Americans refer to their garden as this – and it has three feet! (4)

5 Right now, every garden bird is thinking about where to build its ____ (4)

9 Unit of electrical current, as in damping-off disease! (3)

10 Make a small hole, for a seed or seedling perhaps (3)

12 In the manner of a *Salvia officinalis*, wisely speaking! (6)

13 Collection of hard small materials, such as coarse dirt or ground rock (4)

14 Another name for the fruit of the Chinese gooseberry (*Actinidia deliciosa*) (4)

16 Genus name for the banana (4)

Prize draw

Peckish Daily Goodness Peanut Boost contains kibbled peanuts, which are perfect for little beaks. It's enriched with high protein beans to support growth and development – with added Calvita vitamin mix, too. We have five packs (1kg) worth £4.99 each to give away to readers. See below for details of how to enter.

How to enter:

Send your name and address on the back of a postcard to Peckish Daily Goodness Peanut Boost Draw, Amateur Gardening, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG. Or you can email your details to ag_giveaway@timeinc.com, heading the email Peckish Daily Goodness Peanut Boost Draw. The closing date is: 6 March 2017.

Win
£30!

Wordsearch

THIS
word search
comprises

gardening-related words beginning with 'B'. They are listed below; in the grid they may be read across, backwards, up, down or diagonally. Letters may be shared between words.

Erroneous or duplicate words may appear in the grid, but there is only one correct solution. After the listed words are found there are eight letters remaining; arrange these to make this week's KEY WORD.

B	A	I	S	K	N	A	B	A	S
A	R	B	E	E	C	H	O	I	I
I	T	U	B	O	U	O	B	G	L
L	E	L	G	Q	B	E	E	R	L
L	K	B	U	M	G	E	S	E	E
A	C	S	A	O	A	X	O	B	B
W	U	B	N	T	S	N	M	L	R
O	B	I	B	O	O	T	S	L	I
R	A	W	O	R	R	A	B	I	Z
B	S	I	R	E	B	R	E	B	A

BAMBOO
BANKSIA
BARROW
BEECH
BEGONIA
BELLIS
BERBERIS
BESOM
BILLBERGIA
BOOTS
BOX
BRIZA
BROWALLIA
BRUGMANSIA
BUCKET
BULBS

HOW TO ENTER: Enter this week's keyword on the entry form, and send it to AG Word Search No 354, Amateur Gardening, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG, to arrive by Weds 15 March, 2017. The first correct entry chosen at random will win our £30 cash prize.

