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 – see page 44

28 “Put scarlet in your borders for a splash of colour,” says Hazel

Jobs for this week

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- 5** Re-trellis an overgrown clematis
- 8** Rejuvenate a rockery after winter
- 12** Take dianthus cuttings and sow your free carnation seeds!

Great garden ideas

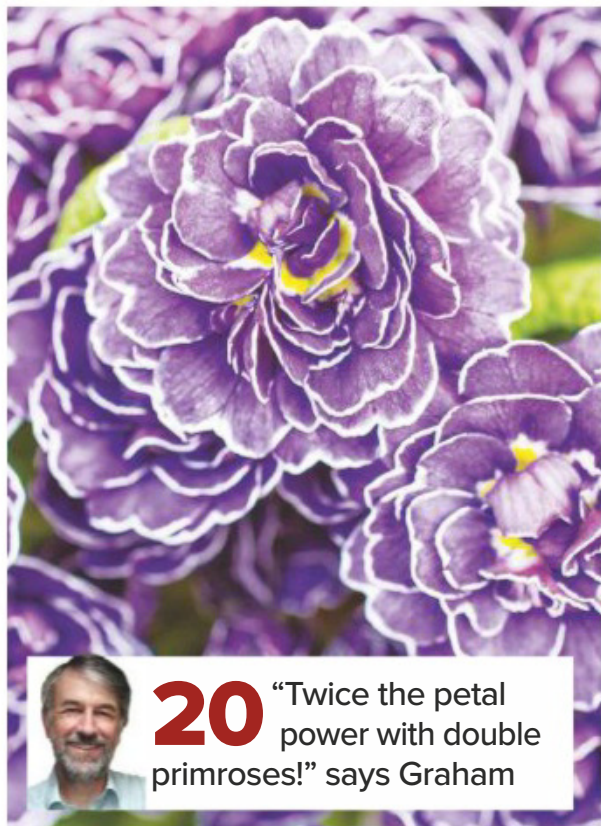
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17 “I’ll show you how to plan a veg plot for best results,” says Lucy



24 “I’ll show you how to create an exotic jungle garden,” says Hazel

“Recent storms and extreme wet weather made gardening difficult recently, but we cope and there’s usually an upside. I had been waiting, with some trepidation, to see the first shoots emerge of the 100+ daffodils planted in my lawn, and was losing faith that they would ever

appear at all. Then, the morning after a day of biblical rainfall, up from the ground appeared the heads of my daffs. Did the rain help? I’ll never know.”



Garry Coward-Williams,
Editor

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Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



Make sure chemicals are securely stored



Remove some ivy but leave some for wildlife



Make sure cables are stored away safely

Always stand on a stable surface when doing maintenance work such as securing trellises and clearing gutters

Keep structures sound

Maintaining a garden's framework is essential, says **Ruth**

IT'S the first week of March and we're all hoping that the worst of the winter is over and we can finally – finally! – enjoy some extended gardening time.

There are plants and bulbs to get in the ground, trees to feed and seeds to sow, but we also need to set time aside to take care of the structures around the garden, such as sheds, decking, fences, summerhouses, trellises and patios.

I know these aren't the most exciting things to be thinking about, but tackling them now will save time, effort and money later. Winter weather can wreak havoc on woodwork and plant supports, so make an inventory of what needs doing and deal with it bit by bit, to avoid 'job fatigue'.

Over the past few days, I have been clearing gutters so rainwater will run free and clean into water butts, putting up a new trellis before its climbing plant gets going, and making sure the patio is free of slippery algae and unsightly leaves and muck. It is always worth giving the shed a spring clean before the main

gardening work gets underway. Clean and sharpen tools, wash pots and gloves, and hang as much off the ground as possible (coiling cables on hooks, for example.)

Make sure chemicals are properly, safely stored and kept in their original containers. Never dispose of the dregs from old bottles down the drain as they will contaminate the watercourse. Instead, use them up completely, then recycle the bottle after rinsing it well three times and using the watery residue as you did the original contents. The containers can then be recycled in household waste, as can empty 'ready-to-use' chemical bottles.

Many chemicals have been withdrawn from use, but have a two-year 'grace' period when they can be used in the garden. Your local authority will be able to help with the disposal of large amounts of surplus.

If you find lots of old unlabelled chemicals when you move house, always contact your local authority for disposal advice.

Step
by step

Painting a wood shed

A coat or two will protect it for years



1 Line the windows with masking tape to stop the paint being accidentally swiped onto the glass.



2 Make sure you have a stable platform to stand on for painting hard-to-reach and high areas.



3 Always go with the grain when painting to ensure better coverage and a neater finish.



4 Don't forget any bare bits of supporting wood, such as supports. Make sure they get a coat of preservative.

Darling dahlias: There is a dahlia for every occasion and if you overwintered yours they will soon be sending out shoots that you can use for cuttings. In next week's AG I show you how.



Keep patios and decking clean

- Patios and decking need regular cleaning to stop them becoming slippery and accumulating leaves and other debris.
- This winter detritus is a breeding ground for pests and diseases, so it needs regular removal.
- A stiff brush and sharp hoe are ideal for removing the worst of the grime.
- Then use a solution of Jeyes Fluid or an environmental cleaner such as Ecofective to get it really clean.
- Pressure washers are great for blasting muck off decking, but avoid using them on patios as they can dislodge the cement between stones.

Looking after woodwork

Care and attention will help make sure it lasts longer

TAKING care of wooden structures and metalwork seems like a chore, but it will pay handsome dividends.

If you have a fence or other woodwork that needs preserving, or metalwork requiring scouring and painting, wait until a windless day when no rain is forecast.

Start by brushing away any algae, moss or other muck adhering to the wood using a stiff brush. Similarly, carefully scour away any old flaking paintwork from the metal, then wipe down with a damp cloth. Make any

necessary repairs and then apply your favoured coats of paint, varnish or preservative, according to instructions.

You may think that canes are cheap to replace, but buying more each year soon puts a dent in your wallet. If you didn't clean them last autumn, do so before you use them this year to boost their longevity and prevent them spreading pests and diseases.

If your climbing plants are clinging on to old rotten supports, this is a good time to rehang them before they really start to grow again later in the spring.

We managed to add a new trellis to a

heavy old clematis that was pulling its ancient plastic mesh support off the wall. It is now properly secured and hopefully will flower better than ever this year.

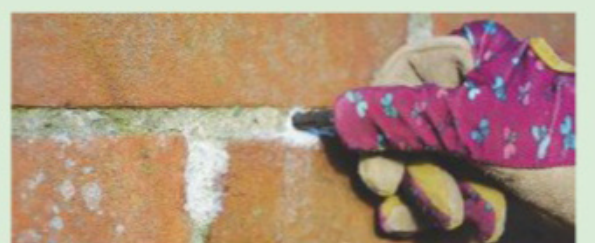
Step by step How to add a trellis to an overgrown clematis



1 Before taking down the trellis, prune your climber, if appropriate, to make working with it easier.



2 Start by freeing the old plastic framework from the wall. Carefully lie it flat with the clematis still attached.



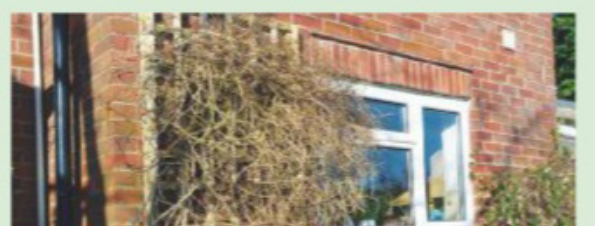
3 Using a spirit level, mark where the trellis supports will be, drill holes and reinforce with rawlplugs.



4 Attach two battens to hold either side of the trellis. Anchor firmly with two or three screws apiece.



5 Attach the trellis to the battens with its horizontal bars facing inwards to leave space for the twining plant growth.



6 Rehang the plant with the old framework attached if needed. It will soon grow to hide the woodwork.



The Scotland Garden Scheme guidebook has lots of wildlife tips

The best of Scotland

THE Scotland Gardens Scheme 2020 has been launched with a new guidebook and more than 500 gardens open to raise money for charity.

Almost half of the plots include wildlife areas and the charity is asking visitors to embrace the natural world and create nature-friendly features in their own gardens.

“Every little helps, whether it be planting flowers to attract pollinators or using natural pest controls; making a garden pond or keeping bees,” says the charity’s president Camilla Parker-Bowles, HRH Duchess of Cornwall, known as HRH The Duchess of Rothesay in Scotland.

