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# Garden news

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up your  
grasses



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comes  
**spring!**

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- Give new bulbs the best chance
- Make stunning hanging baskets

**Carol Klein** "Try my  
trick to fill your plot with  
beautiful hellebores"





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P.10

Perennials for  
shady spots

# Britain's most trusted voice in gardening

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# Garden news

## Only one thing for it: Enjoy!

There's almost certainly more frost on the way in the coming weeks, but as March edges closer we feel justified in finally shouting about spring on our cover. We've waited patiently for long enough but now we want to really get cracking! We all have different types of garden and different jobs to do, and while we have some suggestions for you in this issue - creating an area for early nectar (page 26) has never seemed more important, for example - the main thing is we all get outside and really enjoy our gardens. This is my favourite time of year, so thick with anticipation.

In the depths of winter the garden can be a labour of love, but now spring's in the air it's time to make the most of every minute.

*Simon*  
Garden News  
Editor



P.20

This week's reader  
garden is a real  
love affair



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Tend to grasses  
to give them  
new life



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Care for bulbs

### Our cover star: *Iris reticulata*

They may be small, but these early-flowering beauties are strong on colour and scent. Growing to 15cm (6in) in height, these perennials like well-drained, neutral or alkaline soil in full sun.

## Get in touch!

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# About **NOW**

## New lease of life

Georgian garden will get Lottery millions

**Words** Ian Hodgson

A 70-acre, Grade II Listed garden in Yorkshire is to be transformed to its historical glory. The grounds of Cannon Hall, near Barnsley, South Yorkshire, have been awarded a Heritage Lottery grant of almost £3 million, which will be used to restore and repair original features.

Some elements, such as an 18th century ice house, have never previously been on public display. Improvements will also see a two-acre woodland opened for educational tours, new pathways constructed and lakes dredged to allow use of rowing boats, emulating a popular Georgian pastime. Another part of the pleasure gardens, 'Fairyland', built in the 1870s,



The Victorian 'Fairyland' garden will be refurbished

contains stone arches taken from the ruins of local churches and is said to have been inspired by pre-Raphaelite painter John Roddam Spencer Stanhope.

The walled garden at Cannon Hall also contains a number of historic plants, such as a 200-year-old muscat grapevine

and a collection of more than 50 pear tree varieties, one of the largest in the north. The remains of an 18th century greenhouse, dubbed the Pinery, will be used to emulate the old practice of growing pineapples and other exotic tender fruit under glass.

"The grant is a major boost

for this historic recreational site and fantastic news for the Barnsley community," said The Friends of Cannon Hall chair Richard Emerson.

The parks and gardens are free to visit and open every day of the year.

● Visit [www.cannon-hall.com](http://www.cannon-hall.com).



Buildings will house displays of plants

## Cutting edge!

New Chatsworth show promises 'revolutionary' experiences

The RHS has unveiled the look for its new June show at Chatsworth House. The iconic venue in Derbyshire will play host to the first new major RHS show in 18 years, partnered by Midlands-based Wedgwood pottery.

Under the theme 'Design Revolutionaries', gardens will draw on the influences of historic innovators of garden design such as Sir Joseph Paxton and 'Capability' Brown, both of whom had a significant impact on the 1,000 acre Chatsworth

Estate. Contemporary design will also be high-profile, with a new 'FreeForm' category, encouraging freedom of expression, linking plants, sculpture, art and people. The RHS itself will be staging its own display garden, based on climate change and the scientific research on the subject it plans to publish in April.

The floral marquee will take its look from Paxton's Great Conservatory at Chatsworth, which was the world's largest glass building when built in



1840, but later demolished in 1920. Two floral marquees, housing themed displays by 76 leading nurseries and growers, will be linked by a 14m (46ft) high, domed centrepiece.

Bridges across the River Derwent, which bisects the showground, will provide pedestrian and vehicular

links, including a recreation of an historic Palladian bridge. "We're looking forward to a thoroughly inspiring show," said RHS Director of Shows, Nick Mattingley.

● RHS Chatsworth Flower Show is held on June 7-11. For tickets tel: 0844 995 9664 or visit [www.rhs.org.uk/flowershows](http://www.rhs.org.uk/flowershows).



## Plant OF THE WEEK

# Flowering quince

**These early-blossoming Oriental shrubs create a real spectacle**

Once the flowering quince, or chaenomeles, burst into bloom you know the gardening year is about to get into full swing. Colourful and reliable whatever the weather, these deciduous shrubs flower on bare stems from February, into March and beyond.

The three species all come from the east. *C. japonica* comes from Japan, while *C. speciosa* and *C. cathayensis* come from China (*C. speciosa* is also found in Korea). Many of the varieties available have been developed from *C. superba*, a hybrid between *C. speciosa* and *C. japonica*. The bright, cup-shaped flowers, which form at the base of older stems, come in a range of tones from bright scarlet, pink, salmon, apricot, pale yellow and, of course, white. After the flowers come oval to squat yellow-green fruits. Once ripe, these are best used to make

jams and jellies, but can be cooked. The large-growing Cathay quince, *C. cathayensis*, has the biggest fruits of all, reaching 15cm (6in) across.

They grow in most soils and situations, even heavy clay in sun or partial shade. Once established, they need little care, but growth can become a unkempt and is best pruned to shape. After flowering, cut out all the thin, wispy branches to leave a more open structure composed of thicker shoots. Over-long growths can be cut back by about a third to reduce the height. You can also selectively remove shoots that are three to four years old to encourage new growths to form. Chaenomeles is also good for training up walls or fences, even those which are north or east facing. They're susceptible to fireblight, so don't grow them if this is already a serious problem.

**Fact**

Chaenomeles, particularly *C. japonica* and *C. speciosa*, are traditionally grown and trained as multi-stemmed bonsai due to the spectacular display of spring flowers.

### Best to try for colour



#### *C. superba* 'Pink Lady'

The dark pink flowers are produced earlier than other varieties. Spreading habit. Aromatic yellow-green fruit. Height and spread: 1.5m (5ft).



#### *C. cathayensis*

A robust species with short spurs, hardy to -20C (-4F). White, pink-flushed flowers in April produce huge, egg-shaped fruit to 6in (15cm). Height and spread: 2.5m (8ft).



#### *C. japonica* 'Madame Butterfly'

A medium-sized spreading shrub with lovely, early, salmon-pink and white flowers. Golden yellow fruit. Height and spread: 1.5m (5ft).



#### *C. superba* 'Crimson and Gold'

This is a reliable old variety with a compact, spreading habit. Early, bright scarlet flowers. Height: 1.5m (5ft), spread: 2m (7ft).



#### *C. superba* 'Cameo'

This is a recently introduced, compact variety with gorgeous double-petalled, salmon-pink flowers with apricot tones. Height and spread: 1.2m (4ft).



#### *C. speciosa* 'Moerloosei'

This one flowers later than others, with white, pink-flushed flowers. Ideal for hedgerows or walls. Height: 2.5m (8ft), spread: 5m (15ft).



# AboutNOW

## Top trees!

UK veterans urgently need your vote in Euro contest

British trees will never stand a chance of winning a prestigious European competition because not enough of the UK public vote for them, says a leading charity.

Likening the situation to our lacklustre 'nul points' showing in the Eurovision Song Contest, UK organiser the Woodland Trust is imploring the public to vote for this year's candidates in the European Tree of the Year competition to change our fortunes.

Winners in previous years have come from central Europe and the Baltic states. Last year's winner was a 400-year-old oak

from Hungary, scoring 72,653, with the UK's 250-year-old Cubbington Pear Tree coming eighth with 7,858 votes. Our highest ever placing has been sixth, with **Sherwood Forest's Major Oak in 2015.**

In a bid to boost its profile, this year's competition to select the UK's finalists was covered in a TV programme in December, with 'Father Ted' comedian Ardal O'Hanlon presenting.

With over 70,000 votes, the 2016 winner was the Hungarian oak at Bátaszék, a sole survivor of an 18th century forest



"The UK is renowned as a country of nature lovers, but we never get anywhere near enough votes for our trees," said WT's ancient tree expert Jill Butler. "Perhaps this also goes some

way to explain why so many of our special trees don't have the relevant protection."   
 ● The deadline for voting is February 29. Visit [www.treeoftheyear.org](http://www.treeoftheyear.org).

## Home candidates for European Tree of the Year 2017



**England**  
 The Sycamore Gap on Hadrian's Wall featured in the film *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*.



**Scotland**  
 The Ding Dong tree at Prestonpans Primary school is used for teaching and games.



**Northern Ireland**  
 Old Homer, a leaning Holm oak in an Ulster park, was recently crowned NI's best-loved tree.



**Wales**  
 The Welsh Assembly agreed to re-route a bypass to save the 200-year-old Brimmon oak.



**GEOFF HODGE**  
 Tools for  
**THE JOB**

Writer, TV & radio broadcaster and product guru

BEST VERSATILE PROPAGATOR

**Greenhouse Sensation Vitopod, from £120**

This Standard Vitopod measures 56x55cm (22x22in) and has options to create single, double and triple heights. It has a 50 Watt output heating element, and the easy to use digital thermostat has a very clear display. It took around 100 minutes for the compost temperature to reach 20C (68F).

**Supplier:** Greenhouse Sensation, 01695 554097, [www.greenhousesensation.co.uk](http://www.greenhousesensation.co.uk).



BEST LARGE PROPAGATOR

**Two Wests & Elliott Quadruple Propagator, £149.95**

The Quadruple features a heated, 2.5cm (1in) thick, aluminium base, which measures 96x38cm (37½x15in) and contains a 100 Watt heating element. You then place standard, unheated propagators on top; four are supplied. It took around 150 minutes for the compost temperature to reach 16C (61F) when set at 20C (68F).

**Supplier:** Two Wests & Elliott, 01246 451077, [www.twowests.co.uk](http://www.twowests.co.uk).



BEST COMPACT PROPAGATOR

**Stewart Garden Premium Variable Control Electric Propagator, £89.99**

Plenty of growing space, measuring 52x42cm (20½x16½in) and 28cm (11in) high, and features a 50 Watt output heating element. The manual dial on the thermostat can be set from 12-28C (54-82F). It took 120 minutes for the compost temperature to reach 20C (68F) when set at 20C (68F).

**Supplier:** Stewart Garden, 0203 657 5230, [www.stewart-garden.co.uk](http://www.stewart-garden.co.uk).





# 'Scots pine is my big favourite'

## MY LIFE In Plants

### The first plant I grew

Aged three, I helped my grandfather. He grew a wide range of plants, including flowers, fruit and vegetables, and he saved his own seed. He died when I was 10, and these were my first sowings while looking after the family garden.

### The plant that shaped the gardener I am today

The wildflowers we were encouraged to collect for my primary school project, aged eight. This was a good start in identifying and naming the local plants and established the routine for when I eventually travelled the world.

### My favourite plant in the world

The Scots pine, *Pinus sylvestris*, is a wonderful tree with the widest distribution of any conifer - from north-west Scotland through Europe to Mongolia. At the garden we grow four geographical forms of subspecies *scotica*, subspecies *syvestris* from Turkey, and var *mongolica*.

### The plant that changed my life

It has to be the rhododendron. Collecting them in China in

1981 provided an insight into how they hybridise in the wild, and also gave me a springboard to guiding botanical tours. I met my first wife when she was typing the 1963 *Rhododendron Handbook* and my second wife while seeking advice on rhododendrons!

### The plant that made me work hardest

The difficulty of propagating *Eucalyptus gunnii* from cuttings is well known. My five-year research project, that involved 24,000 cuttings and various treatments and light regimes, resulted in only nine rooted plants! Scientific analysis of the eucalyptus, comparing it with the easily-rooted common myrtle, *Myrtus communis*, showed natural inhibitors were causing the problem.

### The plant I would like to grow more

As I recently had to withdraw my Plant Heritage National Collection of *Paeonia species*

Influenced by his grandfather, Bob became a horticulturist, here receiving his RHS 50 year service medal in 2012

due to disease, I'm building up collections of eucomis, roscoeia and tricyrtis - plants which suit our soil and climate.

### The plant I am in human form

I've been growing *Paeonia* species for more than 50 years and seriously for the last 30. I've always enjoyed the scented white flowers of *Paeonia clusii* long before seeing it in the wild. It's endemic to

### Robert (Bob) Mitchell.

**Emeritus Curator, St Andrews Botanic Garden. Past editor of Scottish Rock Garden Club journal. Plantsman, lecturer, horticultural consultant. Gardening type: Botanic gardener.**

Crete, so this plant sums up two loves succinctly.

### The plant I always give as a gift

This depends on the season and habitat of the person, but we have a superabundance of primroses and *Cyclamen hederifolium* does well with us, so both are always welcome gifts.

## Low-growing lovelies

Aromatic rosemary is a deservedly popular herb that also makes a versatile border shrub for sunny, well drained conditions or pots. These two new varieties are both low growing, making them ideal for border edges, raised beds or containers.

'Whitewater Silver', a sport from the low-growing Prostratus Group, forms a bushy, arching clump with leaves that are silvery beneath. Large, mid-blue flowers in spring. Good for pots or growing over walls. A portion of sales will benefit horticultural charity Perennial. Available from garden centres from spring. 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' is another low-growing rosemary with rich, dark blue-purple flowers and tight, bushy foliage. Height: 30cm (12in). Price £3 (from spring) from Downderry Nursery, tel: 01732 810081 or visit [www.downderry-nursery.co.uk](http://www.downderry-nursery.co.uk).



'Whitewater Silver'



'Sorcerer's Apprentice'



# About**NOW** Picture perfect!

## World-class images of plants, gardens and nature go on show

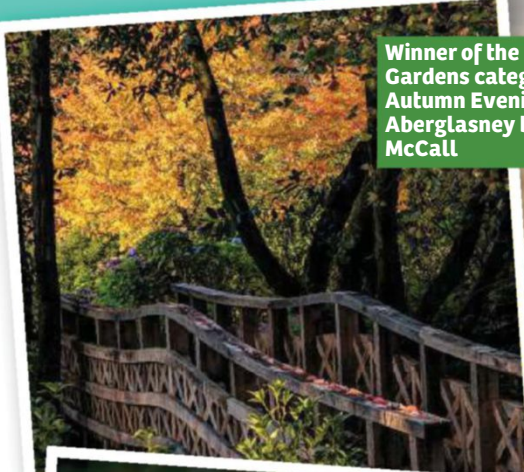
**C**elebrating its 10th year, the International Garden Photographer Of The Year competition has announced this year's winners. The premier competition specialises in garden, plants, flower and botanical photography. Entries are received from both amateur and professionals alike, who compete equally in eight categories, including the beauty of plants, the most popular class, plus trees woods and forests,

beautiful gardens, wildlife in the garden, wildflower landscapes and greening the city. There are also special classes for under 16s and specialist themes.

This year saw around 20,000 entries from more than 50 countries, with amateurs beating the professionals to take 60 per cent of the honours. Winning entries are displayed at Kew gardens, before touring the UK and then

the world. Each year, the competition opens in March and closes at the end of October. ● For more details and how to enter, visit [www.igpoty.com](http://www.igpoty.com).

**Winner of the Beautiful Gardens category: Autumn Evening at Aberglasney by Nigel McCall**



**Commended in The Beauty of Plants: The Ring by Rosanna Castrini**



## Rare plant flowers in Devon

**A**rare plant, now extinct in the wild, has flowered for the first time in a Devon garden. Shrubby *Abutilon pitcairnsense*, known as the yellow fault, was previously found only on the remote, small island of Pitcairn, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. First discovered in 1934, it was thought extinct for more than 20 years, until a single plant was found in 2003.

Thankfully seed and cutting material was obtained and new plants were established in an island nursery, before the original wild plant was swept away by a landslide in 2005.

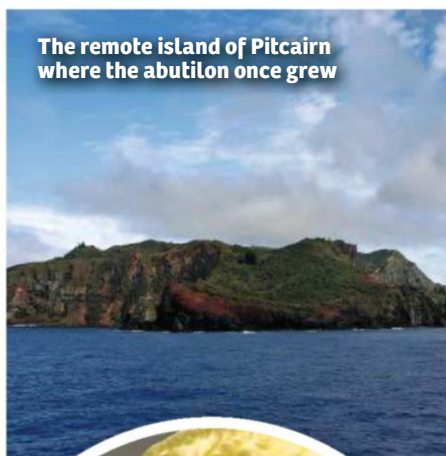
Material is now held at a number of botanic gardens such as Kew, Dublin's Trinity College Botanic Garden and now Devon's Bicton Park Botanical Garden.