No:
354

This week's Keyword is

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

Tel no

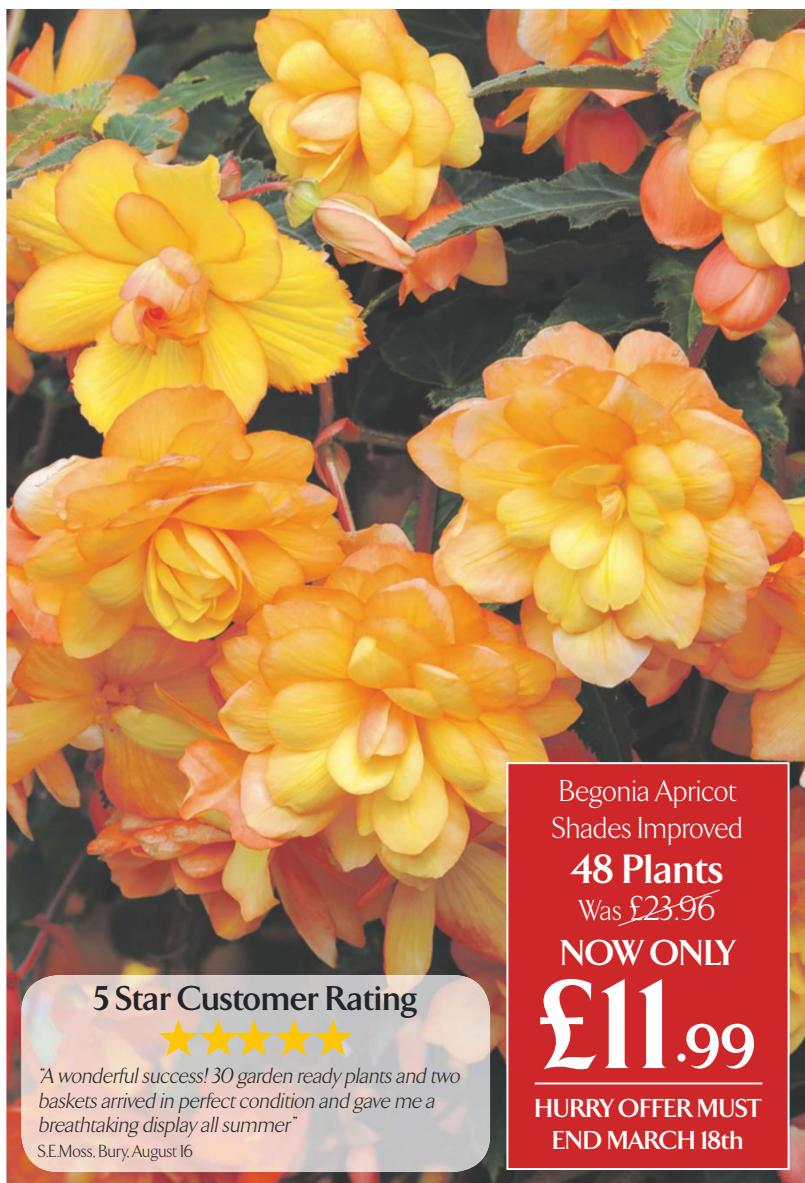
Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, publisher of *Amateur Gardening* will collect your personal information solely to process your competition entry.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS
ACROSS 2 Glen 3 Banyan 6 Riot 7 Iris 8 Esc 11 Clematines 15 Bed 17 Rain
18 Duke 19 Twiggy 20 Lady
DOWN 1 Kiwi 16 Musa
14 Kiwi 16 Musa

KEYWORD TO WORDSEARCH 349 (AG, 28 JANUARY)
COMPOSTS
AND THE WINNER IS: DARREN STEVENS, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE

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Paul Hansford,
Horticultural Director

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Plug plants supplied from April, garden ready from May/June.

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S.E.Moss, Bury, August 16

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TJ70924	Begonia Apricot Shades Improved, 12 plugs	£5.99		
TJ16811	Begonia Apricot Shades Improved, 24 plugs SAVE* £3.99	£7.99		
TJ16812	Begonia Apricot Shades Improved, 48 plugs SAVE* £11.97	£11.99		
TJ47467	Begonia Apricot Shades Improved, 30 Garden Ready	£14.99		
TJ55082P	2x Hanging Baskets (14 3/4" diameter) SAVE* £5	£14.99		
TJ47552	Incredibloom® Fertiliser - 750g Pack	£12.99		
Please debit my: <input type="checkbox"/> Visa <input type="checkbox"/> Mastercard <input type="checkbox"/> Maestro		P&P		£4.95
Grand Total				
CSV <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Please turn your card over and write the last 3 numbers from the signature strip.				
Cardholder's name _____		Expiry Date ____ / ____		

5 border ideas for **spring**

What better way to shake off the winter blues than to start planting for the season ahead, says **Louise Curley**

THE lengthening days and the warming soil mean the coming weeks are the ideal time to start planting for spring. And if you want to add zing to your borders you'll find there's a fantastic selection of star performers to choose from at your local garden centre right now.

New plants will look small for a year or so until they become established, but they will still add interest and colour in their first season. Tempting though it is, don't make the mistake of planting perennials, shrubs and trees too close together in order to create instant impact as the plants will compete for water and nutrients. Instead, give them room to grow – you can always fill in any gaps with bedding plants and

“Give them room to grow – you can fill gaps with bedding”

pot-grown bulbs from the garden centre.

To ensure your spring plantings get the best start, prepare the ground by incorporating well-rotted manure or compost. If you make your own leaf mould, add this to any shady planting areas as doing so will replicate the conditions these plants love. If you garden on clay soil mix some grit into the planting hole for plants that like good drainage, such as tulips.

After planting, firm in and give plants a good watering. It is important to keep new additions well-watered in their first year, particularly during any dry spells, and to stay on top of hoeing in between the plants so that weeds don't take over.