Special wild gardens opening this year include a biodynamic farm on the Island of Lismore in the Inner Hebrides, Barochreal in Argyll with a wild garden and 40 species of moth and over 70 species of wildflowers and Bruckills Croft in Aberdeenshire, home of award-winning wildlife gardener Helen Rushton.

The 2020 Scotland’s Gardens Scheme Guidebook also includes wildlife gardening tips from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

For further details, call 0131 226 3714 or visit scotlandsgardens.org.

Scheme to save our heritage seeds

AG readers invited to become ‘Seed Champions’ for the future

RARE and heritage crops have been given a chance of survival thanks to HRH The Prince of Wales.

Well-known for his interest in gardening and his fabulous gardens at Highgrove, the future king is growing two endangered varieties.

He has tended a number of varieties of heritage seeds over the years including the ‘Mrs Lewis Purple Podded’ climbing French bean.

The Prince of Wales has also grown ‘Black Valentine’ dwarf French beans, which have a lovely flavour.

Horticulture charity garden Organic is now asking the public to grow seeds from its Heritage Seed Library.

Charity spokesman Chris Collins said: “Growing seeds from the Heritage Seed Library is an important way to support conservation as you will be helping protect rare vegetables for generations to come. Anyone can take part and enjoy the benefits to their garden, and to the wider plant world.”

Among Chris’s favourites in this year’s list are ‘Ragged Jack’ kale, which is stimulated



Prince Charles is growing ‘Mrs Lewis Purple Podded’ beans

HRH Prince Charles, seen here at Ruyton Gardens, is a keen champion of gardening and patron of the charity Garden Organic

by the cold weather over the darker months. Full of nutrients, the crop is grown by Chris alongside cabbage and Brussel sprouts on a raised bed.

He also highlights the ‘Bath Cos’ lettuce, which was listed in James Carter’s Catalogue of a Choice Collection of Floricultural, Vegetable and Agricultural Seeds of 1842, and is suitable for those with a lack of garden space as it can be grown in a container. Thought to be synonymous with ‘Brighton Cos’, the large, dark green

leaves have a rust-coloured tinge and are flavourful, crisp and juicy.

Sign up and help out

Garden Organic’s Heritage Seed Library, established in the 1970s, has helped conserve and grow around 800 varieties that would otherwise be lost.

Volunteers sign up to be Seed Guardians, growing rare varieties to preserve the seeds, which are then returned to the library to ensure they are not lost.

For further details and to become a Seed Champion, call 024 7630 3517 or visit gardenorganic.org.uk.



Chris Collins of Garden Organic

First ‘Christian garden’ to open at Chelsea

THIS year will see the first garden inspired by Christianity at RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

Designed by RHS gold medal winner Sarah Eberle, the plot’s themes are taken from Psalm 23 (‘The Lord is my Shepherd’) and will include a hanging rock, foxgloves and cow parsley to

represent a typical English pastoral scene, plus a hawthorn tree, gorse and thistles convey the obstacles in life.

Previous shows have featured gardens inspired by other world religions including Hinduism and Islam. Sarah said: “It does not matter if you are religious or not, it’s about spirituality and

finding humanity in nature.” Bible Society spokeswoman Hazel Southam said: “We visited Chelsea last year, and saw that banks and gin companies had a presence and decided there was no reason the Bible Society should not be in there, too.”

After the show, the Psalm 23 garden is find a new home at Winchester hospice. RHS Chelsea Flower Show dates are May 19-23; see rhs.org.uk.



Sarah Eberle hopes her garden will be a place of meditation

Growing love: Delight your mum on Mother's Day and support the UK's Wildlife Trusts at the same time by giving her an Artists' Meadow kit from Seedball. The beautiful tins, designed by artist Yvonne Coomber, contain clay balls studded with wildlife-beneficial plant seeds including scabious, red campion and ox-eye daisy. They cost £6 from seedball.co.uk or by calling 020 8802 5565.



Community centre to host summer of talks

AFTER months of hard work, renovation, community support and business sponsorship, the Hamblin Centre and plant nursery in Bosham, Hampshire is celebrating The Year of the Garden.

It is opening for the first time as part of the National Garden Scheme, and has a series of talks and demonstrations planned for the year ahead.

The centre, which operates as a retreat and wellness facility, has a three-acre garden with a wildlife pond, a wildflower meadow and a rock garden.

Boundary areas are left to nature providing a rich range of wildlife habitats. A biodiversity hotspot, the grounds also contain a wide variety of butterflies and moths as well as a huge range of other insect species.

Collection of 78 dahlia plants

Hamblin outreach worker Margaret Mountford said: "The nursery was started last December and has been regenerated from a derelict ivy-covered wasteland. We raised £750 from donations, and local firms gave us 15 tons of soil, a summerhouse, a garden shed and fencing.

"Supporters of the Trust gave us a greenhouse, recycled flower pots and all manner of plants, plus items for the actual infrastructure of the nursery. We also grew plants from seeds and cuttings, though a small amount of plants were bought in."

She added that the centre's dahlia collection now stands at 78 plants, with more anticipated to arrive this summer.

A series of talks by experts has been



One of Hamblin's 78 varieties of dahlia

Part of the Hamblin Centre's garden with its donated greenhouse and raised flower beds

planned for the coming months. Daffodils have their moment to shine on 8 March, roses take centre stage on 14 June, and dahlias are in the spotlight on 18 July.

A series of demonstrations and talks has also been planned. On 16 May, Gloria Robinson, from Tawny Nurseries, will show visitors how to create a hanging basket. Catherine Horwood, the biographer of Beth Chatto, garden designer Juliet Sargeant and former West Dean gardeners Jim Buckland and Sarah Wain will give talks on 28 June.

Finally, on 12 July, you can learn how to take garden photographs on your mobile phone with photographer, Jonathan Ward.

Margaret added: "We have a fantastic year of events, and we hope many visitors come and enjoy what we have in store."

For further information, call 01243 572109 or visit hamblincentre.org.uk.

BOOK REVIEW



The Five Minute Garden

by Laetitia Maklouf
(National Trust Books, £9.99)

I CAN understand why people like to break certain aspects of their life down into five- or 10-minute chunks – but gardening, really?

Yes, we all know there are 'five-minute' jobs such as deadheading, weeding and tying back, but does anyone honestly just spend the allotted five doing them? Does anyone actually stop after five minutes without being drawn into the next job, and the next...?

I certainly don't, but if you are that disciplined with your horticultural timetable, then this is the book for you. It is a call to arms to encourage you to leave the house and get working in the garden for a few (well, five) minutes.

It takes you through each month's necessary tasks, and even if they aren't possible in 300 seconds, it is a good reminder of what needs doing when.

This makes it more useful for a novice rather than an experienced gardener, and they will certainly appreciate this sweet, nicely illustrated little manual.

World's 'best garden images' on show at Kew

A STUNNING collection of garden photographs is on show in the Nash Conservatory at Kew Gardens until 8 March.

The images are by winners of the International Garden Photographer of The Year (IGPOTY) competition, now in its 13th year. There are 14 categories covering subjects such as 'The Beauty of Plants', 'Beautiful Gardens' and 'Captured at Kew'.

AG editor Garry Coward-Williams, who was one of the judges, said: "These photographs really brought out the best of the beauty and wonder of plants. This is truly the most prestigious and



'Captured at Kew', winner Andrew Wade

'The Beauty of Plants', winner Jacky Parker

outstanding competition for images of plants and gardens in the world."

The competition is open to anyone who would like to enter. Those AG readers

unable to get to Kew to see the exhibition can view all the winners and find out about how to try for next year's awards at: igpoty-competition-13-results.

Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



Bulbs such as Chionodoxa thrive in rockeries



Winter flowering Erica thrives in our chalky soil



Our inherited rockery has never looked as good as we'd like, so I am planting herbs, heathers and alpines to create year-round colour and interest, and adding gravel to suppress weeds

Care for your rockery

Time to replant, add gravel and tidy things up, says **Ruth**



1 Keep rockery plants free from weeds and debris that quickly smother them. Give them a gravel mulch so lower leaves are away from wet soil, which can cause rotting.



2 Rockeries are ideal habitats for herbs, shrubs and bulbs such as *Iris reticulata*, mini daffs, Chionodoxa and crocuses. Spreading plants such as Vinca help block out weeds.



3 If you don't have room for a rockery, create an alpine garden in a sink or trough. Use John Innes No3 with added grit and mulch with gravel.



4 Take cuttings as rockery plants put on new growth. Use healthy non-flowering growth and grow on in a coldframe or greenhouse.