There are plans to reintroduce the yellow-flowered, 90cm (3ft) tall shrub to the island and there are hopes that more surviving native plants may still yet be found when they flower in July and August.

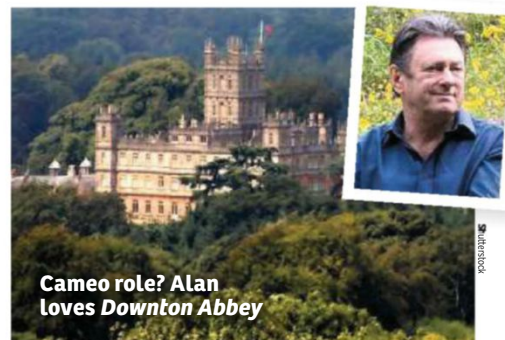
"It's very exciting for us to grow and display these exceptionally rare plants here in East Devon," said Bicton's curator Neville Evans.

● Visit [www.bictongardens.co.uk](http://www.bictongardens.co.uk).

**The remote island of Pitcairn where the abutilon once grew**



**Although extinct in the wild, *Abutilon pitcairnsense* thrives in cultivation**



**Cameo role? Alan loves Downton Abbey**

## "Downton's for me!" says TV's Alan

**A**lan Titchmarsh secretly covets a cameo role as a gardener in the film version of *Downton Abbey*, he has revealed. "I'd like to play the gardener. I'd have a big beard and wheel a wheelbarrow in the background," said the former host of the Chelsea Flower Show and *BBC Gardener's World*. "I'm going to have a go at (series creator) Julian Fellowes. I've never seen anybody do anything in the garden. I'd just like to be a part of it because I so enjoyed that series!"

Alan was speaking at the launch of his new Tuesday night programme *Secrets of the National Trust*, in which he explores the charity's best-loved estates, historic houses and gardens. But he won't be trying other reality TV series, such as *Strictly Come Dancing* or *I'm A Celebrity - Get Me Out Of Here!*, saying his wife thinks his "gardener's knees won't take the lifts", and that no one wants to see him "sitting down and grumbling".





## *Alnus glutinosa*



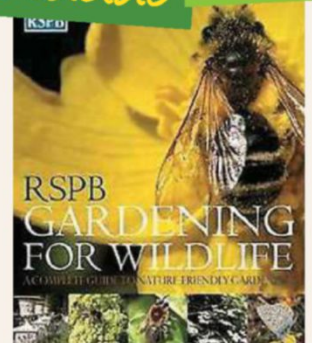
One of the memorable sights of February are those shrubs and trees festooned by curtains of catkins. While those of birch and hazel are familiar, less appreciated are the catkins of the common alder, *Alnus glutinosa*, which also happens to be in the betula family, Betulaceae. The 15cm (6in) long, purple brown, male catkins shed windborne pollen, which fertilises the stubby clusters of round, female cones. It's a fast-growing,

deciduous tree reaching 20m (65ft) clothed in blunt, racquet-shaped, serrated leaves, which turn yellow in autumn.

While this durable and versatile tree may not be in many gardener's top 10, perhaps because of its ultimate size, as a landscape plant it's indispensable. It thrives in constantly wet to damp soil, poor in nutrients, which it does via nitrogen-fixing bacterium *Frankia alni*, that lives in nodules on its roots. Open clusters of cells on its wood also allow fresh air to penetrate to roots submerged in toxic, anaerobic conditions.

Of more garden appeal, especially if your soil is wet, are the cut-leaved varieties such as 'Laciniata', which has a light, delicate appearance and the even more filigree and slower-growing 'Imperialis', ideal for smaller gardens.

### Bedside Books



#### **RSPB Gardening for Wildlife** Adrian Thomas

A new, expanded edition of an award-winning book. The author, who has worked at the RSPB for 15 years, presents a range of practical aspects of creating wildlife habitats, from woodland, meadow and water gardens, while explaining the ecological principles involved in an accessible, chatty style.

**Best line:** The pitch at Wembley looks pretty big compared to most gardens, but even one pair of small birds, such as robins, often need a larger area of gardens than this to raise a brood.

**Bloomsbury, £25**



Many people find gardening relaxing and life affirming



## Is gardening good for us?

University researchers are out to prove it's true

Gardening is good for our health, leading medics often tell us. Now researchers at the University of Sheffield are trying to find out if it's actually true. They're compiling evidence on the therapeutic effects of gardens and are asking the public to help.

"Most evidence is centred around public green spaces rather than private gardens. That's the gap in the knowledge - the contributions private gardens make to the health and well-being agenda," said PhD researcher Lauriane Suyin Chalmin-Pui.

Front gardens, an important focus of the research, are disappearing at an alarming rate - 4.5 million of them contain no plants at all and, mainly thanks to the car, a quarter of front gardens are now totally paved over.

To address the issue this year, Lauriane's research, also supported by the Royal Horticultural Society, will involve planting and greening up front gardens currently paved over, then monitoring the health and well-being changes over the year. The public, whether they have a garden or not, is also being asked to take part in a 15-minute questionnaire which is completely confidential and anonymous.

● To take part visit [www.rhs.org.uk/science](http://www.rhs.org.uk/science).



Front gardens are now car parking spaces



Spring beauty – *Pulmonaria officinalis*

Top  
5

## Perennials for shade

Even dark areas can become a sea of blossom

### 1 Epimedium

Clump-forming perennial with tinted, shield-like leaves and airy sprays of star-shaped flowers in spring. Makes good ground cover once established. Trim old foliage before new leaves emerge. Height: 30cm (12in).

**TIP Buy larger plants as they're slow to establish**

### 2 Pulmonaria

Highly variable perennials with decorative leaves, plain green, variably spotted to completely silver. Clusters of small white, pink or blue flowers throughout spring. Best in semi-shade and moist, well-drained soil. Height: 15-30cm (6-12in).

**TIP Choose mildew-resistant varieties such as 'Margery Fish'**

### 3 Tiarella

This valuable range of clump-forming evergreen

perennials has distinctive, maple-like foliage, often attractively marked. Wands of creamy-white or creamy flowers appear in spring. Best in soils with some moisture. Height: 30-37cm (12-15in).

**TIP Remove spent stems after flowering**

### 4 Dicentra formosa

The filigree grey to blue-green leaves of this tuberous-rooted, spreading perennial give a light, delicate appearance, a wonderful foil for the dangling lockets of red, pink or white flowers that appear in spring. Height: 12-18in (12-45cm).

**TIP Avoid dry shade for best results**



*Dicentra* 'Burning Hearts' has lovely blue-green foliage

### 5 Geranium phaeum

Thriving in shade, even dry conditions, clump-forming 'Mourning Widow' has mottled, aromatic leaves and tall, airy sprays of flowers in shades of dark purple, lilac and white. Height: 45-60cm (18-24 in).

**TIP Use white-flowered varieties to lighten gloomy shade**

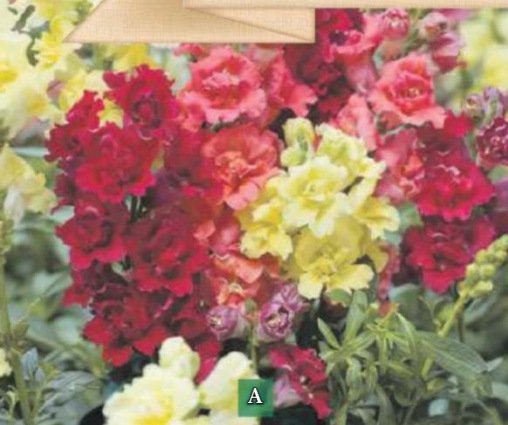


*Tiarella* 'Pink Skyrocket' forms a weed-proof clump



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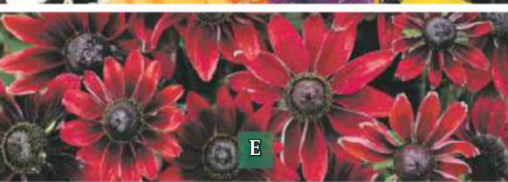
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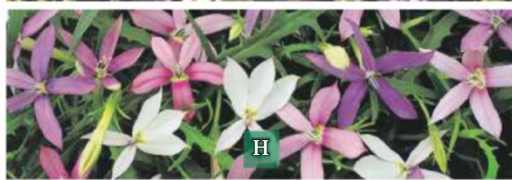
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- D Pansy Tea Party** - Compact growing variety with large colourful blooms. HT 20 cm
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- F Stocks Clove Scented Mix** - Wonderfully fragrant flowers in shades of pink, purple and cream. Makes a great cut flower. HT 60 cm
- G Verbena Peaches and Cream** - Trailing stems and pretty peachy-salmon florets make this ideal for borders, pots and baskets. HT 30 cm.
- H. Laurentia Mixed** - Mounding foliage bursts into bloom with hundreds of pastel coloured star shaped flowers. HT 20 cm
- I. Gazania Red Shades** - Vivid ruby-red flowers will tolerate all weathers for a stunning summer display. HT 25 cm
- J. Ageratum Blue Danube** - Dwarf, bushy plants house these soft blue fluffy flower clusters, ideal for bedding. HT 20 cm
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Reed buntings  
could visit our  
gardens in spring

## Wildlife Watch

With Julian Rollins



### Singing for spring

**But the coming weeks are the toughest for birds and they still need your help**

Is it spring yet? It feels like it's in the air and the birds are singing, which can seem like a celebration of the changing season. Of course, the idea that their song is celebratory says more about us than them – it sounds to the human ear like an expression of delight that winter is coming to an end. But for garden birds, such as robins and wrens, their song serves a purpose and isn't just mood music; it marks out a territory, and attracts members of the opposite sex.

And you'd be wrong if you thought the birds in your garden have made it through the toughest test of their year. In fact, late February and March represent a lean time, what ornithologists have dubbed 'the hungry gap'. It's the time when natural food supplies such as berries and seeds have been used up, but it's too early to switch to insects and other invertebrates. It can make life particularly difficult for seed-eaters like house sparrows and chaffinches.

And it can mean you'll see more unusual garden visitors if a spell of cold weather adds to their problems. That's especially true for suburban gardens that are not too far from

farm fields. In years gone by, farmland species could rely on farmers for food during the winter months, but modern farming is a much tidier and precise business, so free meals are few and far between these days.

For example, grain stores are now sparrow-proof, and much less hay is used to feed livestock (when animals have finished a feed of hay they leave a scatter of fallen seed for birds to clear up).

One farm bird that may wander into gardens is the reed bunting, which often switches to home plots after fields have been ploughed for the coming growing season. Look for a sparrow-sized bird that's mostly brown, so is easy to overlook. However, on closer examination they do have tell-tale clues that will help you make a positive identification. Reed buntings have a longer tail than sparrows and in the breeding season males have a distinctive white facial patch that looks just like a moustache.

Finally, a sure-fire ID tip for both male and female reed buntings is to look at the tail. When the bird's in flight its tail looks near-black, but has distinctive white edges.

### Keep on feeding

● **Don't stop feeding your garden birds just because the daffs are in bloom. Fill the hungry gap by continuing to put out good-quality foods in hanging feeders, on the bird table and on the ground. Sunflower hearts will go down very well with many garden visitors, as will no-waste seed mixes.**



Sunflower hearts are a nutritious feast for many birds

### GO Natural

Rain barrels are a godsend during dry spells

## Save water smartly

**A few easy ways bring time and cash rewards**

Efficient irrigation helps you save water and money, particularly during hot, dry summers. Now you've got time, plan ahead and put some easy and clever water-saving systems in place for the spring and summer to come.

Drip irrigation systems minimise water loss through evaporation and runoff as well as leaching of nutrients. Hoses are positioned closely to the plants you want to water, releasing water slowly onto the rootzone, trickling into the soil, drop by drop. It works well in your greenhouse as well as outside in your vegetable patch, making sure seedlings don't dry out, plus it will save you a lot of time.

Rain barrels are simple devices, collecting rainwater, which is especially valuable if you grow orchids, cacti, ferns or carnivorous plants that prefer natural, rather than tap water. You can get one from your garden centre or even make one by upcycling a large wooden or plastic container. Get started by cleaning your gutters to prevent any debris reaching the barrel and protect the opening with a fine mesh screen. It's a good idea to empty it every month to keep it fresh.

You can also save a huge amount of water if you water early in the morning or late in the afternoon, significantly reducing evaporation through wind and high temperatures. If you apply the water directly to the rootzone this will not only keep the leaves dry and avoid fungal diseases but also save even more water.



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# Beautiful hanging baskets

These seasonal displays will immediately cheer up any corner of your porch or garden

**Words** Tonia Friedrich

**G**enerously overflowing hanging baskets can brighten anyone's winter mood instantly, shaking off the remaining bits of grey, wet winter weather.

They add another dimension

to your garden, as a lively focal point, while also saving space.

There are classic and contemporary, natural and brightly coloured displays, some of which you can plant up now, plus we've got a few suggestions for the coming spring and even some to give you inspiration for

a summer hanging basket.

If you'd like to make your own, we've gathered some practical ideas about what types of baskets and materials you could use, the best and easiest ways you can plant them up and how to look after them to ensure a long life and lots of enjoyment.



## A MIX OF SUCCULENTS



Succulents are a great option for a permanent low-maintenance basket

If you want a hanging basket to really stand out, try this rustic display with a mix of succulents. You've got a wide choice of colour and forms with shorter, upright plants such as *sedum* or *echeveria*, in shades of green and dark-purple, which can be placed in the middle or near the edges.

Trailing succulents overflowing the basket look especially wonderful, such as *Sedum morganianum*, the burro's tail cactus, with stems reaching 1-1.2 m (3-4 ft) or *Senecio rowleyanus*, with string-like stems and pea-shaped leaves.

For the best effect, place trailing plants near the edge so they can hang freely and fit pansies in the remaining space. A wire basket is the best option for succulents, as they need good drainage. With some moss collected from your garden, you can hide the liner, giving your display a more natural look.

## Keep your display vibrant

- Keep the soil moist at all times, until the plants are established and check the baskets regularly to prevent them drying out.
- Deadhead regularly to keep your display neat and to encourage more flowers.
- If you don't use slow-release fertiliser pellets, regularly apply a liquid fertiliser in spring and summer.
- Keep your basket in a protected spot to prevent wind damage. Take it inside if necessary.



With care, your basket will catch the eye all season





A basket full of bright pansies is a herald of spring!

## ROMANTIC SUMMER BASKET

Get ready to plan your summer hanging basket with a charming cottage garden feel, with trailing lobelia, helichrysum, pelargonium, diascia and fuchsia. A sunny spot is ideal for this arrangement of pastel-coloured plants in softer tones, giving a traditional, harmonious display. Abundantly flowering cultivars of diascia in shades of rose, pink and apricot will delight you all summer long. And don't miss out on traditional pelargoniums, enriching the arrangement with flowers, or on freely-branching, vibrant fuchsia. The soft, silvery foliage of helichrysum contrasts with the deep blue flowers of lobelia. Now you've got the chance to plan ahead which seeds to order or which plug plants to buy. Come spring you're ready, either to sow them from seed or plant them as plug plants.



A few trailing plants positioned at the sides of a basket creates a dazzling display

**Top Tip**  
Once you've planted up your hanging basket, keep it in a heated glasshouse or light spot indoors until the risk of frost has passed, and when your plants have grown sturdy, harden them off before moving the basket outside

## COLOURFUL WINTER BASKET

For a colourful, late winter hanging basket you can plant up right now, this hardy mix is the answer.

All the plants cope with less sun, so a spot in dappled shade would be perfect. *Cyclamen coum*, with its many terrific varieties with pink, violet and white flowers from January to March, and heart-shaped, silvery marked leaves, will brighten up any spot.

*Cyclamen* combine well with the delicately patterned, arrow-like leaves of trailing ivy, cascading over the sides. Some upright growing herbs such as pineapple mint will add height, and a dwarf evergreen shrub, with glossy berries, will complement the display – try *Vaccinium vitis-idaea* Koralle Group, with small, leathery, dark green leaves and racemes of pink, bell-shaped flowers, followed by bright red berries.