When choosing spring planting partners, think about colour combinations. And don't ignore plant labels; these have valuable info that will ensure your choices provide interest – be it flowers or foliage – at the same time for maximum impact. They will also tell you if they need similar conditions, such as shade or sun, and moist or dry soil.

Full sun

Euphorbia, tulips & ribes

FOR a sunny, well-drained spot use flowers and foliage in colours that pack a punch. Choose a spring-flowering deciduous shrub such as the flowering currant *Ribes x gordonianum*, and combine with vibrant tulips and wallflowers (garden centres will be selling pots of tulips and wallflowers about to come into flower over the coming weeks). For extra oomph, add a sun-loving euphorbia.



Wallflowers and tulips



Euphorbia characias subsp. *wulfenii*



Ribes x gordonianum



Dicentra, aquilegia, chaenomeles & geranium

FOR exquisite spring flowers position a Japanese quince (*Chaenomeles*) against a north- or east-facing wall or fence (it likes shelter). Train its unruly woody stems onto wire for a tidier look, and underplant with the nodding bonnets of an aquilegia and the graceful stems and heart-shaped flowers of dicentra. Finally, add in a shade-loving *Geranium phaeum* for useful ground cover, interesting foliage and pretty flowers.



Chaenomeles japonica



Aquilegia vulgaris



Geranium phaeum

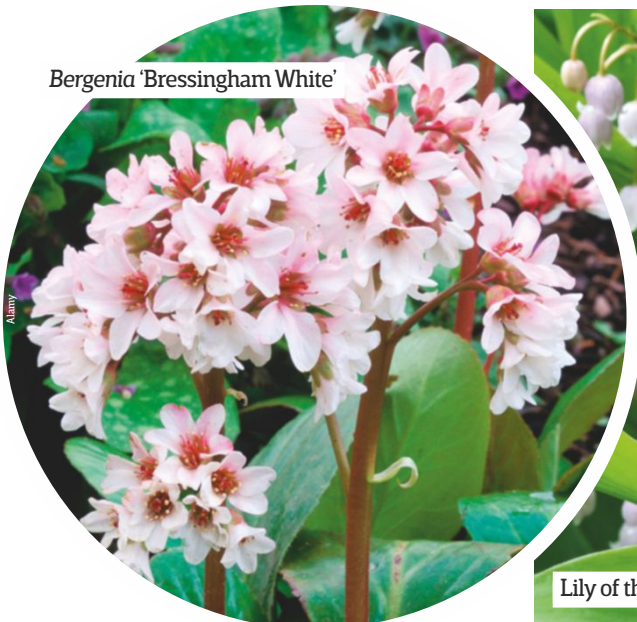


Dicentra 'Valentine'



Bergenia, lily of the valley, tiarella & euphorbia

CHOOSE cool, sparkling whites to lighten and brighten a dark corner. Combine the delicate bell-shaped flowers of lily of the valley with a white-flowered cultivar of elephant's ears (*Bergenia*) such as 'Bressingham White' and the bottle brush-like flowerheads of tiarella. For contrast, plant alongside the chartreuse flower buds of a shade-loving evergreen euphorbia like *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae*.



Bergenia 'Bressingham White'



Lily of the valley 'Rosea'



Tiarella



Euphorbia amygdaloides var. *robbiae*



Primulas, ferns & hostas

YOUR best bet for a moist, slightly shady patch of ground, perhaps by a pond or stream, are plants with lush spring foliage. Look for ferns such as the ostrich fern, and team with large-leaved hostas. Then inject some bold colour by adding to the mix some candelabra primulas like the striking *Primula japonica* 'Miller's Crimson'.



Variegated hosta



Matteuccia (ostrich fern)



Primula japonica 'Miller's Crimson'



Sweet woodruff, pulmonaria & hellebores

THIS collection of plants will provide a vital source of nectar for bees emerging after winter hibernation. Each loves dappled shade, with the sweet woodruff (*Galium*) forming a pretty carpet of green foliage and sweetly-scented, white star-like flowers. Combine with a purple or white-flowered pulmonaria and a creamy-white or green-flowered hellebore.