What's on

Things to do near you



Violas and pansies are celebrated at Meadow Croft Garden Centre, Essex (14-22 March)

7 Grow to Eat Workshop: Bowery Visual Arts, 54 Ottley Road, Headingley, Leeds LS6 2AL.

☎ 0113 224 2284, 🌐 thebowery.org

7 What Now? Your Garden in March & April: RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creep hedge Lane, Rettendon, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 8ET.

☎ 0845 265 8071, 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall

7-15 Science Week: RHS Wisley, Wisley Lane, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. ☎ 0845 6121 253, 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley

8 Orchid and House Plant Weekend: RHS Garden Hyde Hall

8 Botanical Watercolours Workshop: Truro Arts Company, 26 River Street, Truro, Cornwall TR1 2SJ. ☎ 01872 240567, 🌐 truroartscompany.co.uk

8 Shrub Pruning: RHS Garden Rosemoor, Great Torrington, Rosemoor, Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH. ☎ 0203 176 5830, 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/rosemoor

10 Pesticides – Are They Safe? Ewell Horticultural Association, Bourne Hall, Spring Street, Ewell, Surrey KT17 1UF. ☎ 020 8393 9257, 🌐 surreyhorticulturalfederation.org

11 Going for RHS Gold with Mig Kimpton: Cobham Community Pre-school, Meadow Room, The Street, Cobham, Kent DA12 3BZ. ☎ 01474 814879, 🌐 meadowroom.org.uk

13 Garden Design Drawing Skills (Perspective): RHS Wisley

14-22 Viola and Pansy Festival: Meadow Croft Garden Centre, Woodhall Road, Battlesbridge, Wickford, Essex SS11 7QU. ☎ 01245 320314, 🌐 meadow-croft.co.uk

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Your Gardening Week

with Peter Seabrook, AG's classic gardening expert

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Shallots can be seed-raised, but are easier grown from bulbs saved from last year

Semi-leafless cultivars of garden peas are almost self-supporting and suitable for containers

Compact bush tomatoes sown now and raised in pots on windowsills will be ready to go outside late May to crop in June

Should you sow or plant?

There are pros and cons with both methods, says **Peter**

IS it better to either sow and raise your own seedlings of salads and vegetables, or buy seedlings ready to plant? This was the question posed recently. The simple answer is: it is cheaper to raise from seed, but will take longer to harvest a crop.

Of course, there is much more to it than that, and on a garden centre mid-February viewing of vegetable seedlings I could see challenges. First of all, nice sturdy seedlings of broad bean and garden peas were a good buy; hardened off to outdoor conditions, they would be off to a flying start and be cropping by late May.

It would be another month before soil temperatures were warm enough to sow

them direct in the soil, where they would germinate, grow and crop late June into July. The same can be said for lettuce and summer cabbage. If all four could be planted out under fleece or cloche cover, even better – to give protection in the event of a wintery spell.

Onion seedlings, I am not so sure about. Onions from sets are so easy and reliable, I would not grow from seed for general kitchen use, except perhaps for spring onions grown for salads and stir-fries. Carrots grown from cell pack-raised seedlings are a 'no' in my opinion, because the roots all too often grow multi-rooted and are impossible to clean.

If you want early crops of carrot (and without carrot fly damage) then it's better to sow a few seeds in deep pots – those that container roses come in – filled with potting compost. Germinate indoors in the warm, and then stand outdoors up on tables above the flight path for egg-laying adult carrot fly.

Beetroot will grow from clusters of seedlings in cells; if there are more than two or three per cell, thin them out.

Peter's tips



1 Choose Beetroot 'Boltardy' for early plantings and sowings, to reduce the chance of seedlings running straight up to seed rather than forming rounded roots.



2 Leeks are quite slow to germinate – for the average home garden, plants will be easier for May planting.



3 Some vegetables are offered for sale as plants too early: sprouting broccoli and cauliflowers to harvest in May 2021, and winter kales, are better planted from this May onwards.



4 If celeriac is planted too early and the young plants subject to a cold weather check, they are likely to run up prematurely to seed rather than form plump roots.

“It is cheaper to raise from seed, but longer to crop”

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Your Gardening Week

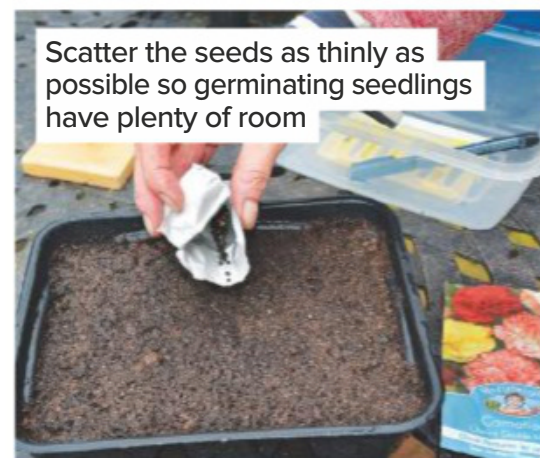


with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



TopTip

To maximise your carnations' flowering, plant them in a sheltered, free-draining spot that gets a minimum of four-six hours of sunlight daily.



Scatter the seeds as thinly as possible so germinating seedlings have plenty of room

All photographs T1 Media unless otherwise credited

How to sow carnations

- Fill a clean tray with fresh seed and cuttings compost and tamp it flat to create a stable surface for the seeds.
- Water with fresh tap water that's free from impurities and leave to drain.
- Scatter the seeds thinly on the compost. If seeds germinate too closely together you can thin them out later.
- Cover with a thin layer of compost, label and add a lid.
- Place somewhere warm and light. Germination takes two-four weeks, at which point the lid should be removed for ventilation.
- Keep the compost damp, watering with fresh tap water.



Tamping the compost flat

The cream of the crop

Ruth sows carnations for indoor and border beauty

I USED to think that members of the Dianthus family – carnations and pinks – were rather old-fashioned and fuddy-duddy and didn't really have a place in my garden.

Luckily, I had the sense to revise this opinion and now have several plants dotted around at the front of borders. What made me change my mind? It was a combination of their good nature (it's a simple case of plant-and-go in our sheltered, free-draining soil), and the fact that they flower for ages and are easy to propagate.

This week's free seeds are for a very special variety of carnation that are longer-stemmed and produce larger

flowers than more diminutive pinks.

'Double choice Mixed' will produce a wealth of medium-to-large double blooms in a range of colours, some bicoloured. They are scented, which makes them ideal for cutting, but they will also add a delicious fragrance to the garden.

Because this variety is a half-hardy perennial, sow undercover now, grow on, pot up and plant out after the frosts have finished.

The plants are suitable for containers as well as borders and will grow to 18in (45cm) in height.

Below I show you how to take spring cuttings from the new growth of existing dianthus – it's a simple method of



Remember to remove the lid after germination

Step by step

How to take easy cuttings of dianthus



1 During the morning, when plants contain most moisture, remove a few lengths of healthy new, non-flowering growth.



2 Strip away the lower leaves so just the top remains, then dip the cut end in hormone rooting powder or gel.



3 Insert the cuttings around the edge of a clay pot filled with dampened cuttings compost mixed with perlite to help drainage.



4 Put a plastic bag over the pot, with sticks holding it away from the cuttings, and place it on a light, warm windowsill.

Your Gardening Week

with Bob Flowerdew, AG's organic gardening expert



Try sowing directly into the ground in early spring but make 'successional' sowings to hedge your bets for veg such as beetroot

Early cropping veg such as 'Early Nantes' carrots can be ready to harvest as soon as May if sown in February

Start some sowings like peas and beans indoors in multi-celled seed trays to plant out later when it's warmer

Start early, crop more!

In his quest for earlier veg, **Bob** refuses to compromise on volume or taste. Follow his tips for the top of the crops

GENERALLY, we want earlier harvests. After all, soon we'll have little left in store, and fresh will be expensive until the new produce starts coming in.

Now, each crop takes a given amount of time to mature.

Breeders have worked on this, and almost all crops have faster and slower maturing varieties – these are usually referred to as 'earlies' and 'lates' or 'maincrops'.

But, of course, there is a trade-off: the varieties bred to be early seldom give the same sort of yields as the slower lates or maincrops, so generally it's best to grow both. Worse, sometimes to get an earlier crop, sacrifices are made in flavour,

sweetness or texture. Very rarely are the earliest varieties the very finest! However, they are good enough, and all the more welcome for coming early.