This bright winter basket will have an instant effect

Continues over the page



## SPICY HERB BASKET

Although you can use nearly any herbs to create a scented herb garden in your hanging basket, maybe you'd like to try a combination of woodruff, oregano, chives and Indian mint for a spot in dappled shade? It's a long lasting display of perennials you can start off now from seed indoors.

Place chives with edible pink flowers in summer in the middle and classic oregano or attractive, variegated forms around it. Sweet woodruff has pretty whorls of leaves and white star-shaped flowers with a mild fragrance from April to June, which are attractive to bees. Indian mint is a trailing type which is perfect to soften the edges of hanging baskets.

**Trim herbs regularly to encourage fresh growth**



## Four easy steps to a fantastic hanging basket



**1** Choose a rattan basket with natural charm, an elegant ceramic or simple plastic container. Wire hanging baskets are popular because you can plant up the sides by cutting holes into it.



**2** If you use a wire basket you'll need a liner to hold in compost and help water retention. Use wool, hessian or Supamoss, leaving overlap on the rim. This will be covered by trailing plants.



**3** Add a layer of compost at the bottom and start from the centre out, positioning taller, upright plants first and trailing plants near the edges. Try to fit in as many plants as you can.



**4** Add some slow-release fertiliser pellets or mix in powdered feed, then water in thoroughly.

**Top Tip**  
To ensure the container doesn't become too small for the root system, split and re-pot the plant

## HANGING HOSTAS

Small and medium-sized hostas are fabulous to lighten up tricky shady areas with their diverse foliage in tones of blue, grey, green and splashed cream. Moreover, it deters slugs and snails by hanging them up high. It's essential to have a large enough container as it makes it easier to keep the compost moist to ensure the plants won't dry out between watering. Displayed in a ceramic pot, top-dressed with fine grit and sitting in a swing, they look very classy. A soil-based compost, such as John Innes No 2, is perfect, and apply a liquid fertiliser monthly during the growing season.

**Hostas will thrive hung up a tree branch**





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# Bean bonanza!

2017 is the Year of the Bean and we're celebrating with these seven wonders of the bean world – from classic to colourfully curious!

## Fantastic French beans

### 1 'COSSE VIOLETTE'

Beautiful long, deep purple pods that unfortunately lose their colour in cooking. The stems and flowers are pretty purple, too. No wonder it's named 'Cosse Violette', which means 'purple pod' in French. Give them lots of sunshine and they'll reward you with 30cm (11in) long bean pods!

**How to grow** Sow April indoors and later in May or June outdoors. Make earlier sowings under glass at around 16C (61F), sow seeds in pots of seed compost. Outside from May onwards, sow seed 5cm (2in) deep. Sow two to three seeds every 20cm (8in). Harden off before planting outside. Support and net plants and water regularly. Harvest from July.

**Suppliers** Chiltern Seeds, Kings Seeds, Sea Spring Seeds and the Real Seed Co.

### 2 'SONESTA'

An early maturing French bean producing long and slender, custard-yellow bean pods! They're sweet tasting, but more importantly have been bred to be resistant to mosaic virus and anthracnose, a fungal problem. Crop them for three months straight if harvested regularly from July.

**How to grow** Sow indoors from April, or direct outdoors from May. Sow in moist pots of compost in a frost-free greenhouse before hardening off in late spring, and then plant out when all risk of frost has passed. Keep really well watered and supported.

**Suppliers** Johnsons Seeds, Thompson & Morgan, Unwins, D.T. Brown.



Glorious, long, purple-black pods grow best in lots of sun



Yellow bean 'Sonesta' has sweeter pods than others

'Robin Hood' is the perfect small space bean



## Brilliant broad bean

### 3 'ROBIN HOOD'

A superbly compact variety for container gardening that produces a lot of beans for such a little plant. Its dwarf broad bean rival, 'The Sutton', is larger, so if space is really tight, this one's the one to plump for.

**How to grow** Direct sow outdoors from March to May at a depth of 5cm (2in). Pinch out the growing tips after the first flowers have set pods to deter blackfly and encourage further pods to set. Harvest from June when pods are thick and seed hasn't hardened.

**Suppliers** D.T. Brown, Mr Fothergill's, Thompson & Morgan, Suttons Seeds and Marshalls.



This dwarf bean can easily be grown in a medium-sized pot



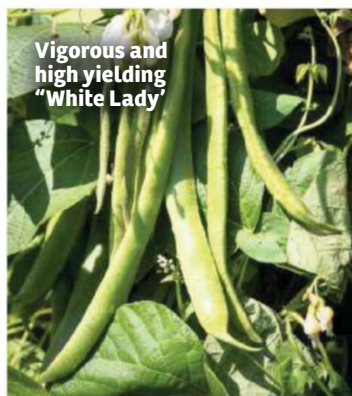
## Borlotti beans

Grow and eat like the Italians and try borlotti or 'fire-tongue' beans. Each pod is splashed with red – and just as ornamental as any flower! Harvested from autumn, the kidney-shaped beans look a little like the pods, but after cooking they'll fade to white.

**How to grow** Sow under glass from March or sow direct from May. Sow indoors 5cm (2in) deep in pots of seed compost, covered with a propagator and kept between 12-25C (54-77F) in the light for up to 10 days. After that, grow on in cooler conditions. Sow outdoors 5cm (2in) deep and the eventual site should be sheltered but sunny, with rich soil. Keep well watered all through the growing season and provide support.

**Suppliers** Thompson & Morgan, Marshalls, Crocus, D.T. Brown and Mr Fothergill's.





Vigorous and high yielding "White Lady"

## The classic runner

**5 'WHITE LADY'** You might normally grow red-flowered runner beans, but this is a rather pretty, well-known white-flowered version. In fact, some gardeners grow it to use its lovely beany-flavoured blooms in salads and garnish for rice dishes as much as for the beans itself. Plant with sweet peas for a colourful plot, and to attract even more pollinators. The beans are stringless and grow prolifically, which is why it's been awarded an RHS AGM.

**How to grow** Sow seed indoors from April to plant out at the end of May, or you can wait till the end of spring to sow direct. Sow as borlottis, but its propagation temperature should be 18-20C (65-68F). Avoid feeding beans with too much nitrogen fertiliser or it'll make your plants produce too much leaf and fewer beans.

**Suppliers** Marshalls, Thompson & Morgan, Sarah Raven, Unwins and Mr Fothergill's.



The hyacinth bean is a climbing beauty with purple-tinged, heart-shaped leaves and pretty blooms

Orca beans come from a dwarf French bean that can be harvested from late summer



## Something a bit different!

**6 HYACINTH BEANS** The prettiest bean plant around. The botanical name is *Lablab purpureus*, but the common name gives some indication of just how ornamental they are! Deep green-purple foliage bears long racemes of fragrant, pinky-purple, sweet pea-like flowers, followed by large, dark purple pods that have a chestnut taste. Keep picking the mangetout-style pods and they'll produce even more.

**How to grow** Sow from March to April 2.5cm (1in) deep into pots of compost, and leave them (lightly moist) in an airing cupboard for 10 days. After that, put them on a sunny windowsill and, as they grow quite fast, keep potting them on regularly. Plant outdoors in late May and train up a wigwam. Water well and feed with potash

through summer. Harvest from July.

**Suppliers** Suttons, Chiltern Seeds.

**7 'YIN YANG'** Just look at these! They're super easy to grow dwarf French beans with the rather sweet common name of orca beans - just like little orca whales in colouring. They're more than a novelty - being a heritage variety from Mexico - and are actually pretty useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, they're compact plants, so you can tuck them into the front of your bean plot or grow them in containers easily. They're often marketed as dual purpose, too, as you can harvest the pods as young green beans, or wait until they mature and eat the bean seed. Surely you'd want to wait for these beans, though!

**How to grow** Sow indoors in modules or outdoors from April, but order now so they arrive in time. Sow 5cm (2in) deep and keep soil moist at all times. Protect from frost, and indoor-sown plants can be hardened off and planted out from May - June. Harvest regularly from August onwards.

**Suppliers** Suttons, D.T. Brown, Mr Fothergill's and Marshalls.



## Garden OF THE WEEK



**Gardener** Jane McNicholas

**Location** 9 Imber Park Road, Esher, Surrey KT10 8JB

**Size** 11m x 26m (36ft x 86ft)

**Soil** Clay deep down, but loam-topped

**Been in garden** 25 years

**Open** Sunday June 25 (1-5pm).  
Admission £3.50, children free.  
Home-made teas.

**More info** [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

# A love affair with gardening

This glorious, natural-looking Surrey plot is filled with plants that have high interest, are low maintenance and work really hard



Blue-green grasses with racing-green spiraea provide a backdrop to the pinks of astrantia, penstemon and spiraea flowers

**Words** Karen Murphy  
**Photos** Matthew Bruce

"Anyone who says their garden looks exhausted from August can't be trying hard enough," laughs Jane McNicholas, a long-time gardener from Surrey. She has made it her mission, since developing a passion for gardening 31 years ago, to fill her plot with year-round colour and scent. Structure and four-season plant life are important to her - right now various evergreens, such as euphorbias, skimmia and

pittosporum, are having their moment in the sun, along with fragrant sweet box and viburnum. The next few months will see her garden developing even more until high summer's explosive peak of blooms.

When she was pregnant with her son in the mid-1980s, she was given an *RHS Encyclopedia of Gardening* by her mother to occupy her time. It ignited her love of plants and armed her with useful knowledge. "You simply can't keep me out of garden centres and nurseries now," she says.

When she set about creating





Left, an arch-trained rose frames the garden on a sunny, summer day, and right, the late 19th century house has new folding patio doors to almost bring the garden inside



Above, hardy geraniums and salvias help make this lightly shaded spot dainty. Below, a climbing rose decorates a tall post among dense, naturalistic planting



Hardy geraniums pepper the garden, chosen for their versatility and long-flowering



her current back garden 25 years ago, she was faced with plenty of pitfalls. The previous renting tenants had a veg garden, which meant wonderfully-worked soil but an uninspiring layout.

A rectangular lawn, lots of apple trees, planes and an elder had to be removed. "It was all just too dense with trees," says Jane. "Plus I had two little boys at the time who needed a footie pitch and a climbing frame!"

Her husband John loves a neat, striped lawn and was keen to incorporate one. While he was away once, Jane had a go at digging up the path to make way for it, but 'it was a disaster', she says. Once rectified, though, the lawn was shaped out nicely, just for Jane to dig it up little by little,

gradually eating into its size with more and more plants in ever-increasing borders. "John wasn't happy," Jane smiles. "But then we started to get compliments from visitors, so we knew we were doing something right."

Now Jane's doing an in-depth garden design course, and a whole new world has opened up. She's learned more about soil types, planting for the right aspect and new techniques. Before, she was losing plants and, while she didn't worry too much about it, she now knows how to keep them better.

"I lose fewer now," she says. "But I've also decided that the more unusual plants you buy, the more problems you have!"

*Continues over the page*



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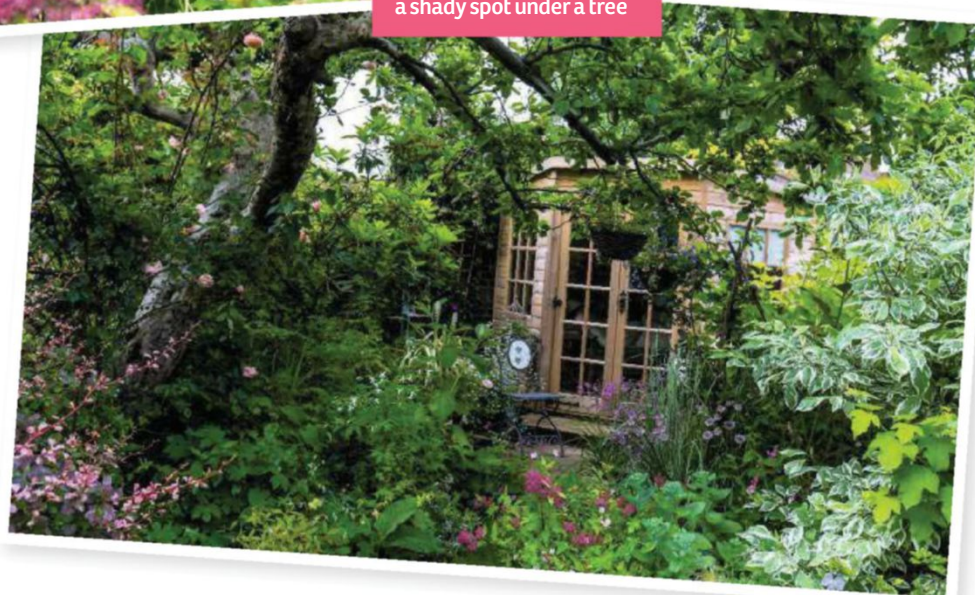


# Garden OF THE WEEK

Much of the pristine lawn remains for John's benefit, winding down to the end of the garden, but the borders encroach, filled with height and drama



Above, neat little seating on which to take a moment and look around. Below, Jane's little summer house, tucked in a shady spot under a tree



However, she still likes to use some unusual specimens, taking the time to research their longevity and situation needs, but she does often fall back on old favourites she knows will perform for her. She looks for RHS Award of Garden Merit labels, and particularly flowering times and lengths.

It's a south-facing garden with lovely loamy soil - deep down it's clay, but Jane has added so much manure and compost that the topsoil is wonderfully rich in nutrients. "I've learned over the years though, that some plants don't like that! I only put it where it's necessary now, where it'll be appreciated. I add grit to help other areas drain well."

**Geraniums and Japanese anemones are among her**

fail-safe favourites, along with astrantias in varying ruby reds and pinks, planted together. Tufted hair grass (*deschampsia*) lasts 'forever', while eupatorium, gallenia and campanula thrive. Jane loves rudbeckia and if they get too happy, she just digs up a few clumps of them. Eryngiums, penstemons and potentilla zing from the middle of borders, while creepers, such as saxifrage and ajuga, are useful at the front, covering ground and drawing the eye down.

Her current favourite is *Verbena rigida*, a slight departure from the usual *V. bonariensis*, but still with all its characteristic robustness and longevity. It's the only one she digs up and takes inside in autumn, just in case it succumbs to the weather.

*Vinca difformis* 'Jenny Pym' has caught her eye again. "I don't see it often but it's wonderful, so I like to go and say hello! I do this with a lot of my plants when I come across them - it's like seeing old friends!"

It's a very natural-looking garden, which continues to change and will likely never be finished. Jane's always tucking a few more plants in and taking some away. "I buy lovely little plants that get hidden - then I find them again and move them where they can be seen. But really I like it all flopping around, natural, wild and woolly."

Indeed, she has swathes of bee flowers, such as echinops, cosmos and veronicas, and wants



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# Jane's six favourite long-flowering plants



## **Cosmos**

Undemanding and flowers profusely in late summer into autumn. Likes warm sun and poor soil. Sow in early March.



## **Verbena rigida 'Polaris'**

Hardy, and bees and butterflies love it! Little, round flower clusters all summer and autumn that have a nice fragrance.



## **Campanula lactiflora**

Gorgeous violet or white bells all summer, and a classic companion to roses. Deadhead regularly for more flowers.



## **Gillenia trifoliata**

Looks like lots of little white stars held above the 1m (3ft 3in) tall plant. Flowers in spring and summer and likes shade.



## **Geranium nodosum**

Pretty ground cover that flowers for three months of the year. Likes shade or sun and spreads quickly.



## **Astrantia 'Claret'**

Deep ruby-red pincushions all summer. Fantastic in modern or classic planting schemes. Likes rich soil and moisture.

to put in many more. She's also learning about all the different species of bee that visit them.

She's pruning and cutting down for spring now, but she leaves the rudbeckia standing as the goldfinches love their seed heads.

She is adamant she doesn't have a favourite time of year, but then thinks again. "Actually, the end of August onwards is a real treat - when amelanchier and parrotia trees turn red and everything has an autumn-faded loveliness."

## Jane's tips to garden longevity

- 1** Don't panic! Enjoy your gardening. People worry too much about pruning and moving plants at what time and how they'll cope. In my experience, if you've got soil in the best condition for the plant, you can do anything.
- 2** It's a good tip to play around with plants at the garden centre while you're there, and

- decide how good they look together, where they'll go, whether they'll be specimens on their own or sit with some mates!
- 3** Find out about where the wet or dry areas of your garden are and research what to put there. Watch what happens in different parts of the garden.
- 4** Have a look at the flowering period before you buy a

- plant. I like mine to flower for long periods. There's nothing more frustrating in planning a grouping of flowers and then find one behaves differently.
- 5** Be patient and flexible. Some flowers and shrubs grow quickly but some you have to wait for - this can affect the master plan drastically, so be prepared to move things around.