Galium odoratum



Pulmonaria



Hungry bees will appreciate any nectar-rich spring plants



Helleborus foetidus

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Your letters

with Jenny Bagshaw



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A world of colour

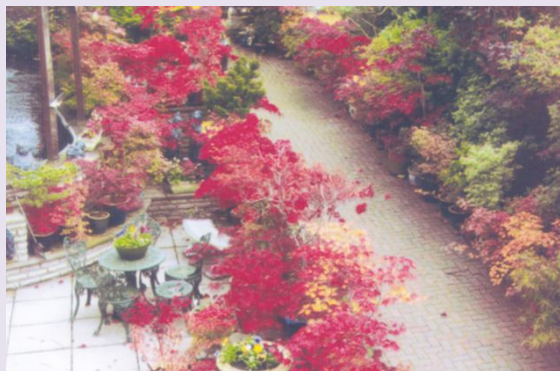
WHILST looking for an article in a back copy of *Amateur Gardening* (12 Nov 2016 issue) I saw the letter and picture from Jay Robinson extolling about the rewards of growing acers.

As we have a fairly large collection of acers ourselves, I thought I'd share a couple of pictures of some of ours with AG readers. Taken of the view down our driveway, the first picture shows their late spring colour, and the second how they change to glowing fiery colours in their autumn shades.

They're a delight all season as they provide such a changing colour scheme.

**Mrs M Littlewood,
Stourbridge,
West Midlands**

Jenny says... Even in my tiny garden I've made room for an acer. They come in such a variety of leaf shapes and colours that I believe they're worth having in any size garden.



Star letter

Practical advice

WE love the great information our local garden centre gives us each week to help us with our planning.

**Steve Giblin, Penarth,
South Wales**

Jenny says... So between your local garden centre and AG's practical tips and advice I'd say you've got it covered!



Full of beans!

MANY thanks for the £10 voucher I received after you published my letter and digi pic in AG 28 January, which I had great fun spending with my three year old son Rufus.

I took him to choose some seed potatoes and vegetable seeds, and also bought a small windowsill propagator, so that he can help raise some plants with me.

He seems to be very keen anyway as, unbeknown to me, he planted some of the bean seeds from a musical shaker he made at nursery in one of our houseplant pots. As you can see they've started to come up which he's very excited about.

I've heard of a kitchen garden but a sitting room garden might be taking things a bit too far!

**Annie Dack,
Swannington, Norwich**



Readers' Quick Tips

THE names of plants and seeds that you write on plant labels have a tendency to wear off.

However, this won't happen if you paint over the lettering with clear nail varnish once the ink has dried.

**Rachael Major, Wooburn Common,
Bucks**





Our Star Letter wins £40 in National Garden Gift Vouchers; tip of the week, £10; other letters £5 (£10 if we use a photo you've sent).



Vouchers can be bought and redeemed at over 2,000 UK outlets offering more than 90,000 garden plants and products. Visit thevouchergarden.co.uk for details.



Spring's on its way – but so are the bugs!

I WAS delighted to see the delicate flowers of my *Cyclamen coum* waking up in the sunshine.

I didn't notice at first but this earwig had also woken up to share the warmth! It made me think 'ere we go' with the joys of another springtime!

Iona Chisholm, Lichfield, Staffs

Jenny says... The best way to trap earwigs is to stuff a pot with some straw and leave it upside down nearby.



Digi pic of the week

Warm glow on a cold winter's day

DURING the months when the trees are mostly leafless I lodge pieces of red glass where the occasional ray of sunshine will shine on them.

The colour fades with time, but for two

or three winters I enjoy the glow of the sun on the red glass – a cheap but cheerful idea.

Mrs Patricia Holden, Williton, Somerset

I'm alright Jack

I LOVE Ruth Haye's pages in the magazine and followed all her tips for growing salad leaves in the winter (AG 14 Jan issue).

I felt very smug when the iceberg lettuce supermarket shortage hit the news, as I've been picking lamb's lettuce, kale, chard and spinach beet all winter. I've even found some rocket this week which had somehow miraculously survived the frosts!

Mrs Sue Wilkes, Northwich, Cheshire



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A winner's guide to online bingo

We tell you everything you need to know

Every day, more and more women are playing online bingo – not just for the fun games but also for the great community. But if you're new to online bingo, it can be daunting knowing where to start. To help you get going, we've put together this guide to **Woman's Own Bingo**.

What is online bingo? It's just like traditional bingo, except you play on your computer or laptop. So you can play in comfort at home when it's convenient to you and win cash prizes.