The next thing we can do is to sow earlier. This is risky, mind – sow too early, and you may not get any crop, as the seed may fail in cold, wet soil. Or it may succeed, but do poorly. Often slightly later sown batches outperform earlier ones, so it's prudent to sow several batches – true, the earliest will crop first, but the better conditions mean that later sowings will do better.

Still, we can improve conditions. We can make the soil warmer by darkening it and adding more organic material, by sowing on ridges or mounds or, better still, by using cloches or tunnels. Or we can really steal a march and start the seed off indoors to plant out later when the soil has got warmer. This last is easy now, as we have inexpensive multi-celled seed trays and can give each seedling its own rootball of compost, then it's not disturbed much when moved out. So sow early – but most of all, sow more often.



Use a cloche to warm up the ground

“Generally, it's best to grow both earlies and lates”

Bob's top tips for the week



Alamy

1 Replenish or place sticky bands around the trunks of fruit trees to stop many pests from climbing up to attack opening buds.



Suttons

2 Cover overwintered green manures with perforated black plastic, or dig them in or strip off the top growth and compost.



3 Take care not to kill with kindness indoors and under cover – avoid over-watering young tender crops and most other plants this early.



4 As spring-flowering bulbs go over, deadhead before they wither or set seed; this will improve their flowering next year.



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Your Gardening Week

with Val Bourne, AG's organic wildlife expert



Controlling disease on rose 'Zéphirine Drouhin' can be a problem

Rose Silas Marner ('Ausraveloe') is a new mid-pink, repeat-flowering shrub rose from David Austin Roses

Another new rose for 2020 from David Austin is The Country Parson ('Ausclergy'), a pure-yellow repeat flowerer



Olivia Rose Austin ('Ausmixture') was the first rose launched by David Austin under its 'healthy rose' breeding programme

Both insets: Howard Rice/David Austin Roses

Howard Rice/David Austin Roses

Coming up roses

Thanks to 'healthy rose' breeding programmes, there's no need to grow poor-performing plants, as **Val** explains

I WAS born in *Bend It Like Beckham* territory, in Southall, London, and my working-class roots and northern ancestry are partly responsible for me being an organic gardener and an outspoken woman! Grandmother Lucy from Yorkshire, 70 years my senior, taught me how to garden organically because she'd known nothing else.

The outspoken bit came because I was the only girl in my family age group, so I had to fight my corner or go down. I think I may have developed a mind of my own (code for obstinate) in the womb, which I shared with my much larger twin brother. Coming from humble stock has been an advantage because I haven't fallen prey to garden snobbery, and the highest form of that revolves around choosing historical roses purely for their name, regardless of the fact that many of them are disease-ridden poor performers.

The suggestion that these roses should be dug up and binned is seen as sacrilege. The one rose that gets mentioned to me most, for all the wrong reasons, is 'Zéphirine Drouhin'. Raised

by Bizot in France in 1868, this climber is a weak grower for most. If it does well for you, you're fortunate.

There is no need to grow a diseased rose in this day and age because breeders are producing healthy roses. British breeders have been encouraged by the success of a German rose company called Kordes, founded by William Kordes in 1887, and now managed by a fifth generation. This successful company sells roses all over the world. However, in the 1980s poor sales threatened the nursery because eco-friendly German gardeners wouldn't use fungicides. The company realised that, in order to survive, it had to produce healthy roses. In response, thousands of seedling roses were left in the fields and then a few were selected for the new breeding programme.

Rose breeding is a slow process. Each year, Kordes produces a million new seedlings from deliberate crosses. These are whittled down to thousands before being planted and trialled for a further seven years. A handful will finally be chosen to go into production. All Kordes roses have a 'Kor' prefix, because they are called different names in different countries.

David Austin roses, which always have the 'Aus' prefix to their name, also have a 'healthy rose' breeding

programme. The first rose launched under this programme was Olivia Rose Austin ('Ausmixture'), and this lightly scented, mid-pink repeat-flowering rose is excellent. In 2001 the excellent The Mayflower ('Austilly') was launched to woo the American market. This very healthy rose has deeper pink cabbage-rose-shaped blooms.

This year David Austin is releasing two new roses. The exceptionally healthy Silas Marner ('Ausraveloe') has classic pink flowers and a strong rose-scent with lemon accents and fruity notes of banana and apricot. This shrub rose will form a bush 4x3ft (120x90cm), so it's a useful size.

Austin's The Country Parson ('Ausclergy') is much shorter, but it will need more careful placing because it's a thorny hybrid of the Scotch rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia*, although sadly it doesn't bear small black hips. The flowers are a pallid-yellow and that's an unusual colour in roses. Most Austin roses come in pastel colours, so they mix and match well, both with each other and with most herbaceous plants.

If you dig up an unhealthy rose, do not put a new rose in the same space



TIP If you do dig up an unhealthy rose, put a perennial in the gap and plant your new rose a couple of feet away.

"Rose breeding is a slow process"

Your Gardening Week

with Lucy Chamberlain, AG's fruit and veg expert



Taking time to plan what to grow where will ensure good results later in the year



I prefer carrots such as 'Chantenay' that can be harvested in autumn



Sugar-packed Peach 'Avalon' loves a sunny wall or fence

Inset: Mr Fothergill's

Inset: Alamy

Focus on... Planning the plot

Want to get more from your plot? It's all about the planning, and now's the best time to give thought to the best spots for shade and sun, rotation and timings, as **Lucy** explains

DECIDING what fruit, veg and herbs you're going to grow on your plot this year is the most exciting part of having an edible garden. But making a list of what you like and then shoehorning it in willy-nilly is just setting yourself up for disappointment. We know that ornamentals such as rudbeckias enjoy the sun, rhododendrons need acid soil, and clematis like cool roots – but what do our edible crops thrive on? This is where savvy planning is essential.

A place for everything

Fruit, veg and herbs have their preferred growing conditions, just like ornamental plants do. Head gardeners of estates years gone by would assess their walled

kitchen gardens, then plant accordingly. Identify your warm sun-traps and place heat-loving tomatoes, chillies, sweet peppers and aubergines there. Fan-train peaches, apricots, gages, nectarines, figs and grapes along south- or west-facing walls and fences, so the sun and warmth can boost those sugar levels.

Allocate leafy spinach, cold-hardy leeks and moisture-loving celeriac along the shadier side of your plot. Think here about tarter fruits, too, such as currants and culinary gooseberries.

They will be happy trained against a north- or east-facing fence.

Think about the timings

Consider crop rotation and timings, too. Research plant families so you know all members prone to a specific root disease (the brassica family is huge). Work out not just what you want to grow, but when you eat it; I don't use carrots in summer, but love them in autumn, winter and spring. Get rotations, location and timings right, and success will surely follow...

“Get rotations, locations and timings right”



Sour-tasting blackcurrants (right) and their relatives are happy in a shadier location



Make a plan of your garden, with its orientation, and locate crops accordingly

Your Gardening Week



with Lucy Chamberlain, AG's fruit and veg expert

Lucy's corner...

How to get the timings right

Planning for sun:

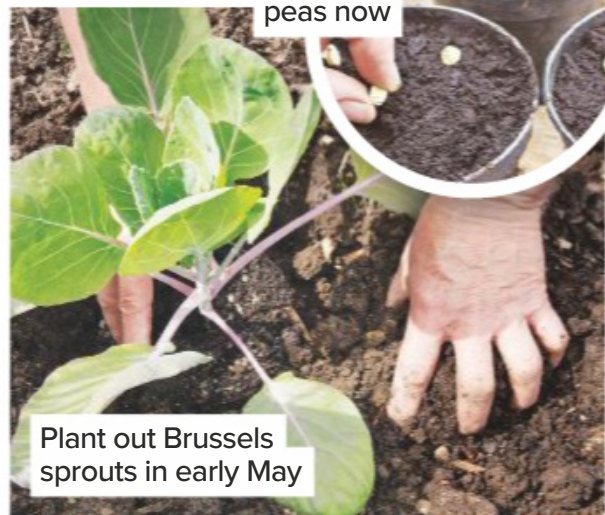
- Sow early-maturing peas now, following these on with sweetcorn grown in 3½in (9cm) pots to transplant later.
- Quick-to-mature first early potatoes can be followed on by 5in (12cm)-pot courgettes and other squashes.
- Sow under cloches now to get a quick crop of baby beetroot, radish and turnip

before transplanting out French or runner beans.

Planning for shade:

- Overwintered and spring-sown broad beans can be followed by leek transplants in June.
- Squeeze quick-to-mature hardy salad transplants into the area destined for celery, celeriac or Florence fennel.
- Sow drills of annual spinach, and then transplant out your modules of Brussels sprouts, Savoy cabbage and other winter brassicas.