The little pea flowers of *Cercis siliquastrum* are a delicious godsend for bees!

# Create an early nectar garden

Get your garden buzzing by feeding newly-emerging pollinators

**Words** Karen Murphy

With the decline of many of our garden pollinators due to habitat loss, we really need to help them. They perform a great service to us gardeners, doing a grand job of vital pollination of many of our fruit, veg and ornamentals, so it's only right we return the favour and provide them with more plants. And there's never a better time than in late winter and early spring, when many bees and other pollinators are in desperate need of some food!

Right now you might even see a few queen buff-tailed

bumblebees buzzing about, emerging after a long winter, ready to find nesting sites and create a new colony.

They'll be extra hungry and need a good feed to restore their energy.

But what are the best plants to use? Winter aconites and hellebores are a good early start, but here we've picked a select few from a range of plant types, some for instant impact in the next few weeks and some to invest in for future years. It's perennial and tree planting time now, so you can get stuck in right away.

Fear not, you'll have your own 'nectar café' set up in no time!

## Perennials

### **Bergenia**

Charmingly also known as elephant's ears for its large, low-growing leaves, it's an evergreen perennial whose leaves glow bright red in winter and provide stout ground cover all through the year. But in spring its tall, pretty blooms come in rather handy to bees and other pollinators, who can sense their nectar richness.

**Flowers:** March to April.

**When to plant:** Available in garden centres or online now for planting in non-frosty ground. Otherwise plant in autumn.

### **Care and maintenance:**

Plant in fertile, well-drained soil, in sun or partial shade. Remove faded flower heads after flowering, and generally tidy up through the year, removing dead leaves. Lift and divide clumps every couple of years in spring.

### **Pulmonaria**

A lovely, extremely nectar-rich perennial (also called lungwort) with speckled leaves and deep blue-pink flowers. It's native so will likely fare well in your garden and needs little maintenance. Try the cultivated



**Pulmonaria 'Blue Ensign'** has striking violet flowers



**Aurinia saxatilis** likes well-draining soil



Muscari are so easy to grow and will spread readily



**Woodland anemones** naturalise well under deciduous trees



## Spring bulbs or rhizomes

### **Anemone nemorosa**

Create a lovely woodland flower carpet to plant around trees. It'll naturalise and spread to produce even more pretty, ground-growing open blooms for pollinators.

**Flowers:** March to April.

**When to plant:** Potted plants are available now, but you can also plant rhizomes horizontally 5-8cm (2-3in) deep in September or October.

**Care and maintenance:** Plant in cool shade. It'll appreciate a helping of leafmould in autumn. Make sure its soil drains well.

### **Muscari**

Brilliant blue-violet little cone blooms that reach only 15cm (6cm). Plant with pansies and sunny daffs for a classic spring colour contrast, or with the white version interspersed with it.

**Flowers:** April and May.

**When to plant:** Potted plants are widely available now, but you can also plant bulbs 10cm (4in) deep in groups in autumn. Lift and divide groups in summer that are congested.

**Care and maintenance:** They simply needs fertile, well-drained soil in full sun or dappled shade.

variety 'Blue Ensign' for its spectacular colour. It'll spread nicely if you plant it in open ground.

**Flowers:** Various February to summer.

**When to plant:** Available in garden centres or online now for planting in non-frosty ground.

**Care and maintenance:** Plant in enriched soil in light sun or part-shade. Water well and deadhead old blooms and leaves to tidy up and keep its shape.

### **Aurinia saxatilis**

Often used as an alpine or rockery plant, as it appreciates free-draining soil and full sun.

Lovely evergreen, grey-green foliage with a matt of yellow flowers on top.

It's a good one for draping over a wall like you would aubrietia. It's a really easy-going plant and has an RHS Award of Garden Merit to show for it.

**Flowers:** April to June.

**When to plant:** Sow seeds indoors now to plant out in spring. Sow directly in April or in autumn for overwintering.

**Care and maintenance:**

Trim after flowering to encourage a fresh showing of blooms.

### **English bluebells**

Our own native bluebell has all the nectar a bee needs! Make sure you don't plant or encourage invasive, non-native Spanish bluebells at all, as English bluebells need all the help they can get to thrive. Naturalise in grass or under trees for an evocative, spring scene.

**Flowers:** April and May.

**When to plant:** Potted plants are available now, or plant bulbs

**Scented English bluebells** are more delicate-looking than Spanish ones



*Continues over the page*

**Bergenia 'Ballawley'** has pretty crimson spikes in spring







Like its fellow catkin-bearer garrya, stachyurus has lovely, nectar-rich pendulums



## How to tempt pollinators in

- **Choose a sheltered spot** – cold, windy exposed areas could put paid to your efforts! If necessary, set up a natural or artificial windbreak.
- **Place plants in large groups or drifts so you're making it easy for pollinators to find them** – the colour and scent will be easier to detect. One or two plants or a tiny cluster of bulbs may not get a look in!
- **Prolong the flowering season** – choose plants that overlap in flowering time, so you have a constant show of flowers from very early spring. Late autumn flowers will help insects prepare for hibernation.
- **Choose naturalistic flowers with a simple single, sometimes flat structure, which are easiest for insects to feed from** – not all bees can access nectar in long tubular flowers. A range of open-structured blooms will cover most bases. Highly cultivated varieties with double flowers often have no nectar or pollen as it has been bred out.
- **It's not just flowers they like** – carder bees like to scrape the hairs off the furry leaves and flower stems of *Stachys byzantina*, or lamb's ears, for their nesting sites.

8cm (3in) deep in autumn in moist soil in dappled shade.

**Care and maintenance:** Add well-rotted manure or compost to the soil prior to planting to improve it. Cut back old flower spikes and leaves to tidy up later in summer.

## Trees

### *Stachyurus praecox*

A Japanese native that's not seen nearly enough in this country. Drooping racemes of flowers like catkins bloom from late winter and pollinators flock to them.

**Flowers:** February to April.

**When to plant:** Plant now to establish in future years.

**Care and maintenance:** Once your tree has established, flowered stems can be cut back to their base after flowering, and mulch in spring.

### Flowering quince

The quintessential early spring tree for glorious cup-shaped, salmon pink or red blooms. Can be wall-trained or grown as a hedge, too. You've probably seen these starting to flower now and love their blooms – well, bees do, too!

**Flowers:** March to May.

**When to plant:** Plant now to establish in future years.

**Care and maintenance:** Once established, prune stems to five or six leaves and

remove crossing stems after flowering.

### *Cercis siliquastrum*

A pink delight in spring! Before any leaves clothe its branches bunches of little pea-like flowers emerge, waiting for bees and other pollinating friends to visit.

**Flowers:** March to April.

**When to plant:** Plant now to establish in future years.

**Care and maintenance:** Plant permanently as they don't like being transplanted, and it needs little pruning except for a trim of any broken, diseased or crossing branches in late autumn or winter. Incorporate well-rotted compost in the planting hole.

How can any bee resist these quince blooms?



A glorious tree companion to all your other bright spring blooms, cercis only needs a light prune in winter



Bees also love the woolly leaves and flowers of lamb's ears



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CAROL KLEIN



This week  
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**"Hellebores are promiscuous plants. If you grow them, you'll have seen seedlings galore around the parent"**

# Breaking the rules

The meteoric rise in popularity of *Helleborus hybridus* has made it a gardening phenomenon

Normally horticulture is a slow-moving business. Although fashions may come and go, they do so in a comfortable, gradual sort of a way. But every so often there is a gardening phenomenon that breaks all the rules. The development of *Helleborus hybridus* and its rise to top of the charts at this time of year has been nothing short of meteoric.

*Helleborus hybridus*, or *Helleborus orientalis* as it used

to be known, is a member of the buttercup family, Ranunculaceae. If its flowers appeared in midsummer they'd probably go unremarked but arriving as they do during the bleakest months, they're not just valued, but truly celebrated.

They last a long time, too. Their 'petals' are, in fact, sepals which keep going for months – in common parlance they're often called Lenten roses. The sepals are subtly-coloured

in mysterious, sometimes sombre, shades ranging from almost black to pure white, encompassing green, soft yellow, pink, crimson and wood-pigeon grey.

Their flowers can be self-coloured or heavily spotted with a contrasting colour, and sometimes the spots join up to make larger colour splotches. In their centre is a circlet of nectaries (this is what those

early bumblebees make all the fuss about) and arranged around them a ring of stamens dusted with golden pollen as the flowers open fully. The flowers face the ground, a device to protect precious pollen from the ravages of the weather.

Hellebores are promiscuous

Hellebores are such valuable plants in the garden right now





# My gardening Diary



**Proof's in the pudding – Carol collects hellebore seeds from her attempts at hybridising her own forms**

common denominator. But the advances in hellebore breeding and selection over the last 30 years, brought to a crescendo by Ashwood Nurseries, have given gardeners flowers of unbelievable form and colour. Their work has been an inspiration to have a go.

If you want to try it yourself, start with two really top-rate plants.

Take the pollen from one (the best way to do this is not with the traditional camel-hair brush but with the black lid of a biro pen rubbed smartly on your sleeve or jeans to produce static. Dab it onto the anthers of an open flower on the father plant), and carefully open a fat, virgin bud depositing the collected pollen onto the central stigma. Close the petals and repeat the process on three separate days.

Tie a bit of coloured wool behind the flower and stick a bit of the same wool in a notebook, recording a note of its parents. Come late May or early June there should be fat pods full of seed. Catch it before it falls to the ground, sow it on the surface of gritty, loam-based seed compost, cover with grit, water and leave outside. Cover pots to protect seeds from mice.

Check regularly and when the first seed leaves start to emerge, remove any covering. When seedlings develop a few leaves, separate and prick out into individual pots. Pot them on regularly until they've made sturdy little plants.

When it's time for your new seedlings to face the big wide world, plant them out in dappled shade. When they flower, keep those that show star quality and give away the rest or, if you're feeling very altruistic, give away a few of your stars, too!

plants. If you grow them, you'll have seen seedlings galore clustered around the parent plant. They should be removed or both parent and children will suffer from the competition with each other. Very few of them will have outstanding characteristics.

With random pollination, they seem to revert to the lowest

**MONDAY** Sowing parsnips. Because they're slow to germinate, experts say sow them with radish seed which germinates quickly, so you can see the row. I don't like radishes so I'm sowing in modules to be planted out before they make tap roots.

**TUESDAY** In my recent absence, Neil potted up the rest of our Barnhaven primulas. On my return there were at least a dozen trays with 20 plants in each. It's going to be a busy spring! Once upon a-time, we used to plant out our new primulas around fruit bushes where they bulked up quickly thanks to the rich soil. We might try it again.

**WEDNESDAY** Shed sorting. No matter how often it gets done, it always seems to need doing again but it makes potting up so much more organised. Cleaning tools and sharpening secateurs are part of the process.

**THURSDAY** We've already potted up some gladioli but we're potting extra, including *Gladiolus colvillii* 'The Bride'. There is a handsome, dark red form of *Gladiolus papilio*, now listed as gladiolus 'Ruby', which is sensational, yet not as in-your-face as some of the large-flowered hybrids.

**FRIDAY** Planting peonies in Alice's garden. They have over-wintered outside, kept in a sheltered spot and are beginning to show signs of growth with crimson shoots popping up.

**SATURDAY** Taking salvia cuttings from several plants that have begun to green up. We take short shoots with a heel if possible, neaten them, nip out their tops and push them round the edge of clay pots full of gritty compost. We top them off with more grit, water them thoroughly once then put them in the brightest, warmest place we can find.

**SUNDAY** Cutting out a rogue branch from *Prunus padus* 'Colorata'. In full leaf it's obvious that a central trunk must have sprung from a rootstock, as its leaves are paler.

**Carol Klein**



**Gladiolus papilio 'Ruby' is an enchanting small variety**



## What's looking good now

### A snowstorm of blossom!

Last year we planted a little cherry tree called *Prunus* 'Hally Jolivette'. It's a pretty name for a pretty tree. It's a cross between *Prunus subhirtella* 'Autumnalis', the rosebud cherry, and *Prunus yedoensis*, both Japanese cherries. The cross was made by the then director of The Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University, Karl Sax, and named after his wife.

Both flower during and often at either end of the winter, with a myriad of tiny, white flowers.

Joyfully the tree has lots of flower buds.

It will be several years before the tree transforms into an absolute snowstorm, but each year the show will be more and more spectacular.

Like most cherries, *Prunus* 'Hally Jolivette' likes full light and prefers free-draining soil. Cherries have a preference for alkaline soils but they're not too fussy.



**Prunus 'Hally Jolivette' is a pretty tree for smaller gardens**



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# WHAT TO DO

THIS  
WEEK

Meet  
the  
team



## Ian Hodgson

Kew-trained horticulturist and garden designer. Previously with the RHS, Ian is interested in all aspects of gardening.



## Karen Murphy

A keen container gardener, Karen has RHS qualifications and also loves wildlife.



## Tonia Friedrich

Fond of wildflowers and biodiversity, Tonia was a horticulturist at Kew and has RHS qualifications.

If you do just one job...

## Care for your grasses

A comb through or cut back now will give them new life

Having left your ornamental grasses to add a little bulk and interest to the garden over the winter, they'll be getting a little saggy now and desperate for a bit of a tidy-up. But it all depends on what grass you have - evergreens need only a little combing through of all their dead stems and any damaged ones, and may not appreciate a full haircut! However, as deciduous grasses are dead stems, they'll need a heavy chop to the ground to leave room for new ones to grow.

Deciduous *Stipa tenuissima* is a bit of an exception, as in many gardens it behaves as an evergreen, depending on its environment.



Remove old foliage from grasses now to freshen them up

If it has stayed predominantly green it may just need a comb through, too. The exception in the evergreen camp is pampas grass, which benefits from a good cut down right to the ground. Be careful of damaging any fresh growth if you see it.

Combing through grasses simply involves using your hands, with your gloved fingers

running through it to release loose leaves, or gently raking them if they're ground-grown.

Use secateurs to cut back deciduous grasses to a few centimetres above the ground, and pull out loose strands by hand. If you think your grass may need it, incorporate general fertiliser into the area around the grass to help it into new growth.

## Garden News RECOMMENDS



### Deciduous

*Calamagrostis acutiflora* - a stiff, vertically-growing grass with strong stems that needs trimming to the ground.



### Deciduous

*Panicum virgatum* - a red-tipped grass with wispy flowers that needs cutting back when tatty.



### Evergreen

*Festuca glauca* - this glorious blue fescue needs a light comb through to release dead foliage.



### Evergreen

*Carex testacea* - a lovely green-orange sedge that also just needs a light rake through to give it a spruce up.



# Look after emerging bulbs

Give them a helping hand now for healthy growth

What a treat it is to happen upon little green leaf tips emerging from the soil at this time of year. Snowdrops and aconites are already delighting us, but all around the garden are signs of life from all those bulbs you might have forgotten you put in last year!

While you're carrying out your late winter clear-up, keep an eye on sprouting growth and be careful not to trample on new bulbs. Don't cover up emerging foliage with wet mulch when you're adding it to your borders - the less wet, dense matter directly over and around them will mean less chance of rotting - but do mulch near them.

In pots, your bulbs will need good, well-draining soil, so check the pot is airy enough and not clagging up with wet, and if the compost is dry, be sure to water well for good development, just ensuring it's moist. While you use a general-purpose fertiliser on open ground, bulb feeding in containers is slightly different. Use a tomato feed or other high-potassium fertiliser to get them off to a good start, and continue this every 10 days until a good few weeks after flowering.

See below for a few more top tips on how you can help new bulbs along their way.



You may want to net container bulbs to stop pests damaging them



## Step by step



**1** Remove overhanging dead grasses or perennials near to bulbs so they get more light.



**2** Carefully rake away any dead, wet leaves so the bulbs can 'breathe'.



**3** Weed around emerging bulbs so they're not competing for water and nutrients.



**4** Feed with a general-purpose fertiliser (such as Growmore) to encourage good flowering.



# Check hydrangea cuttings

It's good practice to keep an eye on the hydrangea cuttings you've taken. If the plant is growing noticeably, it's likely to have developed a good root system. If you're not sure, check if the roots are reaching out of the drainage holes as that's a sure sign they need more space to grow. Carefully take off the pot and remove any compost around the roots, then plant the rooted cutting in a new pot, one size bigger, with fresh compost.