How do I join? Visit womansown-bingo.co.uk, register and pick a member

Woman's Own BINGO

Top tips for new players

name and password. Then deposit money into your account to buy tickets and play games. If you deposit £10, you can buy up to 1,000 bingo tickets!¹ You're always in control as you decide how much to deposit and play.

Welcome Bonus. When you join *Woman's Own Bingo* and make your first deposit, you'll get a 250% Welcome Bonus. For example, if you deposit £10, we'll give you an extra £25 FREE-PLAY*, so you'll have £35 to play with. That's a lot of bingo – up to 3,500 games!¹ So the greater your first

deposit, the bigger your bonus – you can get up to £250! When you make your first deposit, don't forget to tick 'Yes' to accept the Welcome Bonus.

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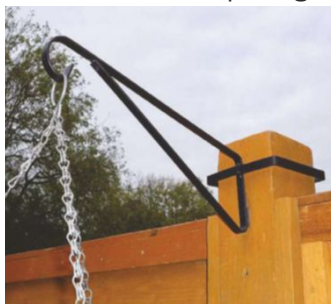
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Get the look

Ideas for gorgeous gardens

Circular island beds are filled with a range of perennials and allow plants to blur the edges of the garden for a softer look at Brooke Cottage



No view? Make plants the stars

Barry Davy's garden next to a railway station is a horticultural oasis that's just the ticket

LIVING next door to a train station has its plus points – not least being able to get out of the house and onto a train in double quick time – but it lacks a certain something when it comes to views. Fortunately for Barry Davy a collection of mature trees and a 12ft tall leylandii hedge were already in place to block out overhead cables and other railway paraphernalia when he moved into his 1830's home in Handforth.

Over time these features have provided the foundation for his garden, which wraps around three sides of the house and consists of a trio of distinct areas. Barry's favourite is his woodland garden, a lush collection of foliage beneath silver birches, acers, holly bushes and an oak tree, the canopy of which has been raised over the years to ensure there's plenty of dappled light for everything growing underneath. Bordering it is a mixed hedge containing rhododendron, holly, yew,

“The paving slabs are from the original railway platform”

hawthorn and privet.

A verdant and calming environment, the space is a magnet for birds, as well as a choice spot for some of his favourite plants, including more than 20 ferns and a variety of hostas. “This part of the garden is in shade for half of the day and gets the sun in the afternoon,” says Barry. “Here the most important thing is foliage because it's around far longer than flowers and gives structure, contrast and texture.”

As a foil to the woodland area, the back

garden is full of hot colours inspired by Christopher Lloyd's planting at Great Dixter. The influence of the Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf can also be seen in the naturalistic combinations of grasses and perennials, particularly in the two island beds and long border. “The lawn has been gradually whittled away,” Barry explains.

A south-facing patio completes the trinity, with its York stone paving softened by potted plants such as ligularia, hosta and daylilies, along with a small pond. “A neighbour told us that the paving slabs are from the original railway platform – they have holes where the railings were and are 3ft square, 4in thick and very heavy,” Barry says.

“Overall our garden is a very inward looking space,” he concludes. “Some people have fantastic sweeping views but we don't have any of that, so I have to make sure that vision stays in the garden and doesn't wander.”

Make plants the stars



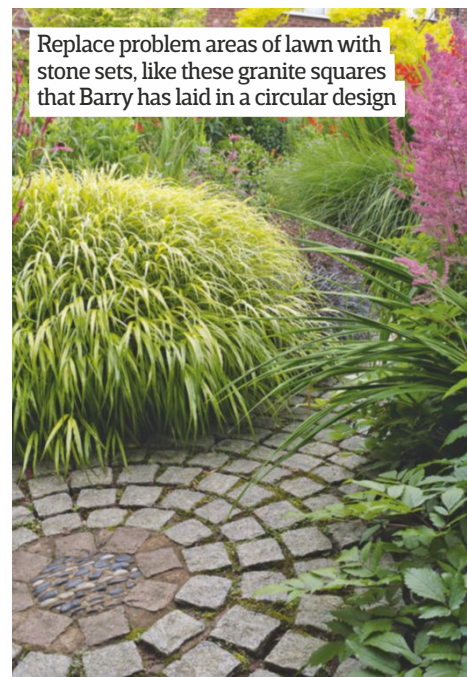
Make room for an eye-catching work of art like this ceramic bowl decorated with life-like lizards