Sow early-maturing peas now



Plant out Brussels sprouts in early May

Lucy's tips

Crop rotation rules for success on your plot



1 Pests: Control pests completing part of their life cycle underground using rotations. If carrot fly, cabbage fly, potato eelworm (above) or vine weevil are problems on your plot, then rotate to avoid growing susceptible crops successively in contaminated areas.



2 Diseases: Brassica club root, onion white rot (above) and celery sclerotinia produce 'resting' spores that can lay dormant in soil for many years, while potato blight can overwinter on missed infected tubers. Rotate vulnerable crops if infection occurs.



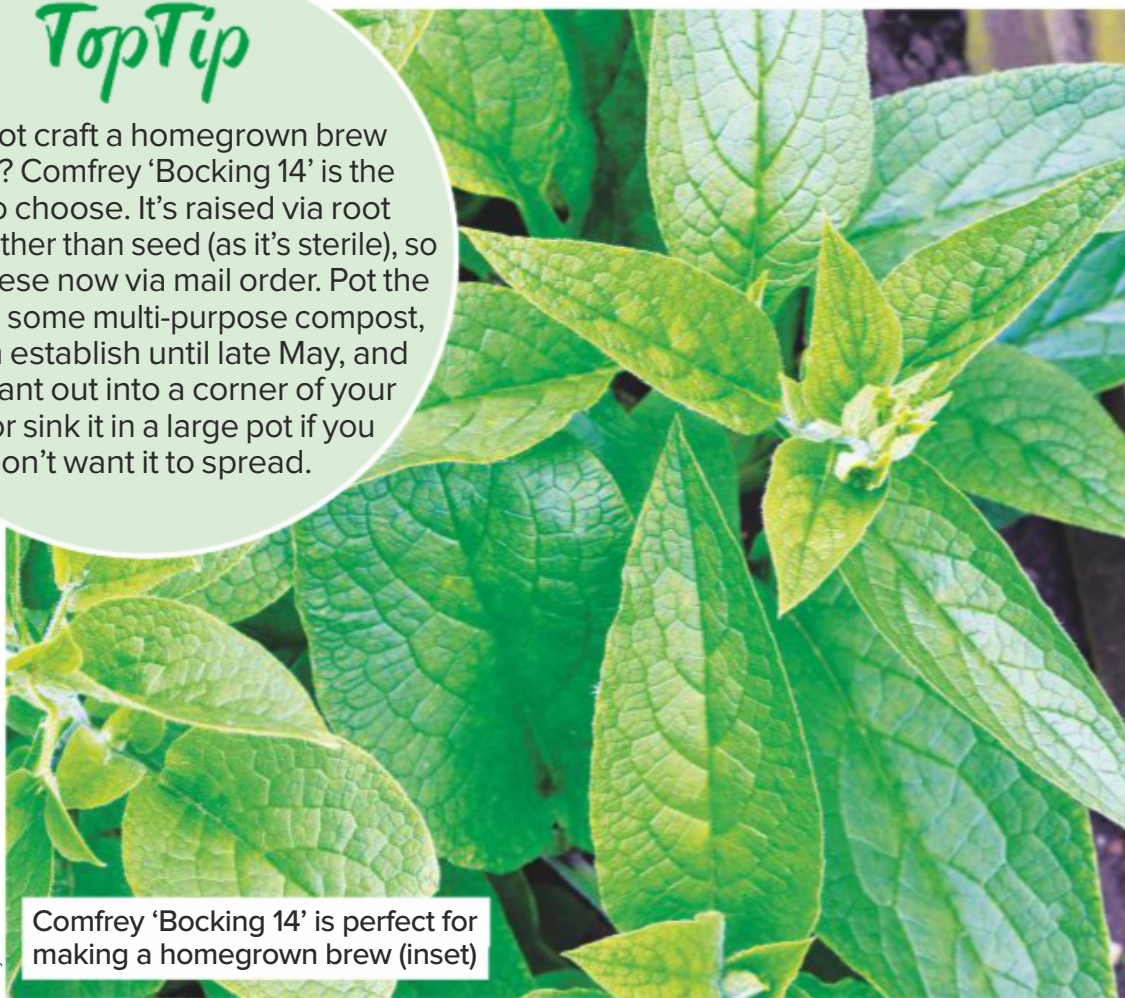
3 Nitrogen: Hardy, nitrogen-fixing crops like peas and broad beans produce nodules in their roots that, once decaying, release nitrogen back into the soil. Cut down (don't pull up) these crops, then follow them with nitrogen-hungry brassicas.

5 quick jobs

- 1 Wash old plastic pots, seed trays and modules in warm, soapy water so you can re-use them for many years to come.
- 2 Asparagus crowns become available in early spring. Plant them quickly so they have time to settle in before spears emerge.
- 3 Also step to it if you've got bare-root fruit to plant. The sooner they are in the ground, the sooner their roots can establish.
- 4 Check over your trays of seedlings daily, and be ready with pots and compost to prick them out as soon as they are big enough.
- 5 Inspect forced rhubarb stems for slugs and snails. Either remove by hand or scatter some organic slug pellets under forcing pots.

TopTip

Why not craft a homegrown brew for free? Comfrey 'Bocking 14' is the plant to choose. It's raised via root cuttings rather than seed (as it's sterile), so source these now via mail order. Pot the roots into some multi-purpose compost, let them establish until late May, and then plant out into a corner of your plot, or sink it in a large pot if you don't want it to spread.



Comfrey 'Bocking 14' is perfect for making a homegrown brew (inset)

Next week: Focus on cloches, plant blueberries, start off tender tubers, make a stale seedbed, try Anise hyssop.

Feeding essentials for potted fruits

GROWING potted fruit is the perfect concept for small-space gardeners or those living in rented properties. Clever training and rootstock selection keeps plants compact and, with prices frequently over £10 per plant, pot culture allows you to take your investments with you if you move home. Just bear in mind that any plant with a restricted root system is more reliant on you for watering and feeding.

Now is a good time to assess plants for re-potting (congested roots dry out quickly) but what about feeding? Fruiting crops like a high-potash fertiliser to aid wood maturity and flowering. However, to encourage healthy leaf growth, too,

begin feeding now with a balanced liquid feed. In May, once fruitlets are setting, switch to the ubiquitous tomato feed. Acid-loving crops like blueberries and cranberries are different: use ericaceous fertiliser throughout spring and summer, taking care not to over-apply.

“Make sure you encourage healthy leaf growth”



Step by step

Water seedlings the right way

Propagation season is in full swing, so be sure to tweak your watering regime to ensure you deliver exactly what seedlings and cuttings need:



1 Delicate seedlings are prone to damping-off disease if they are chilled or exposed to pathogens, so use tap (not butt) water, and do let it stand in your propagation area for a few hours first to raise it to room temperature.



2 Avoid flooding your seed trays and pots, as this can knock over seedlings and cuttings which damages the stem. If watering from overhead, use a watering can with a fine rose to ensure the droplets are small.



3 Another way to stop pot/tray flooding is to avoid overhead irrigation altogether. Instead, you can stand containers in a shallow tray of (room temperature) water, removing them after a few minutes.

Time to get on top of weeds!

I FIRMLY believe that the enjoyment you get from your edible plot is directly related to how ahead you are in early spring. Get beds cleared through autumn and winter and then, come spring, you’ll be looking at beautiful bare earth rather than a weed-strewn wilderness.

There’s nothing more depressing than looking at nuisance plants in the wrong place – especially at the start of the season. So act now to rid your beds of weeds before they grow, set seed and proliferate at your expense.

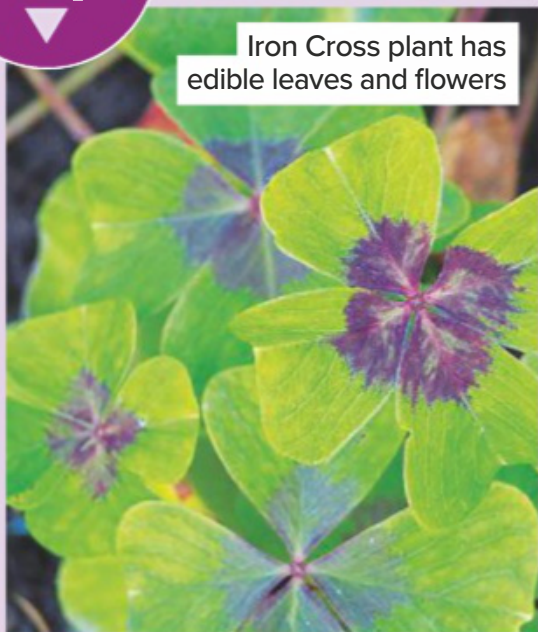
If the tide of weeds is against you, concentrate on mature ones with seedpods or flowers. Once these are removed, smaller ones are your target. If you’re still overwhelmed, one trick I adopt is to focus on one species – chickweed,



shepherd’s purse, nettle – before moving onto the next. Hand-pull, hoe or smother with thick mulches. Whatever you do, you’ll feel far better for it, I promise!