## Mulch border perennials

**With spring just around the corner, mulching is one of the best things you can do for your border plants. It will allow your soil to retain moisture and keep the weeds down, providing extra nutrients for when**

**your plants start their vigorous growth. After clearing up all weeds, apply a 5-7.5cm (2-3 in) layer of mulch. You can use garden compost, mushroom compost or leaf mould, but make sure you leave a gap around the stems of woody perennials as the mulch could burn them and lead to rotting.**



## Prepare hanging baskets ready for planting

A hanging basket takes only a little effort to prepare and is a fantastic eye-catcher on your porch or in your garden. A mesh basket will require a liner to hold in the compost and plants, so cover the inside with a 1.5cm (1/2 in) layer of cardboard liners, but hessian or coco fibre are all suitable, too. For a nice natural look, you could also use some moss from your garden as a liner. Now all that's left is to fill the basket with compost to get you ready for planting.

● See our feature on page 14 for some basket planting inspiration.



## Trim box

Trimming box twice a year will keep it in a nice even shape. Choose a cloudy day to avoid burning the leaves and clip off new growth with a pair of clean garden hand shears. Also, remove any dead or diseased material to prevent fungal diseases. If you'd like to thicken the box up, slightly cut into old growth to encourage branching. As any pruning can stress your plant, give it a treat and water and mulch it.

## Pot on evergreen perennials

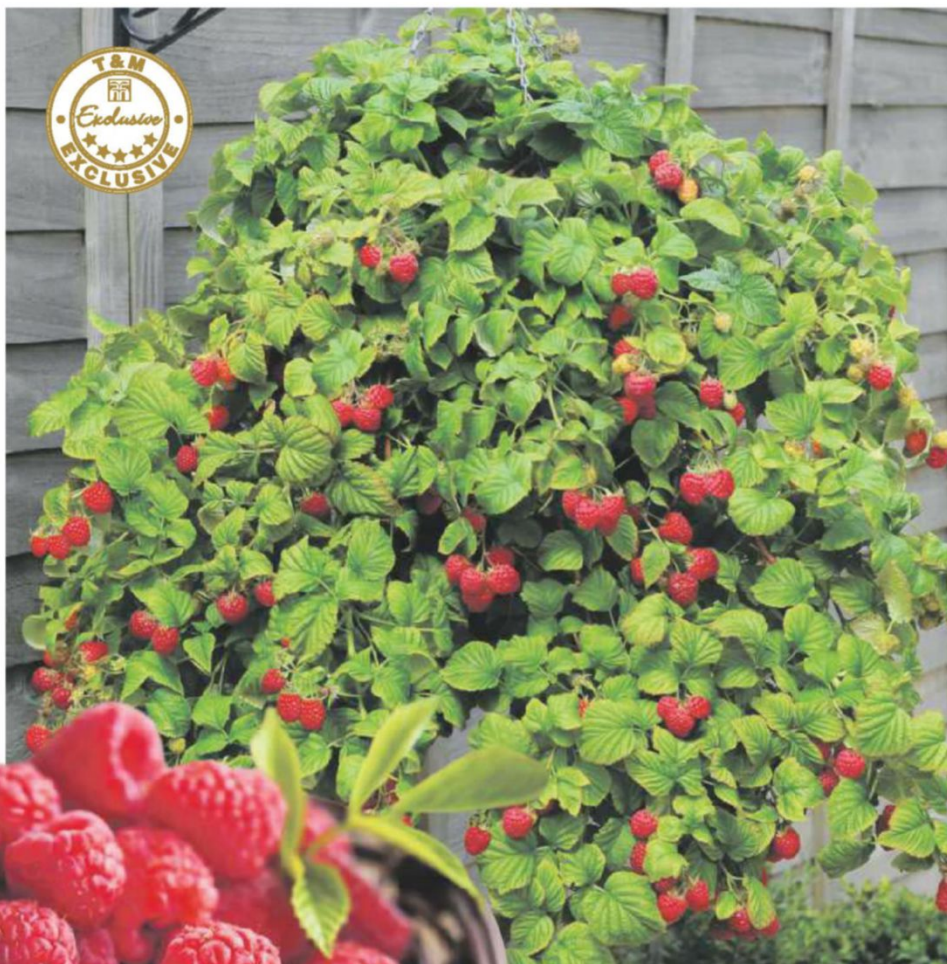
Potting on evergreen perennials regularly ensures the pot won't get too small for the root system. If your plant becomes pot-bound it could lead to dehydration, restricted growth and wilting. Give the plant a good water the day before potting on and choose a pot 2-3cm (1 in) larger than the rootball. Take the evergreen out of the pot and gently remove any compost. Cover the drainage hole with crockery and replant the perennial in fresh compost.





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**NICK BAILEY**

# The inspirational GARDENER

Award-winning designer, TV broadcaster and best-selling author

## Upcycle your garden timber

**You can create unique additions for your plot using your wood waste**

**U**pcycling is one of those trendy terms bandied about at the moment. For all intents and purposes, it means making use of waste, which is something us gardeners have been doing for generations. It comes naturally to us in the form of compost made from garden waste and broken crocks for pot drainage. Something I've tried to do in every garden I've worked in is to reuse all the timber it generates. From gangly prunings to substantial logs and slices of mature trees - all these offerings can be upcycled. I've experimented with various ideas over the years, so here are some that worked.

### Logs as path edging

Tree or shrub prunings between 7-15cm (3-6in) in diameter work brilliantly in wilder areas of

the garden to edge paths. Select pieces up to 2m (80in) in length and lay them out end to end to form a snaking path through a bed, wild area or woodland garden. The natural kinks and twists in the timber can usually be jigsawed together to form a meandering path which can be back-filled with bark mulch as the walking surface. Secure the timbers in place with 40cm (16in) long rods (prunings) which are around 2cm (¾in) in diameter. These 'rods' can be hammered in at a 45-degree angle either side of the edging logs to form mini A-frames, which will hold them in place. The timber won't last forever but you'll get a good five years out of it.

### Rustic planters

Logs of 10-15cm (4-6in) diameter cut down to lengths of between 30-60cm (12-24in) can be used to create quirky planters. Select 10-15 logs and cut them to the desired height of the planter, then drill two holes through each log 10cm (4in) from the top and bottom.

**Get creative with your wood and make new planters**



Tree prunings can be easily reused as plant supports

Constructing the planter simply involves pushing straining wire through the holes to link the logs together in a circle. The planter can then have a suitably sized plastic pot or black plastic sheet inserted into it, followed by soil.

### Support for annual climbers

A knarled, multi-stemmed pruning can make a perfect climbing frame for the likes of morning glory, Spanish flag or *eccremocarpus* for a few seasons. I part-buried and secured a multi-stemmed pruning several years back, followed by planting *Ipomoea purpurea* at its base. Within two months the plunged pruning was literally dripping with foliage and flowers.

## Logs to help wildlife

Logs stacks support lots of garden wildlife, from hibernating toads to a host of invertebrates. A rough stack in a forgotten corner works well but why not give the logs a dual purpose and make them into a low, stacked, dividing wall. Logs of around 50cm (20in) length and

5-20cm (2-8in) diameter work best. Interweave them like bricks to keep the wall straight and even as you build it up, ensuring the front face (the log ends) are flush with one another. Occasional soil infills work as a securing mortar and means ferns and self-seeders are more likely to

make the 'wall' home. Try setting a longer, curvy log into it, perpendicular to the pile, using the normal logs to pack it into place. Get it right and it turns a standard log stack into something quite sculptural. The newly-resident toads will love it and you'll love its aesthetic merits!



Logs stacked as a wall look good and attract wildlife



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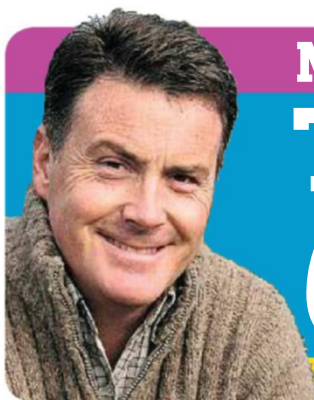
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**MARTIN FISH**

# The undercover GARDENER



Former head gardener, TV and radio broadcaster and RHS judge

## Nothing beats home-grown toms

**It's time to sow your tomato and pepper seeds undercover**

Summer still seems a long way off, but the thought of fresh, ripe tomatoes picked straight from the plant is something to look forward to. Just a few weeks ago I was giving a talk to a gardening club and one lady told me she didn't bother growing tomatoes because you can buy them so cheaply from supermarkets.

Well, yes, you can, and most other veg, too, but my point to her was home-grown tomatoes taste so much better than any shop bought ones, simply because you can allow them to fully ripen on the plant and pick them when they've been warmed by the sun. At that point the taste is absolutely delicious. By the end of our conversation the lady said she would give them a try this summer to see if there's a difference!

I grow most of my plants undercover, where they get extra protection. To be able to

start picking in mid-summer, I start sowing the seeds now in the heated greenhouse. I also start sowing peppers, too, because they need an early start to fruit in the summer. Both tomatoes and peppers need a fair amount of heat to germinate the seeds, so if you don't have a heated propagator or warm, light place, it's best to hold fire for a few weeks. However, if you can provide a germinating temperature of around 18-21C (65-70F) and some gentle heat afterwards to grow the seedlings on, you can get sowing now. I grow several varieties of tomatoes including 'Akron', 'Red Bodyguard', 'Sungold', 'Big Daddy' and 'Tigerella'. I'm also trying a new pepper called 'King of the North', which is suitable for cooler climates, so it should be at home in North Yorkshire!

The seeds of both are sown thinly in small pots and lightly covered with sieved compost, watered and then placed in the warm propagator to germinate.



Sorting my packets of tomato and pepper seed for sowing

**Sowing tomato seeds thinly in small pots of compost**



### Jobs to do now

- Sow lettuce and other salad leaves in trays in a cool greenhouse.
- Gradually increase the amount of water as fuchsias start to make new foliage.
- Cover greenhouse borders with black polythene or fabric to help them warm up.

## I'm dividing and re-potting begonia tuber

Begonia tubers grow larger each year and eventually get too large for the pot. That's exactly what's happened with a *Begonia sutherlandii* that I've been growing for several years. It's a lovely semi-trailing begonia with

small, pale orange flowers all summer long. The tuber has been dormant over winter and is now just showing early signs of growth with tiny buds starting to develop. This is the ideal time to cut the old tuber into sections and from the

large tuber I can get three or four good chunks, each with several growth buds. Once divided, the cuts are allowed to dry for a day or two and the sections are then re-potted into fresh compost to start growing.



Cutting a begonia tuber into several sections

**Next week: Early veg in the polytunnel**



## What to do this week

# ON YOUR FRUIT & VEG PLOT

**H**asn't the year gone quickly already? Yes, it's that time again when you'll soon be sowing a great many veg outside, so get ahead now and prepare where they're going to go.

Choose a nice dry day, though not immediately after a huge shower, as you don't want heavy sludge and compaction - there's no point in trying to work gloopy soil if you don't need to!

If the soil has been recently compacted, initially just give it a quick fork over. Even if you've covered over your plot with sheeting to be rid of weeds and recently uncovered it, or sprayed or hand-dug lots of them up over the past couple of weeks, there's always a handful or two that creep up super quickly. Get rid of all weeds you see as the problem will only get worse. Clear debris that has accumulated and get started. Effectively you're aiming for a smooth, crumbly clear, rich soil to work in.

Once your bed is ready you can start sowing, in general, in March. Drills are the most common way to do this, and a good tip is to lay a bamboo cane on its side and press it into the soil to create the drill line. A nice, quick trick!

# Prepare a seedbed

Get your plot in good shape for seed sowing next month



## Step by step



**1** Remove stones, sticks and any other debris from your seed bed.



**2** Also pull out any new weeds that have sprouted recently or they'll quickly spread.



**3** Dig in some rotted compost to improve the texture of and feed the soil.



**4** Rake until the ground is level with the consistency of a fine, crumbly tilth.



## Feed cabbages

Planting out cabbage seedlings is an ideal time to apply some fertiliser as they're particularly greedy crops. Both summer and winter cabbages benefit from a high-nitrogen fertiliser before they get too big. To add fertiliser when transplanting, just sprinkle it over the soil in the planting hole and around the root zone. It's best to check the label on the fertiliser package for the correct rate of application as it can vary depending on the product.



## Sow spring onions in pots

Try 'White Lisbon', a fast-growing variety ready for harvest in just eight weeks, or 'Apache', with purple-red skin and a crispy texture, as both are ideal to sow in a container. You'll just need a pot, trough or windowbox, and multi-purpose compost mixed with garden compost or slow-release fertiliser. Fill pots up to about 2-3cm (1in) off the rim with moist compost and firm in. Then sprinkle the seed and cover it with a thin layer of soil.



## Repot bay trees



Just before spring is the ideal time to repot bay trees. If you want to keep it at its current size, you can use the same pot, otherwise choose the next size up. Taking the bay out of the container is sometimes difficult if it has become pot-bound, so carefully turn the plant to the left and right, easing it out. If this doesn't help, cut with a knife around the plant, and if it's seriously pot bound you might have to break the pot to get the plant out. Replant in a well-drained, soil-based compost, such as John Innes No. 2, mixed with some extra grit added to improve stability and drainage.

## Reduce height of quince

How tall your fruit trees grow depends mostly on the rootstock. If you don't reduce the size of an established tree, it can grow tall, reaching more than 4m (13ft). It's best to curb it so it can grow productively. Remove up to 25 per cent of the canopy each year to prevent the tree becoming overgrown. Take off all dead, diseased, damaged and crossing branches. Cut unproductive growth to an upward and outward-growing side branch, aiming for a framework with an open centre.



MEDWYN WILLIAMS

## Growing for SHOWING

Winner of 11 Chelsea golds and awarded an MBE!



## Potting on leeks

It's time to move them into new containers

Last October I potted up the bulbils from the leek flowers into 60-cell trays and have since moved them into 9cm (3½in) pots. They've really grown well this year so last month I potted them into two-litre pots using Humax multi-purpose compost with some added soil.

The soil I use for potting on is from the celery bed and as it had a lot of well-rotted manure worked into it last year, it always does a good job for me. I fill the pot with compost, then I form a mould within the pot using an empty 9cm (3½in) pot and compact the compost around it. Then I remove the leek from the small pot and drop it into the hole. Finally, give the pot a tap on the bench to settle the compost around the roots and water well. Each leek is supported with green plastic plant support clips with each end of the clip attached to a short, split cane, forming a complete circle.

When potting the leeks on, I found that a couple of them had two flags attached to one another by a very thin gossamer-like material which intrigues me as I really don't know how this develops. I have had it in previous years as well and all you need to

do is pull it away from the other leaf or give it a nick with a sharp knife to release it. I wonder if anyone else has any idea what causes it?

This year I'm growing more leeks than ever as I now have a few of the crosses that Ivor Mace has developed from his work with the 'Welsh Seedling' and the 'Pendle Improved'. There are five different ones that Ivor has selected and even now, at this early stage, you can tell they've plenty of vigorous growth in them. Time, of course, will reveal everything and at the end of the season we might well see which ones will be worth growing on for the following year.





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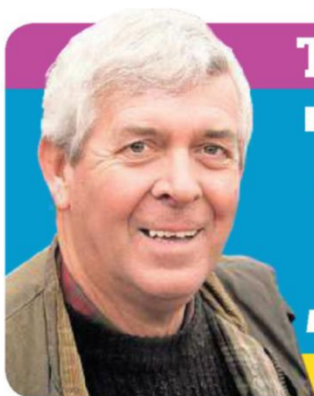
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**TERRY WALTON**

# Tales from the ALLOTMENT

Star of BBC Radio 2's *Jeremy Vine Show* and best-selling author. His allotment sits in the Rhondda Valley

## The quest for great compost

**Once upon a time, mushrooms held the answer - but no longer!**

In the 1970s, mushrooms became trendy and growing sites popped up in the vales near the allotments to cater for the heavy demand. There were polytunnels filled with bags of special compost on which the fungi were grown. Several times a year these tunnels were emptied and discarded bags were brought along to the plots and given away for just the cost of the petrol (only a few pounds in those days!). This was a brilliant soil improver and an extremely cheap way of 'bulking out' the soil.