Pull together plenty of pots to bring a patio to life. Barry uses an irrigation system to ensure every plant gets the right amount of moisture



Fill up with foliage: choose trees, shrubs and perennials with contrasting leaves to create layers of colours and textures, as Barry has done in his woodland area



Replace problem areas of lawn with stone sets, like these granite squares that Barry has laid in a circular design



Bring home ideas from famous gardens. Inspired by Great Dixter a long border is filled with grasses and perennials including *Geranium psilostemon*, *Aster x frikartii* 'Monch' and *Crocsmia* 'Lucifer'



For a natural look give plants room to breathe. The south-east facing back garden has layers of *Crocsmia* 'Lucifer', *Hydrangea* 'Annabel', miscanthus grass and euphorbia.



Use a statue to create a focal point and evergreen honeysuckle (*lonicera*), to soften its edges



Turn up the heat in a south-facing patio area with lush plantings of richly-coloured perennials. Barry's are planted in pots linked to an irrigation system



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Meet the owner

OWNER Barry Davy

ADDRESS Brooke Cottage, Church Road, Handforth, Cheshire SK9 3LT

GARDEN SIZE Less than quarter of an acre wrapping around three sides of the house

ASPECT South-east facing back garden

SOIL Acid

VISITED July

SPECIAL FEATURES Plant-filled garden next to railway station. Woodland and container gardens plus naturalistic borders.



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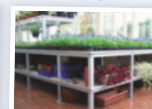
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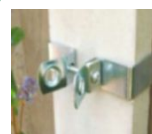
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Toby Buckland

Nurseryman and former Gardeners' World host



Some plants are hardier and will withstand a blast of icy weather

Hardening off can help plants to survive cold weather. Others need wrapping for protection

Taking an icy plunge

Hardening off can be critical to a plant's survival, says **Toby**

THERE'S a man in our town who goes down to the beach and takes a swim in the sea every day of the year.

Even when Arctic winds cut across the shingle and ice dusts the dunes, he's down there taking the plunge. I'd have a seizure if I dipped a toe, as such tolerance takes time to build.

The same can be said for plants. At this time of year, nurseries and garden centres sell pot-grown senetti, primroses and bulbs. In the normal scheme of things they wouldn't be in flower, but thanks to clement conditions inside nurseries, polytunnels and garden centre plant areas, their buds

Whenever you buy evergreens and plants in flower, give them time to find their feet, especially if the forecast predicts a blast of cold weather.

Books recommend a fortnight of putting newly acquired indoor-grown plants on to the patio during the day and bringing them into a cold greenhouse or cold-frame for the night.

If this is too much work (and for most gardeners it is) do the next best thing and leave out of the wind against the house wall where latent heat from the brickwork will keep off the frost. After a week (ideally two) they'll have toughened up and be better able to cope with the cold.

"Hardening off is akin to dipping your toe before a swim"

are bursting as if spring has sprung.

The thing is, it hasn't. And if you were to buy them and trowel these treasures straight into cold, wind-exposed soil, the shock could kill them. This is where hardening-off, a process akin to dipping your toe before a swim comes in.

Job of the week

Understand plant hardiness

WOODY plants survive a freeze by allowing ice to form in parts of their stems that don't get damaged, between cell walls and away from living tissues.

Some hardy evergreens have tougher cells that don't rupture in the cold – you can feel this difference between tender basil and conifers (right). Hardy plants can concentrate their sap by removing water in autumn, making it more 'salty'. This lowers the point at which it freezes.

Toby's top tips



■ Never move pots when they are frozen as it can bruise leaves and damage roots.



■ Keep compost of tender plants on the dry-side and don't start feeding until the weather warms-up properly.

Some plants are naturally hardier than others (see below) and I always thought that was the case with the sea-swimming man. According to him though, anyone can do it.

"After six dunkings the human body becomes accustomed to the cold," was his wistful thought on the matter. "Although even then you don't enjoy it, so much as turn a blind eye to the discomfort".

And if that hasn't sold you the idea of taking a winter swim, I don't know what will! I'll hold your towel.



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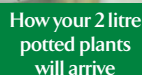
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