Why not try..?

Oxalis deppei



IF you’re lucky enough to have free-draining soil and a sunny, mild location then this little bulbous plant, native to Mexico, is worth growing.

Oxalis deppei is known commonly as the Iron Cross plant, due to the chocolate-brown markings on its green shamrock-shaped leaves, which are lemony in flavour.

The pink flowers are also edible, although neither flowers nor leaves should be eaten in quantity (they contain oxalic acid), so you should consider them a garnish rather than a main course.

In harsh winters, it’s worth lifting some of the dormant bulbs as an insurance policy, storing them somewhere dry and frost-free.

Outside, shoots will emerge in late spring, followed by flowers in summer and autumn. As a potted plant, you can keep oxalis in growth year-round if it’s kept frost-free.

Thanks to new introductions there are more double primroses than ever to choose from. The Belarina series currently features 27 different varieties including lovely bi-coloured 'Amethyst Ice'



Get twice the petal power with Double primroses

From centuries-old varieties to new series – if you want primulas that offer something a little different then you need to do the double, as **Graham Rice** explains...

THE primrose may not quite be Britain's favourite wild flower – it's pipped to that particular post by the bluebell – but as one of the first flowers of spring, it has a special place in our hearts. Wild primroses have been in flower in my garden since Christmas, and two or three blooms in a blue egg cup on a frosty January morning offered the promise of spring even before we were into the worst of winter.

Growing wild across the UK, primroses spring up almost anywhere out of the sun, their seeds carried around by ants. You'll see them in woods and along shady hedgerows, and at the foot of north-facing walls – sometimes in huge numbers.



'Ken Dearman' will warm up early spring days

And ever since the 17th century, when eagle-eyed country parsons travelling their parishes on horseback spotted primroses that were a little bit unusual, double-flowered forms have been transplanted into gardens.

The best-known of these original wild double primroses, the white 'Alba Plena', is still available today. Also dating back hundreds of years is the pinkish lilac 'Lilacina Plena', while the similar but slightly peachy pink 'Sue Jervis' is a much later discovery.

Barnhaven Primroses pioneered the development of double primroses. It sold them as seed; however, only a small proportion of the seedlings actually developed double flowers.

A few individual double-flowered plants were chosen to be propagated in the laboratory by tissue culture, and for a few years the resulting plants became so widely grown that you could even find them for sale on garage forecourts. Nowadays, Barnhaven sells an expansive range of both traditional and modern double-flowered varieties.

Rainbow of colours

Meanwhile, a whole new range, the Belarina Series, has been developed in Cambridgeshire by the breeder who was responsible for the superb Tumbelina Priscilla ('Kerpril') double petunia. There are currently 27 distinct Belarina varieties, some with an attractive neat green ruff behind each flower. They come in a whole rainbow of colours, plus some very pretty bi-colours.

Compared with the older double-

6 top double primroses



'Lilacina Plena'

Also known as 'Quaker's Bonnet', this very old variety probably originated in Ireland in the 17th century. The pinkish lilac flowers are tightly double and unusually prolific – many old varieties tend to flower less well. H: 6in (15cm).



Belarina Cobalt Blue ('Kerbelcob')

The flowers are an astonishingly rich deep blue, with tiny white flecks at the edges of the petals that give them real sparkle. Neat, and so floriferous that the blooms sometimes camouflage the foliage. H: 6in (15cm).



'Sue Jervis'

A prolific and, for me, surprisingly robust variety, featuring masses of apricot-tinted pink double flowers that look like miniature roses. It's said to have been found growing wild in a Shropshire wood in the 1980s. H: 6in (15cm).



Belarina Rosette Nectarine ('Kerbelnec')

A green ruff of foliage backs flowers that open golden orange with central reddish peach tints, the red colouring becoming richer as the flowers mature and enlarge. Looks good in a windowbox with dwarf daffodils. H: 6in (15cm).



Belarina Pink Ice ('Kerbelpice')

The frilly flowers open creamy white and, as they mature, develop a pink flush that shades to lilac – all the while retaining their creamy centres. Very pretty in a container with blue scillas or grape hyacinths (muscaria). H: 6in (15cm).



Belarina Rosette Valentine ('Kerbelred')

Sultry deep red, fully double flowers, each backed by a neat green ruff, are darkest in the centre and develop slightly more fiery tones as they mature. Lovely planted with a vigorous snowdrop such as 'Atkinsii'. H: 6in (15cm).

flowered primroses, those in the Belarina series are more vigorous. They'll also flower for longer, and have larger blooms that do not weigh down the flower stems. Don't worry about choosing between these prolific new varieties and the golden oldies, though – I think you have room for both.

Where to buy

Barnhaven Primroses 📍 barnhaven.com ☎ 0033 296 356 841
Dorset Perennials 📍 dorsetperennials.co.uk ☎ 01963 210643
Hillview Hardy Plants 📍 hillviewhardyplants.com ☎ 01746 716454
Shire Plants 📍 shireplants.co.uk ☎ 01280 817800

4 perfect planting companions



Anemone nemerosa

As its name implies, creeping woodland anemone spreads among primroses and other early blooms to create a pretty spring tapestry. Double-flowered ‘Virescens’ is like a mound of green lace; ‘Vestal’ (above) is a white double. H: 6in (15cm).



Scilla

Dark blue *Scilla siberica*, white-eyed blue *S. sardensis* (above) or ice blue, tricky-to-spell *S. mischtschenkoana* will emerge through or around primroses in borders or containers. All three flower for weeks and spread well once settled. H: 6in (15cm).



Daphne

In dappled shade, evergreen daphnes such as Rebecca (‘Hewreb’) make fine primrose partners. The scented, pink-budded white flowers and variegated foliage give them year-round appeal. Both plants like an autumn mulch. H: 39in (1m).



Galanthus

Clumps of snowdrops are delightful among primroses (and other early perennials) – they are especially pretty with them in containers on the shady side of the patio. Prolific, later-flowering snowdrops such as ‘Magnet’ are ideal. H: 6in (15cm).

Propagating pointers

BECAUSE modern Belarina double primroses do not produce seed, they need propagating by division. Vigorous when settled, plants can often be split every two or three years. After flowering is the ideal time, as long as you can be sure your new splits won’t dry out; otherwise, go for autumn.



Belarina doubles can only be propagated by division

Planting and care

- Double primroses perform best in rich but well-drained soil, in partial shade or a bright but sun-free site.
- They’re ideal as specimens in a terracotta pot or a deep trough.
- Nip off the dead flowers as they fade.
- Mulch with weed-free humus in autumn.
- These primroses will usually tolerate dry summers, but they need a soaking before they become truly parched.
- Watch out for vine weevil damage (notched leaves are the telltale sign), and treat promptly.



Primroses will thrive in rich, well-drained soil

HAYLOFT PLANTS, MANOR FARM NURSERY, PENSHAM, PERSHORE, WORCESTERSHIRE WR10 3HB



Totally tropical: combine the large leaves of banana, palms and ferns with pops of colour courtesy of bromeliads, dahlias and cannas



For something different, try *Begonia luxurians* – it's frost tender so will need to be moved to a conservatory for the winter



The orange flowers of annual climber Chilean glory vine will stand out against all the greenery

How to create a jungle-style garden

Take your cue from Great Dixter's Exotic Garden and embrace lush leaves and flowers in bold, tropical shades. It's easier than you might think, says **Hazel Silver**

AS our climate gets warmer and wetter, it's not surprising that jungle-style planting continues to grow in popularity. The large, lush leaves, explosions of colour and enclosed feel give a sense of the exotic – whether your garden is pocket-sized or more generous – and with the right plants, you can achieve the look without worrying that the slightest touch of frost will kill them off.



Dark-leaved *Colocasia esculenta* 'Black Magic' gives a contemporary feel to a jungle bed or border

Done well, jungle planting creates a feeling of escapism: dense foliage produces layers of green and forms shady pockets in which exotic flowers bloom in parrot-like colours. And if the planting is tall, there's an 'Alice in Wonderland' sense of being small in a surreal, oversized landscape. That's certainly the effect at the Exotic Garden at Great Dixter in East Sussex, created by the late Christopher Lloyd and head gardener Fergus Garrett. Hidden beneath a canopy of immense leaves, you find yourself drawn into a paradise of bizarre foliage, flowers and scents.