This sought-after compost then became fashionable on gardening shows, and there was a clamour to get it. Gardeners went along to mushroom farms and collected the compost themselves. The final irony in the history of this good, cheap compost was that mushrooms could be imported cheaper than those grown locally and all the farms ceased to exist. There are a few mushroom farms left around the country but this once-cheap commodity is much more expensive now!

Life was so simple then, but my mind is back to the present and my thoughts turning to spring. The pleasure of sowing the new season's crops will soon bring back joy.

The sowing regime continues to grow and almost each week a new cluster of sowings takes place. Over recent years, I've had constant 'beef' over the declining quality of compost used for sowing. The compost

I've relied on for several seasons then produces poor results, so the quest begins for another one. At the back end of last season I came across a new compost called 'Champions Blend' produced by Bathgate, and this gave me great germination and excellent growing on results. This hasn't changed this season and my early sowings are thriving in it. Fingers crossed they don't change the mix! What are your experiences with multi-purpose composts?

So, the sowing continues and this time it's the slow-coach peppers' turn to start their season. I'm sowing two varieties, the first being one I've grown before called 'Corno di Toro Rosso', which produces long, tapered fruits turning green to red in the ripening process. I'm also following Rob Smith's choice, 'Alma Paprika', which starts off a creamy-white then finishes up red. Plenty of colours for my summer salads!



The latest compost I use, which helps seedlings thrive

### Jobs to do now

- Clean around raspberry canes and top dress with potash.
- Give greenhouse glass a wash to remove dirt.
- Ventilate the greenhouse regularly each day.

The seeds are sown thinly in 10cm (4in) pots of compost then covered with 6mm (¼in) of sieved compost. Water lightly with tepid water then pop into a plastic bag and secure with an elastic band. These are popped into my airing cupboard for two days to kick start the germination.

## Get the 'early birds' started...

My early sowing of lettuce 'All the Year Round' is growing on well but it's time to plan for the succession of lettuce for the season. This time I'm growing 'Red Iceberg', which gives me a colourful lettuce with a crunch. These are sown in nine compartmental trays with two to three seeds per

compartment. The seed is covered with 6mm (¼in) of sieved compost and lightly watered. Cover the tray with a piece of glass and pop them on the staging.

Another early starter for me is carrots and I've two large pots that are ideal for sowing an early crop. I'm

sowing some 'Early Nantes', which produces early blunt-ended carrots. Fill with compost and scatter the seeds lightly on the surface and cover with 6mm (¼in) compost. Water and pop under the staging. These will be grown in the greenhouse for an early May crop.



Cleaning my leek tubes for good hygiene

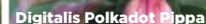
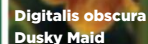
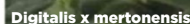
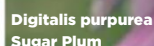


'Early Nantes' carrots sown now

**Next week: Planting my onion sets**



rare | unusual | exciting



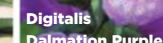
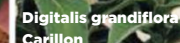
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**Our popular vegetable class has fantastic prizes worth growing for**

**A**re you a member of your local gardening club or horticultural society? Or are you your club's show secretary? If so, you'll welcome the news that GN's Top Tray is back for this year's shows. Make sure your club applies now for our show packs, which we're bringing to you in conjunction with our sponsor, leading seed company D.T. Brown.

Nationwide, veg gardeners treasure the Garden News Top Tray awards they've won at local shows and the prize vouchers the winners receive.

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Our packs contain everything you need to stage the class, and they include the prize vouchers from D.T. Brown worth £10, £5 and £3 for the first, second and third-prize winners.

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We'll send you all the stationery you need and the prizes, so you can hold a successful Top Tray class. You can also print these forms from our website, [www.gardennewsmagazine.co.uk](http://www.gardennewsmagazine.co.uk)

To avoid disappointment, get your application in as soon as possible. The closing date is June 30, 2017.

## Your pack will contain

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## How to apply

Agree within the society to hold the Top Tray class. Send the completed application form, with your payment of

£6.50, to: Garden News Top Tray Class, Media House, Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6EA. Cheques should be made payable to Garden News.

## Entry form

### TOP TRAY CLASS 2017

Our society would like to include the Top Tray class in its 2017 show. I have enclosed a cheque (made payable to Garden News) for £6.50 with this application.

SOCIETY NAME	<input type="text"/>
TITLE OF SHOW	<input type="text"/>
VENUE OF SHOW	<input type="text"/>
DATE OF SHOW	<input type="text"/>
NAME OF SHOW SECRETARY	<input type="text"/>
EMAIL	<input type="text"/>
ADDRESS	<input type="text"/>
POSTCODE	<input type="text"/>
TELEPHONE	<input type="text"/>
MOBILE	<input type="text"/>

The closing date for applications is **Friday, June 30, 2017**

☐ Please tick this box if you are applying for a society that has never taken part in Top Tray before.

**DON'T FORGET TO ENCLOSE PAYMENT OF £6.50 WITH THIS APPLICATION FORM**

Send to: Garden News Top Tray Class, Media House, Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6EA.

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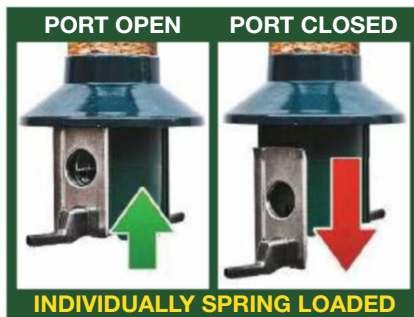
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TONY DICKERSON

# The Problem SOLVER

Royal Horticultural Society gardening advisor and podcaster

## Is my flowering cherry suckering?

**Q** How can I tell if my flowering cherry tree is suckering?

**Sarah King,**  
Elstree, Hertfordshire

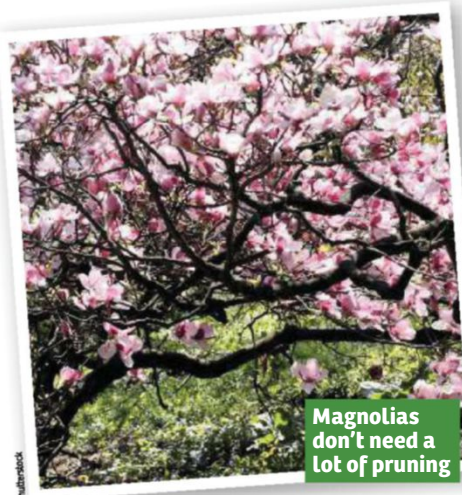
**A** The flowering cherry *Prunus 'Amanogawa'* is a gardeners' favourite, being small, narrowly fastigiated with all the branches growing rigidly upright. The tree is often grafted on to *Prunus avium* (wild cherry)

rootstock. The graft is usually visible as an obvious swelling about 30cm (12in) from the ground. Growth from below that point, especially if the buds look different and the branches more horizontal, is almost certainly from suckers. New shoots from above that point can be tied in if necessary.

But there's no hurry to cut out any suckers as cherries are always pruned when in leaf to avoid the possibility of fungal silver leaf infection. This is the same disease that affects plums. Inspect the suspected suckers later in spring and if they're decidedly different, cut them out once we've some warm, sunny weather. This can be mid-summer if necessary and wounds will heal quickly. Don't apply a wound paint, which should only be used on cherries if pruning



Plums and cherry trees should be pruned when in leaf



Magnolias don't need a lot of pruning

damaged branches in winter when the tree has no leaves.

Magnolias are another popular group of deciduous trees and shrubs which should only be pruned when in leaf. This is because magnolias are soft-wooded and winter pruning cuts are liable to decay. Pruning in the warmth of mid-summer will lead to rapid healing.

However, do bear in mind that other than clearing wayward branches or damaged shoots,

you should avoid pruning magnolias altogether. Magnolias respond to hard pruning with strong, vertical-growing water shoots that don't flower and spoil the shape of the tree.

For other deciduous trees, complete any winter pruning as soon as possible now before growth starts. This includes apple and pear trees and don't be put off by frosts as this will do no damage to the harder wood of these fruit trees.

## Four plants to prune now



### Apples and pears

Apples and pears are both best pruned every winter to encourage a good shape and crop load.



### Wisteria

Cut back growth to two or three buds now to tidy plants up before the growing season gets going.



### Roses

Late winter is a good time for rose pruning. Hybrid Teas and Floribundas in particular respond well.



### Clematis

Prune mid to late summer-flowering clematis now. Group 2 plants need just a light trim, while prune group 3 back hard.

*Continues over the page*



# The Problem **SOLVER**



## Will acer be damaged?

**Q** Will a new path damage our acer?

**Frances Finnegan, Shardlow, Derbyshire**

**A** Putting down a block paver path close to your acer will cause problems. It's not the pavers nor the mortar mix itself, but the roots you will sever when digging out the sub-base. Roots of trees mainly go sideways. Even for a large oak they'll largely be in the top 60-90cm (2-3ft)

of soil. If your path is within 30cm (12in) of the canopy that won't be a problem, but if it's within 30cm (12in) of the trunk you'll be removing half the root system.

Established trees may tolerate losing a third of their roots, but losing a half is more problematical. Either redirect the path or get a landscaper from the British Association of Landscape Industries to look at bridging over the roots (tel: 024 7669 0333).

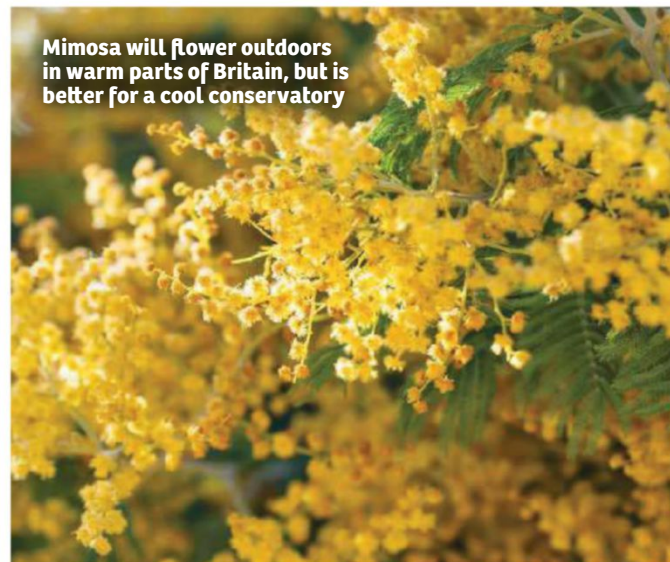
**Q** Why is my mimosa dropping flower buds?

**Helen Mayers, by email**

**A** Mimosa (*Acacia dealbata*) makes an exotic tree for a cold conservatory but I suspect yours is just too warm and the atmosphere very dry. The problem in domestic situations indoors over winter is that temperatures tend to fluctuate

from very warm in the evening to very cold in the early hours of the morning. A constant temperature, even as low as 10C (50F), will be better. Also, make sure it's away from radiators or the cold of the glass but keep the tree in the best possible light.

Obviously, keep the pot watered but avoid drowning or drying out as these extremes will also cause bud drop.



**Q** How do we pollard an Indian bean tree?

**Jill Davy, Southampton**

**A** *Catalpa bignonioides*, the Indian bean tree, is wide-spreading, growing to 20m (65ft) in all directions. This is great if you have a country estate but it's not ideal for a small garden. Fortunately, it responds

very well to hard cutting back, but won't flower. This needs to be done now while the tree is still dormant. Cut back to a framework of main branches or even lower, leaving perhaps 60cm (24in) of trunk. Retain the strongest, best-placed new shoots from the regrowth. Then pollard annually or every second year in winter.



**Q** How do I prune my climbing rose?

**Reg Sargeant, Penrith, Cumbria**

**A** Climbing roses need a semi-permanent framework of three, five or seven main stems. If you have a rose with just one main stem and a mass of spindly growth, it will need radical treatment.

I'd cut the strong stem and two others (if not too weak) to 30cm (12in) from the ground and prune out entirely any remaining growth. At the end of February apply a rose fertiliser and mulch, and water once a week in summer if the weather is dry. Hopefully you'll get a number of strong stems developing in the spring and early summer. Fan these out and tie in. Flowering will be modest, if at all, this year. Next winter, cut out any excess main stems and cut back all sideshoots to about 30cm (12in).





## Q What is making the shoots of my willow distort?

Jackie Heal, by email

**A** The strange growth on the shoots is called fasciation. This is where the shoot appears flattened, with many stems compressed and fused together. It's due to abnormal activity in the growing tip of the plant. It's most common on willows, forsythia, delphiniums and foxgloves, but can appear on a wide range of plants. There are various causes, including random genetic mutation or where the growth point is



Fasciation or distortion is common in many plants including foxgloves

damaged by insects, the weather, or bacterial or viral infections. Affected parts of trees and shrubs can be pruned out but it seldom recurs the following year.

## Where can I get 'Kipfler'?

### Q Am I able to buy my favourite Australian potato in the UK?

Sharon Mayers, by email

**A** 'Kipfler' is a potato of German origin. As the UK is an important supplier of seed potatoes, there are very strict regulations on the varieties that can be grown. It doesn't appear to be on the GB Certified Potato Variety list and is,

therefore, unavailable. It's described as having a nutty and buttery taste with a creamy texture. The popular French salad variety 'Ratte' appears to be quite similar.



'Kipfler' is unavailable but 'Ratte' is similar

### Q Can you suggest some trees with attractive bark for a small town house garden?

Gavin Hughes, Brixton, London

**A** Unfortunately, most trees with attractive bark, such as the Himalayan birches, *Acer griseum* and snake-bark maples tend ultimately to be too large or, in the case of *stewartia*, need acid soil. There's a fine selection of smaller flowering cherries, such as *Prunus pendula ascendens* 'Stellata', although given you say you have a Mediterranean style, I might be tempted to go with *Acacia pravissima*, *Euonymus europaeus* 'Red

Cascade' or *Genista aetnensis*. Once established, these trees will cope well with the increasingly dry summers enjoyed in the South East.

Euonymus has attractive fruits and autumn colour



## Quick Questions

### Is there more than one type of Japanese knotweed?

Darren Grundy, Falkirk, West Lothian

There are several species of knotweed (*Fallopia*) but only *F. japonica* and the related giant knotweed, *F. sachalinensis*, are seriously invasive species.



Japanese knotweed is highly invasive

### Is it possible to plant into hardcore?

Martin Millam, by email

You need to create planting pockets at least 30cm (12in), deep-filled with gritty soil (perhaps 25 per cent grit to soil). After that, look at selections of plants for gravel gardens, particularly Mediterranean shrubs such as lavender, phlomis and rosemary. They would need watering once a week in dry weather in the first year to establish a decent root system.

### What companions can I plant with hostas to avoid slug damage?

Lisa O'Rourke, Lincoln

Companion planting will often fail when it comes to hostas, which are very much the caviar of the slug

world. Instead, use a combination of hand-picking, lager traps and organic slug pellets based on ferrous phosphate.

### When can I move my dogwood?

Hayley Twilley, Peterlee, Co Durham

The shrubby dogwoods, grown for their winter stems, need to be moved now when they're dormant. Dig round with a spade and lift with a good rootball. Water in well and do so once a week in dry weather throughout the summer. 'Midwinter Fire' is one of the most ornamental but it's not the most vigorous, so don't prune it back this spring to give it a chance to recover. 'Anny's Winter Orange' is similarly impressive, but is more vigorous.



## Phone our team of gardening experts...

We'll solve your problems if you call 01733 468835 from noon-1pm, Monday-Friday. Calls are charged at UK national rate.