Visit in September or October, when the garden is at its best, and you will come across weird and wonderful plants you may not have laid eyes upon before: spidery green *Cyperus vegetus*; palm-like *Begonia luxurians*; the fabulous *Colocasia esculenta* 'Black Magic', whose immense black leaves are the stuff of dreams. In amongst these aliens are more familiar sights. Offsetting the lush greenery with vivid splashes of bold

colour are the likes of *Verbena bonariensis*, dahlias and cannas.

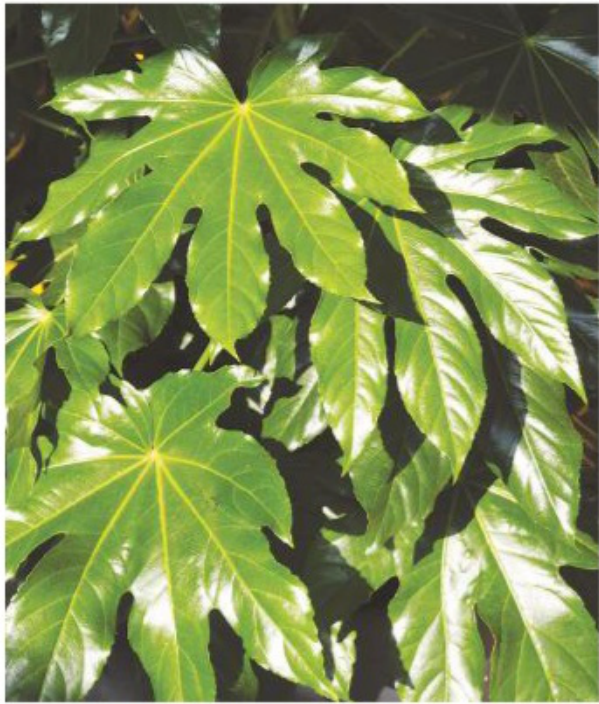
Replicating the look (albeit on a smaller scale) in your own plot is a lot easier than you might think. Not all tender specimens have diva-like demands, and you can create a jungle border using plants that are hardy in the UK.

Familiar favourites

Teamed with other exotic-looking specimens, many of the plants we know and love can create a jungle effect. For height, choose 12ft (4m)-tall giant reed grass (*Arundo donax*) or umbrella bamboo (*Fargesia murielae*). Slightly shorter is *Miscanthus sinensis* var. *condensatus* 'Cosmopolitan', a variegated grass that reaches 6ft (1.8m), while biennial *Angelica archangelica* and annual *Nicotiana sylvestris* will each provide verdant exotica in a relatively compact (4ft/1.2m) package.

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

6 jungle essentials



***Fatsia japonica* AGM**

It may look like something from a tropical rainforest, but this evergreen is hardy in the UK. Glossy palmate leaves are supplemented by white flowers in autumn. Grow in a pot or border. H&S: 10ft (3m).



Dahlias

Available in all manner of shapes and sizes, dahlias complement exotic schemes perfectly. Opt for hot colours like the red-tinged yellow 'Spasmacher'. Plant tubers in pots under cover now, for flowers from July. HxS: Varies.



***Miscanthus sinensis* 'Strictus' AGM**

Compact and clump-forming, this upright zebra grass adds movement and sound, as well as privacy. It dislikes excessive winter wet. For arching growth, choose 'Zebrinus' instead. HxS: 6½x1ft (2mx30cm).



***Ipomoea tricolor* 'Heavenly Blue' AGM**

A climber with white-throated azure blue trumpet flowers in summer, morning glory should be grown as an annual in sheltered sun. Sow seeds from February to May under cover. HxS: 4x2½ft (1.2mx75cm).



***Yucca filamentosa* 'Bright Edge' AGM**

Towers of white bells bloom above sword-like gold and green leaves in summer. Plant this evergreen in spring – it likes a sunny spot and can cope with drought. Needs good drainage. HxS: 1x4ft (30cmx1.2m).



***Cleome hassleriana* 'Violet Queen'**

A gorgeous half hardy annual that produces handfuls of strongly scented, pea-like magenta blooms atop tall stalks during summer. Sow indoors Jan-Mar. Deadhead for maximum flowers. HxS: 4x1ft (1.2mx30cm).

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

If you do want to add some tender exotics to your new jungle border, you might be pleasantly surprised at how accommodating they are – you just need

Where to buy

Architectural Plants 📞 architecturalplants.com ☎ 01798 879213

Crocus 📞 crocus.co.uk ☎ 01344 578111

Desert to Jungle 📞 deserttojungle.com ☎ 01823 443701

◀ good planning and the right indoor space. Bulbous tender plants like cannas and *Colocasia* can be lifted at the end of autumn and overwintered in a garage; fragile exotics (such as palm-leaf begonia and the lovely maroon banana, *Ensete ventricosum* 'Maurelii') should be transferred to a warm greenhouse or conservatory for the winter.

Winter protection

If overwintering isn't an option, you'll need to stick to tender 'jungle' plants that can be protected in situ, without being lifted. The wonderful blue-green *Melianthus major* and the orange-flowered *Hedychium* 'Tara', for example, can be wrapped in a good thick layer of winter protection, such as bracken, until the frosts have passed.

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

Many sensitive plants that look great in a jungle border – such as the honey spurge *Euphorbia mellifera* – will do fine as long as they benefit from the shelter provided by a warm, south-facing wall.

When planning your jungle look, first ask yourself what sort of effect you hope to achieve: an unapologetic riot of colour or something more subtle and refined. If you fancy a no-holds-barred explosion of bold shades, good choices include the scarlet *Crocasmia* 'Lucifer', yellow dahlia 'Moonfire' and purple *Gladiolus communis* subsp. *byzantinus*.

Soothing shades

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

Many of these can be planted or sown indoors now; others will have to wait until later in the spring. Start planning this month, and you'll soon have the ultimate tropical escape – just outside your own back door.

2 container choices



Canna 'Phasion' AGM

Blazing orange torch-like flowers complement the big bronze-purple leaves in summer and early autumn.

Needs full sun and winter protection – move cannas in pots somewhere frost-free. HxS: 4x2½ft (1.2mx75cm).



Ficus carica 'Brunswick'

A favourite of Christopher Lloyd, this common fig has handsome leaves and will produce sweet fruit. Grow in

a container to restrict its size, position in sheltered sun and provide winter protection. H&S: 8ft (3m).

Ideas for exotics



If you don't fancy a jungle border, a collection of exotics in pots will give a similar feel. Bananas (*Ensete ventricosum* 'Maurelii'), bromeliads and chusan palm will all work well. Remember to water regularly in summer and move under cover for winter.



Nowhere to overwinter more tender specimens? You can easily create an exotic garden without using a single tender plant. Ferns, figs, hostas, yuccas, euphorbias and bamboos (above) are hardy, yet they look exotic.



Allow foliage to take centre stage in your jungle garden – the larger and lusher the better. Consider leaf shape, colour and size, and opt for a range of different kinds. Fiery canna leaves team well with heleniums and dahlias in similarly hot shades.



For a contemporary jungle feel in a limited space, try a raised bed with a tree fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*) underplanted by other ferns and leafy favourites including phormiums and yuccas. A range of heights creates a 'canopy' effect.

Used sparingly, red flowers such as scarlet *Dahlia coccinea* will bring borders to life. They work well against a backdrop of greens and more muted shades

Gaillardia x grandiflora 'Burgunder' has deep red daisy flowers

Scarlet fever

It's the colour of passion and danger, but don't be wary of using red in your borders – just remember that a little goes a long way, says **Hazel Silver**

THERE'S no denying that splashes of red provide cheer in the garden. But scarlet flowers (such as those of 'Bishop of Llandaff' dahlias and *Lobelia cardinalis* 'Queen Victoria') can easily overpower their border companions, and while we're happy to have red in the autumn border, many people avoid it in summer. Thankfully, there are ways to temper red, so that you get all of the positives without any of the possible negatives.

The trick is to avoid big swathes of it, and to combine it with the right colours. "Large blocks of undiluted red are a mistake; indigestible as swallowing a lump of uncooked dough," wrote the late Christopher Lloyd, who created the colourful garden at Great Dixter. "Red can combine well with other strong colours... bright pink, magenta, strong purple, orange and white. The wonder is that it works, but it does."