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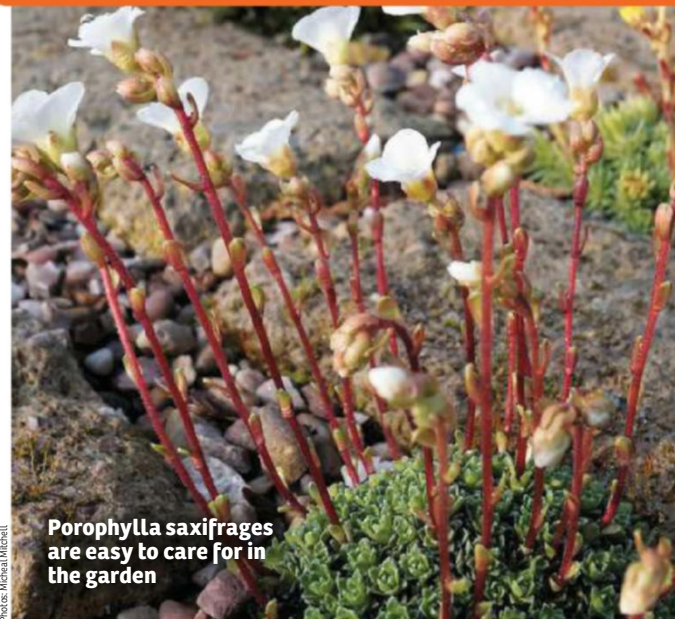
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Garden News, Media House, Peterborough Business Park, Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6EA. Enclose an sae



# Gardening with the **EXPERTS**

The world's finest share their tips for success



**Porophylla saxifrage** are easy to care for in the garden



**'Sulphurea'** is an easy, fast growing saxifrage to get started with



## Alpine jewels will sparkle

### Porophylla saxifrage brighten up the garden in early spring

**P**orophylla or kabschia is the name given to a group of saxifrage which flower from February until late April, often with brightly coloured flowers on compact cushions of small, evergreen leaves. They have their wild origins mainly in the mountains of Europe or Asia, often exposed to the full force of the elements. Their meagre needs are, therefore, fairly easy to cater for in the average garden setting.

Porophyllas are generally small plants and perhaps best grown in containers. This allows you to mix a suitable compost for excellent drainage and also provides an opportunity to raise the pot to make viewing the plants easier. Porophyllas can be grown on their own or with other alpine plants with similar needs.

Ready-made composts are not well-suited to alpine plants, so make your own using the following recipe: John Innes loam based No 1 compost mixed 50:50 with chippings or grit. This provides good aeration and plenty of nutrients. Don't be tempted to add extra feed as this will encourage excess soft growth.

Your container should be a minimum of 15cm (6in) deep. Place some bits of broken pot over the drainage holes to avoid blocking, then add 2.5-5cm (1-2in) of gravel before filling with the compost mix. Now simply plant it up, adding 2.5cm (1in) of chippings.



#### Michael Mitchell

Michael and his wife Allison own Slack Top Alpine Nursery, situated 282m (925ft) above sea level on a north-facing slope in the Yorkshire Pennines. They have won nine gold medals since they started exhibiting at major shows in 2006. Michael is the author of *Alpines – An Essential Guide* and has raised many new varieties over 30 years.

This not only looks nice but also helps cut down on water loss and prevents compost splashing on the plants during heavy rain.

Once planted and watered, there's little to

do except to watch them slowly grow into an ever more delightful display. Keep an eye on watering, especially during summer when a week or so without rain in warm weather will necessitate giving them a good soak.

They shouldn't need any additional feeding; in fact, it's better to starve them as this will help to keep the cushions firm and better able to withstand winter wet. A container planted with porophylla saxifrage should last for 10 years or more.

If you live in an area with high rainfall it's a good idea to provide overhead protection from winter wet by moving the container to a cold greenhouse or against the house wall on the opposite side from prevailing weather.



**'Vladana'** makes a compact dome shape





Little 'Auguste Renoir' is only 2.5cm (1in) tall



*Begonia semperflorens* has classic little blooms with yellow centres



*Begonia* 'Million Kisses Elegance' is a vigorous, trailing variety

# Starting with begonias

Get going with seed sowing but leave planting tubers until next month

If you have a propagator and a heated greenhouse there are many exciting begonia varieties to grow from seed on sale from firms such as Thompson & Morgan ([www.thompson-morgan.com](http://www.thompson-morgan.com)). When sowing seed aim for a temperature of about 25C (77F) and sow thinly on the surface of small trays of seed and cutting compost. Use plastic covers and water from below, ensuring the compost doesn't dry out. Germination should take after about two weeks. After that, give them more air and reduce the temperature to about 21C (70F). Prick the seedlings out to about 2.5cm (1in) apart when they're large enough to handle.

It's still too early to start tubers into growth unless you want flowers early for a special reason, but it's time to prepare them for starting next month or early April. Check the tubers carefully for signs of rot and remove any that you find, drying the surface with a tissue. By this time tubers may



## Alan Harris

Alan started growing begonias in 1975 after a visit to the Chelsea Flower Show, and the variety 'Fred Martin' that he saw that day is still one of his favourites. He's also very fond of the multiflora 'Flamboyant'. He was secretary of the National Begonia Society for 12 years until 2013 and specialises in cut blooms, which he shows at Spalding each year.

already be showing signs of growth, with small pink or white shoots, known as pips, starting to show on the surface. If they're not yet showing, wake them up by placing the tubers upside down in a warm place for a couple of weeks.

The tubers have a definite top, which is the slight concave area from where the growth starts. The tubers are far more likely to grow successfully if they have the pips showing before being planted in compost.



Small pink or white pips on a begonia tuber

## Six easy saxifrages

- 'Princess': Dome-shaped cushion of spiny, grey leaves with crisp white flowers opening from red-stemmed buds and stems.
- 'Gregor Mendel': Slow spreading mat of stiff green leaves, short stems with clusters of primrose-yellow flowers.
- 'Penelope': Unusual beige coloured flowers and a dome-shaped cushion.
- *S. marginata*: This non-hybrid makes a grey-silver dome, giving rise to clusters of white flowers.
- 'Sulphurea': As the name implies, pale sulphur yellow flowers on red stems. Very compact cushion.
- 'Peach Melba': Slowly-spreading, deep green mat with peachy flowers.

## Six slower growers

- 'Drakula': Very spiky dome, clusters of acid-yellow flowers, later flowering than most.
- 'Vladana': Slow growing, very early biscuit orange flowers.
- 'Tysoe Blush': Very floriferous, soft pink, crinkly petals.
- 'Satchmo': Glowing bright pink flowers.
- Auguste Renoir: Delightful pinky-orange flowers.
- 'Harlow Car': Deep pink flowers.

● For a wide range of saxifrages, visit Slack Top Alpine Nursery, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, tel: 01422 845348, [www.slacktopnurseries.co.uk](http://www.slacktopnurseries.co.uk).



Begonia seedlings ready to be pricked out



Readers' gardens now!

# Over the FENCE

A neat and tidy garden now will help you no end in spring



## Borders get a tidy up

Photos: Joanna Daniels, unless stated



**Joanna Daniels**

**A family garden in Astley Burf, Worcestershire, with recently developed beds and borders.**

What a treat to wake up to birdsong again – one particularly loud and cheerful blackbird positions himself at the top of a fir tree in the corner of the garden to serenade us each morning. Added to the mornings and evenings getting lighter by the day, it really feels as though spring is on the way.

No matter what the weather's like, I'm trying to spend some time each day in the garden. I'm

currently working my way through all the borders. Dead stems on perennials can now be cut back and I'm using a narrow rake to pull away leaves that have been blanketing the borders since autumn. Even just an hour a day makes a huge difference to the look of the garden and it's so rewarding to uncover the emerging shoots of spring bulbs.

The first snowdrops naturalising in grass are in flower, with many more pushing through daily. The idea is to have a carpet of snowdrops and crocus under the trees in the spring area, and I hope this year it'll start to resemble the picture I have in my mind! Cyclamen are also now starting to flower and



**Beautiful blackbird song can be heard at this time of year**

I'm so pleased to see the first buds on the hellebores.

I've received my allocation of seeds from the Hardy Plant Society seed exchange. I was so excited I immediately sowed a couple of things and can't wait to start the rest off. I'm awaiting seeds from the Cottage Garden Society seed exchange too, so have washed plenty of small pots and half seed trays so there won't be any delays once the seeds arrive. I've also sown plenty of sweet peas. Read more about our garden at [www.talesfromacountrygarden.wordpress.com](http://www.talesfromacountrygarden.wordpress.com).



**Left, budding hellebores and right, naturalised snowdrops in the lawn**



## Beautiful fragrance



**Sandra Jordan**

**An urban oasis in Twickenham combining trees, shrubs and general planting with a variety of pondlife and wildlife.**

After deciding the garden needed sprucing up before the spring bulbs emerged, I planted some elegant hellebores with their nodding, creamy white flowers and prominent foliage. I've never been a particular fan of primulas but I've come to love the pale creamy yellow varieties and they complement the hellebores in lighting up shady areas of the garden.

Photos: Tom Pullison



**The old silver birch is in need of a professional prune**





**Hellebores are known for their beauty and their wildlife value**

Beside the kitchen door, *Clematis florida* 'Sieboldii' and *Lonicera periclymenum* 'Graham Thomas' have suddenly burst into life as they scramble and twine their way up the trellis. *Viburnum* 'Dawn' wafts its beautiful clove-scented fragrance when the door opens.

Quite literally, 'over the fence' I'm very envious of my neighbour's *Garrya elliptica*, which at this time of year is adorned with long, silky catkins, hence its common name the silk tassel bush. It's an excellent shrub for a small garden.

Bumblebees have been spotted around and on top of my compost bin. I had to gently help a honey bee on its way after it became stuck lying on its back.

Even on some chilly February days, the winter sunshine can be quite warm, making it a joy to be in the garden. Who knows, I might even be inspired to paint the garden furniture!

Normally, I'd prune my *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' (red-stemmed dogwood) and the green-stemmed *Cornus sericea*



**Left, beaded catkins on *Garrya elliptica*, and right *Cornus* 'Flaviramea'**

'Flaviramea' in February but, according to the RHS website, recent studies have shown that pruning in mid-March to April is preferable so I will heed their advice and wait till then.

Photo: Sandra Jordan, unlesstated



**Creamy-yellow primroses sit with hellebores in shade**

Shutterstock

## Life is getting busier!



**Tom Pattinson**

**A garden full of unusual plants and a big collection of fruit and vegetables in Alnwick, Northumberland.**

After a steady beginning to the gardening year, with old, shrubby perennials removed and new plantings completed, the pace is stepping up a notch. In keeping with most gardeners, we've commitments beyond the home plot.

The Alnwick Garden, at which we're volunteers, has reopened after the January break so I'm back taking Poison Garden tours. There's also the local radio programme to co-present each Saturday. Our *Weekending Show*, which broadcasts on FM 107.3 or live online at [www.lionheartradio.com](http://www.lionheartradio.com)



**An early hive bee takes advantage of heather nectar**

is a mixture of music, gardening and natural history. The Alnwick Garden Club, of which I'm chairman, demands a little of my time for speaker-finding.

Last week, *Betula jacquemontii* received its biennial prune with long-handled loppers but the old silver birch (*B. pendula*) stands 8m (26ft) tall and is a job for the professionals who have promised to come next week while it's still dormant. The diversity

of birds these two attract year-round is unbelievable, so we'd hate to be without them.

The daily temperature band has ranged from 8C (46F) to -3C (27F) recently, and early bees have been encouraged to appear under the midday sun. We've recorded one big bumbler and several hive bees already. The main attraction for them are groups of *Erica carnea* in pink and white, mahonia 'Charity', winter aconites and snowdrops. The annual Festival of Snowdrops, at nearby Howick Hall, is showcasing great woodland swathes of them.

The recent shortage of certain vegetables, and price increases, has made those grown on our island beds taste all the sweeter!



**There's no shortage of lettuce here!**

To maintain continuity, I've just planted plugs of leaf lettuce, raised from seed in a cell tray, out into the greenhouse border. Micro leaves will be on the menu before we know it.

A fresh bunch of daffodils in bud, bought each week for £1, go into a vase in the kitchen window with existing stems of *Ribes sanguineum*, *Spiraea arguta* and *Forsythia suspensa*. The water is changed weekly and the shrubs, now flowering and with roots, are retained. When these cheap and cheerful displays run out of time, the young shrubs will be planted outside.



**Early daffodils with forsythia make a sunny yellow display**



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**SIMON CANEY**  
**Pick of the POST**  
 With the editor of Garden News



## Surprise for Giuseppe

I planted this hippeastrum just before Christmas, as my husband Giuseppe, who is Italian, had never seen one before. Nothing happened for weeks and then it suddenly shot up!

*Patricia M, by email*



## Cyclamen is a bargain

Here's the cyclamen I bought from a garden centre in October 2015. It has had 30 flowers now, so it's proving to be quite a good bargain!

*Mary Mason, Sussex*

## Leftovers

These sweet peas on my windowsill are growing in a piece of wet kitchen roll. It's a good experiment with any leftover seeds after sowing.

*Marie Macfarlane, Dorset*



## Speedy's having a ball

It's party time with 'Speedy Gonzales' and friends!

*Sarah Langley, Suffolk*



## Smell the coffee...

In a recent issue of Garden News it was suggested that coffee bushes grown in the house won't produce berries. The coffee tree I had for some 15 years reached 2.4m (8ft) tall. It flowered every year and produced lots of berries. I did roast some of them and they smelled wonderful, but I don't recommend trying to make a drink with them!

*Morag Whitworth, Nottingham*

## Tweets & Posts



It won't be long before these beautiful camellias are in flower in my mum's garden.

*Hugh Cassidy, Twitter*



I'm ready to harvest some leaves from my pots of rocket and mustard sown at the end of November. They've done well, in spite of the frosts.

*Brendan Byrne, Twitter*



I planted tulip and iris bulbs yesterday and I also did a painting of them!

*Jean Cooper, Facebook*



**STAR PRIZE**

## I'd be lost without GN!

When we moved from our small, suburban garden to a very large but very neglected one in 2015, I set about transforming a sloping and weedy part of the plot into a terraced raised vegetable patch. The soil was compacted and full of slate and rubble, but with the help of Garden News, the crops I harvested in 2016 were phenomenal. I still have a lot to do, but I'd be lost without the advice and timely reminders on when to sow and how to grow from the GN team!

*Alison Cartwright, by email*

*Simon says: Glad to be of help, Alison. Your garden looks chock-full of thriving fruit and veg!*



Alison wins a £25 voucher from Mr Fothergill's for use in its mail-order catalogue. It's packed with a huge choice of quality seeds and exciting flower, fruit and veg plants.



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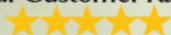
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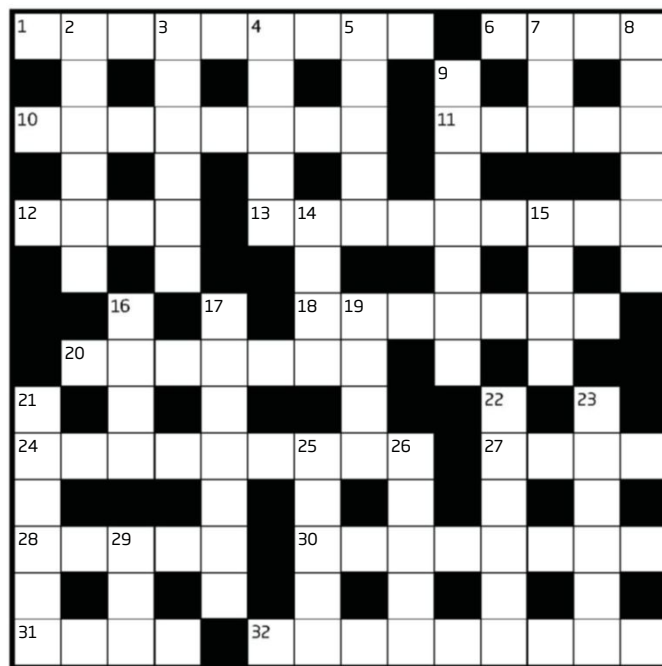
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8

# PRIZE CROSSWORD

When all the answers are in place the letters in the even-numbered squares from 2 to 26 will spell out two words; the first is associated with 28 across and the other with 25 down in the common names of two plants.

## ACROSS

- 1 Gets in the way of (9)  
6 Abnormal growth on a plant, especially an oak (4)  
10 Common name of an evergreen shrub of the Nerium genus (8)  
11 Cereal plant of the genus Triticum (5)  
12 Common name of the culinary herb *Salvia officinalis* (4)  
13 Absolutely necessary (9)  
18 Shakespearean title character, and variety of *Ligularia dentata* (7)  
20 'I had a 8 down \_\_\_\_, Nothing would it bear...' (nursery rhyme) (3,4)  
24 Capital letters (5,4)  
27 Tall water grass (4)  
28 Another name for 25 down (5)  
30 Spring bulb (8)  
31 Harvest a crop (4)  
32 Small, red acid fruit of a member of the heather family (9)
- ## DOWN
- 2 Aromatic resinous substance exuded by certain trees and shrubs (6)  
3 Tall prickly plant with spiny purple flower heads (6)  
4 Excessive, not warranted (5)  
5 Biblical weeds (5)  
7 Wood-chopping tool (3)



- 8 Small (6)  
9 \_\_\_\_ College, first horticultural training centre for women, in 1902 (7)  
14 Fruit of the blackthorn (4)  
15 Not working, or lazy (4)  
16 Small rounded hill or mound, often in place names (4)  
17 Cook in oil while mixing briskly (4-3)  
19 River of N E England (4)  
21 Tremble, shake (6)  
22 Long narrow cut (6)  
23 Older (6)  
25 Snake (5)  
26 Of a person, small with a

## SOLUTION TO No 6

**Across:** 8 Alabaster 9 Exam 10 Migrate 12 Embody 13 Don 14 Kung fu 17 East 18 Lawn 19 Tuba 20 Mars 21 Equine 22 Leo 24 Armani 26 Kashmir 30 Eels 31 Apparatus  
**Down:** 1 Farm 2 Bang 3 Lava 4 Steed 5 Orientale 6 Herb 7 Waddesdon 11 Rights 15 Unmarried 16 Umbilical 17 Enough 23 Okapi 25 Apse 27 Serb 28 Mite 29 Ross  
**Hidden aria, opera and composer:** Flower duet, Lakmé, Delibes  
**Winner of Crossword No 6 is Mrs C French-Wollen, of Malpas, Cheshire.**

mischievous charm (5)  
29 Word that can be preceded by 'snow', 'split' and 'sweet' (3)

# Garden news

**Address** Garden News, Bauer Media, Media House, Lynch Wood, Peterborough, PE2 6EA  
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**Editor at large** Ian Hodgson  
**Features editor** Karen Murphy  
**Garden writer** Tonia Friedrich  
**Senior production editor** Kathryn Lovelock  
**Production editor** Andrew Wright  
**Art and cover editor** John Temple  
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**Group Commercial Director** Charlie Brookes  
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**Brand Manager** Charlotte Walsh  
**Direct Marketing Manager** Julie Spires  
**Direct Marketing Executive** Freddie Campbell  
**Head of Newstrade Marketing** Leon Benoiton  
**Newstrade Marketing Manager** Sam Tomblin

## PRODUCTION

**Tel** 01733 468341  
**Print Production Controller** Rebecca Stone  
**Advertising Production** Danica Pembroke, Chloe Martin  
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# Home GROWN

## Forced rhubarb

Keep light off your crop and you'll enjoy the delicious taste of smooth, pale stalks

**P**ink, forced rhubarb is much more subtly flavoured than a main crop as it's grown in the dark. The thin skin needs no stringing, so nothing diminishes the brightness of the stalks and, of course, it can be enjoyed much sooner.

To force rhubarb you simply starve the crop of light by covering it over while plants are dormant in late winter. In its search for light, it will reach up, producing smooth, pale stems.

Use an upturned terracotta pot with its drainage holes sealed with black gaffer tape, banking straw around the outside of the pot to create warmth. You can do this either in situ on established plants, or for an even earlier harvest, pot up pieces of crown with healthy buds into large pots of compost and place, covered over as before, in the greenhouse.

Your forced rhubarb is ready to pick when the stems touch the top of their pot, about 20-30cm (8-12in) long.

## Rhubarb and Chocolate Flapjacks

Everyone's favourite flapjacks have been given a bit of a makeover with tangy rhubarb pieces and a deep chocolate flavour. And they're simple to make, too.

Makes 16 squares

### INGREDIENTS

300g (11oz) forced rhubarb, washed and trimmed  
50g (1¾oz) golden granulated sugar  
175g (6oz) salted butter, diced  
6 tablespoons golden syrup  
400g (14oz) porridge oats  
50g (1¾oz) cocoa powder

### METHOD

- Preheat oven to 180C (fan ovens) or

equivalent to part cook rhubarb.

- Reduce heat to 160C for flapjacks.
- You will need a greased 20cm (8in) rectangular baking dish lined with a strip of greaseproof paper from end to end, leaving the ends protruding as 'handles' or a greased and lined brownie tin.
- Cut rhubarb into ½cm

(¼in) slices with a sharp, non-serrated knife. Toss in sugar and bake in a roasting dish in a single layer for 5 minutes until almost tender.

- Drain, reserving any juices that collect, and pat with kitchen paper.
- Melt butter and golden syrup gently. Combine oats, cocoa and rhubarb and stir gradually into the melted mixture, making sure everything is fully coated. Press into prepared dish, smoothing down firmly and evenly with a wet metal spoon.
- Bake for 15-20 minutes (at lower temperature, see above) until just starting to pull away from the edges.
- Cool slightly, cover, and refrigerate. Once cold turn out and mark into squares.

Top tip

For an even more irresistible flapjack, drizzle or coat with melted chocolate once cold



Top tip

Spare rhubarb juice is handy for gravy and casseroles or mix half and half with sparkling water or orange juice

## Rhubarb Betty

Lovely, easy, old fashioned Betties are usually made with dry breadcrumbs: try this even more delicious rhubarb version made with oatcake crumbs.

Serves 4

### INGREDIENTS

450g (1lb) forced rhubarb  
50g (1¾oz) granulated sugar  
1 tablespoon water

Plus:

110g (4oz) oatcakes, broken into pieces  
50g (1¾oz) golden granulated sugar  
¼ teaspoon cinnamon  
40g (1½oz) melted butter

### METHOD

- Preheat oven to 180C (fan oven) or equivalent
- You will need a 23cm (9in) pie dish or similar
- Cut rhubarb into 1-2cm (2½-5cm) lengths. Transfer to pie dish and stir in sugar and water. Bake for 15 minutes until tender. Strain off most of juice and reserve.
- Whiz oatcakes into crumbs in a food processor with sugar and cinnamon. Add melted butter and whiz until the crumbs are evenly coated.
- Pile onto fruit and bake for 15 minutes until crisp and golden.

Photos: Sue Simkins, unless stated

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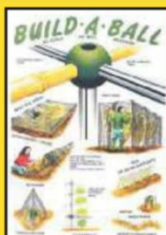
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This is a versatile clematis, great for pots or growing up walls and fences in sun

## Buy an astoundingly beautiful clematis!

This new clematis has the most stunning flowers we think you'll ever see! Fully hardy and fast growing, the uniquely-coloured *Clematis florida* 'Taiga' will flower from June to September, getting better and better each year. Masses of

lilac and gold flowers set against dense foliage will transform walls and fences. Supplied as 7cm (2½in) potted plants. Height & spread: 2m (6ft 8in).

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## CODE GN327Z/GN328Z

**ONLINE** www.thompson-morgan.com/GN327Z Garden News subscribers go to www.thompson-morgan.com/GN328Z to claim your 10% discount.

**BY PHONE** 0844 573 1686 quoting GN327Z (quote GN328Z if a GN subscriber).

**BY POST** Cut out the form and send to Garden News, Clematis Offer, Dept GN327Z/GN328Z, PO Box 162, Ipswich IP8 3BX

**Offer closes** March 15, 2017.

Clematis despatched from March 2017. All other items will be acknowledged by letter or email to advise of despatch date.

If in the event of unprecedented demand this offer is oversubscribed, we reserve the right to send suitable substitute varieties.

Please note that your contract for supply of goods is with Thompson & Morgan, Poplar Lane, Ipswich, IP8 3BU. All offers are subject to availability.

CODE	ITEM	PRICE	SUB PRICE	QTY	TOTAL
TCB71512A	Clematis 'Taiga' (1 plant)	£9.99	£8.99		
TCB78540A	Clematis 'Taiga' (2 plants + 1 FREE)	£19.98	£17.98		
TCM56850P	Large patio pot and saucer (x1)	£9.99	£8.99		
TCM56956P	Large patio pot and saucer (x2 + 1 FREE)	£19.98	£17.98		
TCC47551	incredibloom™ (1 x 100g sachet)	£4.99	£4.49		
TCC47552	incredibloom™ (1 x 750g tub)	£12.99	£11.69		
Postage & packing, worth £4.95					FREE
GN SUBSCRIBER NUMBER (IF APPLICABLE):					
GN327Z/GN328Z					TOTAL £

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## Help the bees with these nectar-rich hardy perennials

We're offering a collection of hardy perennials that are great for adding early interest to the spring garden and are often an essential source of nectar for hungry, searching bees. Each plant we've selected is incredibly hardy and will slowly self-seed around the garden if left undisturbed. They're supplied as young plants in 14 days, the ideal time to plant and enjoy.



### *Cyclamen hederifolium* Pewter Group

Flowering from December to March and appearing in a myriad of tones from shell-pink to pure-white, cyclamen form impenetrable mats of kidney-shaped, glistening foliage. Each leaf is accentuated by a neat rim which elegantly skirts around the edge, adding contrast.



### *Anemone leveillei*

Very similar to the award-winning variety 'Wild Swan', *A. leveillei* offers the same mauve-bicolour blush detail to the back of each large, white, open blossom. Each bloom is packed with nectar-covered stamens. Its form is still attractive and slender, but it's not as difficult to grow as its designer cousin and is more floriferous, flowering from March to June.



### *Viola labradorica* *purpurea*

One for the front of the border where its attractive, dark purple leaves create neat clumps of heart-shaped foliage. As with all violets, this variety is fragrant and rich in nectar, producing flowers from March through to autumn. Its blue and white flecked blossoms are small but very attractive and rewarding to grow.

**Buy 3 plants for £9.99 or SAVE £8 when you buy 6. Or buy the nectar-rich collection of 12 plants, four of each, for HALF PRICE**

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**ONLINE** [www.hayloftplants.com/GNROGN](http://www.hayloftplants.com/GNROGN).

**BY PHONE** Call 0138 642 6245 and quote ROGN17-19.

**BY POST** Cut out order form and post orders to Garden News Reader Offer, PO BOX 2020, Pershore WR10 9BP.

All plants will be despatched in 14 days - unless stated otherwise. All orders will receive an order acknowledgement with an approximate delivery date.

UK delivery only. Delivery surcharges may apply for outlying areas.

**Offer closes** March 25, 2017.

All items are subject to availability; we reserve the right to send suitable substitutes or for paid for items, offer a refund. If demand exceeds anticipated volumes for free items, we retain the right to replace with products of a similar retail value with no further notice. Offer available to UK addresses only. Reader Offers cannot be used in conjunction with any other promotions or discounts. Please tick here ☐ if you prefer not to receive offers from any company other than Hayloft.

CODE	ITEM	PRICE	QTY	TOTAL
YC03	<i>Cyclamen hederifolium</i> Pewter Group (3 plants)	£9.99		
YC06	<i>Cyclamen hederifolium</i> Pewter Group (6 plants) <b>SAVE £8</b>	£11.98		
YA03	<i>Anemone leveillei</i> (3 plants)	£9.99		
YA06	<i>Anemone leveillei</i> (6 plants) <b>SAVE £8</b>	£11.98		
YV03	<i>Viola labradorica purpurea</i> (3 plants)	£9.99		
YV06	<i>Viola labradorica purpurea</i> (6 plants) <b>SAVE £8</b>	£11.98		
YNC12	Nectar-rich Collection (12 plants, 4 of each above) <b>HALF PRICE</b>	£19.97		
Postage & packing		£4.95	1	<b>£4.95</b>
ROGN17-19			<b>TOTAL</b>	

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Hayloft Plants (with name and address on the back) £

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Please note that that this collection is supplied as a pack of 12 well rooted plug plants and consists of 6 each of 'Sweet Colossus' and 'Finesse'. Plants should provide you with a maiden crop this summer. **Code: STPL Price: £18.00 (inc p&p)**

**Finesse**

Plants will be dispatched from late April 2017

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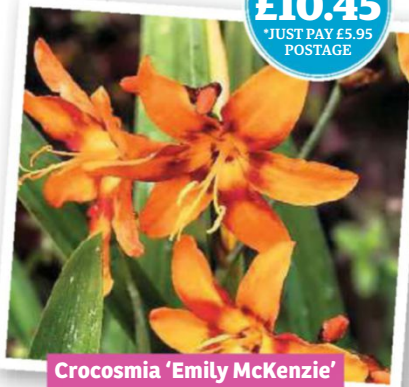
Two Wests & Elliott (GN) Unit 4 Carrwood Rd,  
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## Free crocosmia bulbs for every reader

Crocasmia is spectacular garden plant and super in arrangements, too.

If left undisturbed, it will increase well to form a spreading clump of thin, green leaves set off by the most vibrant colours on arching, 60-90cm (2-3ft) stems in summer. To receive 10 bulbs of 'Emily McKenzie', orange with red blotch, worth £10.45, just send £5.95 to cover postage or get them free when you order our super 40 bulb crocosmia collection consisting 10 bulbs each of ● 'George Davison', pure yellow ● 'Columbus', orange/yellow ● 'Red King', reddish orange and yellow ● 'Mistral', scarlet. **Our offer price is £13.95, saving £11.** Delivery from late March. Offer closes March 25.



Crocosmia 'Emily McKenzie'

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**begonias**, pretty ruffled double flowers,

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'Sweet Dreams'



Chirita flavimaculata



'Stardust'

Chirita tamiana

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ITEM	PRICE	QTY	TOTAL
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Crocosmia collection (40 bulbs plus 10 free)	£13.95		
FREE double begonias (6 tubers)	£5.99 POSTAGE		
Double begonia collection (18 tubers plus 6 free)	£12.95		
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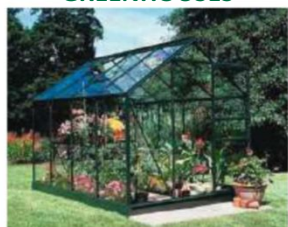
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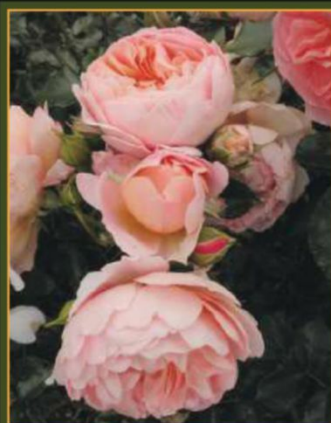
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# Gardening GENIUS

Nuggets of pure wisdom

## Get your tools in top condition

**Y**ou want to have the best tools to get all your jobs done efficiently. The GN team and expert Christopher Brown give you some valuable tips to maintain your tools and improve their performance.

### Expert Insight

I carry a small sharpening stone with me. That way I can sharpen secateurs while I'm in the garden. Little and often is the key. Draw the bevelled edge of the blade along the stone four to five times at an angle of 30 degrees.

To sharpen shears, place the blades in a vice one at a time. Then using a fine grade file gripped with two hands, move the file in one broad stroke along the bevelled edge at an angle of 30 degrees. Repeat this process eight to 10 times on each blade.

Use a fine sharpening stone for knives, prepared with a few drops of oil. Push the blade forwards and to the side while pushing it down on the stone. Repeat this process until the knife is razor sharp.

**Christopher Brown**  
is a horticulturist  
at Kew Gardens

Lubricate your  
sharpening  
stone with oil



Keeping tools clean before you sharpen them reduces the risk of spreading diseases

Before you sharpen your tools, give them a good clean. To sharpen pruners, use a whetstone for a very sharp edge. You may need to add a few drops of oil or water to lubricate. Rub the sharp edge of the blade toward the stone in a curved motion, like you're trying to shave off a thin slice from the stone.

**Karen Murphy**, features editor

I always clean my secateurs after use with a little WD-40 then, after it has soaked in, wipe the blades clean. This removes any sap and sticky exudate that can build up on the blade causing it to stick. It also keeps the spring mechanism supple.

**Ian Hodgson**, editor-at-large

To keep my hoe sharp, I hold it with the blade up and file the outside edge to a sharp angle with the coarse side of the file. Then, with the fine side of the file, I brush off any burrs from the inside edge, keeping it nearly parallel to the blade.

**Tonia Friedrich**, garden writer

Keeping tools clean in the first place means they stay sharper longer anyway, so a regular dust-up with wire brush is worth the effort! When you do sharpen them properly, use a file over the edges and always remember to finish by oiling them to bring them back to full sharpness.

**Simon Caney**, editor

Our  
KNOW  
-HOW



Sharpen in a curved action and then clean with a little WD-40

**Garden  
news**

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