You can tone down the overly dominant blaze of vermillion and

crimson by using other brights, such as tangerine, violet and fuchsia, or pairing them with mellow shades from the red spectrum: claret, copper or raspberry. Taking the heat out of bold red in this way allows it to blend into the border.

Code red

Like any bold colour, red can be divisive, however – some love it, while others loathe it! Red is the colour of blood, which explains why people have always been both fascinated and frightened by it.

Associated with both birth and death, it has come to symbolise passion, danger and power. Studies have shown that men leave bigger tips when waitresses wear red, and athletes who

compete in a red strip are more likely to win. In colour therapy, it's used for motivation and confidence. It's also said to stimulate conversation, making red flowers and foliage a great choice for planting around a seating area that is used for entertaining.

Red perennials can go in the ground now, as can red border roses (the likes of Darcey Bussell and Fragrant Cloud), which are still available to plant bare root (just). Seeds of red annuals such as *Papaver commutatum* 'Ladybird' and *Ricinus communis* 'Carmencita' can also be sown in the coming weeks.

Don't be afraid of red in the summer garden; use it wisely, and you'll find that a little will go a long way.

Where to buy

Claire Austin 📍 claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk ☎ 01686 670342

Crocus 📍 crocus.co.uk ☎ 01344 578111

Macplants 📍 macplants.co.uk ☎ 01875 341179

9 red hot perennials for borders

Scarlet



Papaver 'Türkenlouis'

You'll need sunglasses for this oriental poppy, which sizzles scarlet in May and June. Use maroon or orange wallflowers, purple irises and lupins or euphorbias to help tone it down. Plant in well-drained soil in sun. H: 3ft (90cm).



Monarda 'Gardenview Scarlet' AGM

An eye-catching bergamot featuring punk heads of letterbox red flowers above aromatic foliage. Mildew-resistant and loved by bees, it needs moisture-retentive, well-drained soil in sun or semi-shade. H: 3ft (90cm).



Potentilla 'Gibson's Scarlet' AGM

Throughout summer, this cinquefoil produces single, bright scarlet flowers that catch the sun and attract wildlife. The blooms are held above green leaves like those of a strawberry plant. One for well-drained soil in full sun. H: 1½ft (45cm).

Ruby



Lupinus 'The Page'

A modern cottage garden essential that produces its ruby candles on wine red stems in June and July. Needs well-drained, neutral-to-acid soil in sun or semi-shade, and slug protection. Part of the Band of Nobles Series. H: 39in (1m).



Achillea millefolium 'Red Velvet' AGM

With flat heads of cherry red flowers held above silver-green ferny leaves in summer, this yarrow is one of the most striking you can grow. Good for attracting butterflies. Likes well-drained, moisture-retentive soil in full sun. H: 2½ft (75cm).



Knautia macedonica 'Mars Midget'

Another butterfly pleaser, this one with raspberry-garnet pincushion flowers that seem to float amid the border from June to September. More compact than the species, 'Mars Midget' likes well-drained soil in sun or semi-shade. H: 1½ft (45cm).

Blood



Paeonia 'Buckeye Belle'

A decadent peony with glossy Venetian red petals and golden stamens; ideal for adding glamour to the border in May and June. One for rich, moisture-retentive but well-drained soil in sun or semi-shade. H: 3ft (90cm).



Cosmos atrosanguineus

The chocolate cosmos has sumptuous, chocolate-scented, maroon-red flowers in summer and early autumn. For a more compact option, look for the cultivar Chocamocha. Does well in rich, well-drained, moist soil in sun. H: 2ft (60cm).



Dianthus cruentus

Despite its gruesome name, the blood pink is a lovely alpine with clumps of deep red and crimson summer flowers on tall, slender stems. Grow through gravel, or as a 'see-through' plant in a border. Needs well-drained soil in sun. H: 2ft (60cm).

3 blushing reds for pots



Geum ‘Mrs J Bradshaw’ AGM

No garden is complete without ‘Mrs J Bradshaw’. Its cheering bright red flowers sit atop tall, slender stems – they’ll keep appearing for months if you deadhead. Ideal for well-drained pots in sun or semi-shade. H: 2ft (60cm).



Dahlia ‘Menorca’

Plant for fire engine red flowers from July to October. To ensure a steady supply of blooms keep cutting flowers for the vase or deadhead regularly. Use John Innes No2 compost and don’t let the pot dry out. H: 20in (50cm).

GAP

4 reds for semi-shade



Lamprocapnos spectabilis ‘Valentine’ AGM

Still sometimes called Dicentra, bleeding hearts are so pretty. This has red and white flowers on deep red stems in spring and early summer; the ferny foliage matures from maroon to grey-green. Moist, humus-rich soil. H: 28in (70cm).



Crocosmia ‘Hellfire’ AGM

It may not be as well known, but ‘Hellfire’ is far superior to the ubiquitous ‘Lucifer’. The big, rich vermillion flowers have burgundy throats and dark stems. A summer must-have for well-drained, moisture-retentive soil. H: 32in (80cm).



Penstemon ‘Andenken an Friedrich Hahn’ AGM

Plum stems are complemented by tubular ruby flowers that are particularly attractive to bumblebees. Blooms during summer and autumn in well-drained soil. Cut back the spent stems to encourage further flowers. H: 2½ft (75cm).



Lychnis chalcidonica AGM

The Maltese Cross flower bears large domed heads comprised of blazing scarlet blooms. Held on upright stems, they appear from June to August. Likes moisture-retentive, well-drained soil and may not flower well in the first year while establishing. H: 3ft (90cm).



Salvia 'Royal Bumble' AGM

Small flowers in a bright Ferrari red float on tall, slender stems in late summer and autumn. Salvias not only look lovely, but they also help to prevent rose sickness and provide nectar for wildlife. Needs a well-drained pot in sun. H: 2ft (60cm).



Splashes of red will really stand out

How to use in the garden

- Plant red close to the house, rather than at the end of your plot – it has the optical effect of shrinking a space.
- Splashes through a border are more effective than a vast sweep of red. Remember less is more.
- If bright scarlet is too much for you, use the warmer, subtler shades in the red palette; try maroon, fox red or raspberry.

Colour companions for red

Back of border: Combine the chilli red (*Dahlia* 'All Directions') with purple (*Verbena bonariensis* AGM) and orange (*Canna* 'Wyoming' AGM).

Mid-border: Try brick red (*Hemerocallis* 'Stafford' AGM), pink (*Achillea millefolium* 'Cerise Queen') and gold (*Carex testacea*).

Front of border: Rich red, lime and apricot, courtesy of *Potentilla thurberi* 'Monarch's Velvet', *Alchemilla mollis* AGM and *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine'.

For wildlife: Orange red (*Echinacea* 'Tomato Soup') works well with wine (*Astrantia major* 'Claret') and blue (*Nepeta x faassenii* AGM).

In containers: Deep red (*Helenium* 'Ruby Tuesday') is a good pot partner for lavender (*Perovskia* Lacey Blue) and cream (*Stipa tenuissima* AGM).



Echinacea 'Tomato Soup' is a hit with pollinators

Try these for red foliage...

Heuchera 'Forever Red'

A useful foliage plant, the semi-evergreen flame red foliage of which is complemented by tiny white summer flowers. Wonderful in containers. Likes rich, moisture-retentive, well-drained soil in sun or semi-shade. H: 1½ft (½m).



Ensete ventricosum 'Maurelii' AGM

The huge claret leaves of the Ethiopian banana are a delight in summer and autumn. Grow in a large container positioned in sun or semi-shade, and overwinter indoors. Appreciates good drainage. H: 10ft (3m).



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Ask John Negus

John has been answering reader queries for 50 years

John will reply personally to all your gardening questions every week

What plants are good for wildlife and us?

Q We are slowly turning our garden into somewhere that we, and the surrounding wildlife, are happy to spend time in. Could you suggest some wildlife-friendly, shallow-rooted evergreens and perennials that would

work against a warm south-facing wall.
Lucy Duffy, Telford, Shropshire

A I suggest that you plant the following, which will attract birds and insects, including butterflies:

Small flowering and berrying shrubs:



Berberis wilsoniae: Evergreen, coral-red berries; red and orange autumn colour



Abelia x grandiflora Confetti: Scented white blooms in August



Buddleja davidii Adonis Blue: Fragrant blue flowers from July to August



Caryopteris x clandonensis 'Kew Blue': Dark-blue flowers in late summer



Chaenomeles speciosa 'Geisha Girl': Apricot blooms from March to April



Choisya x dewitteana Goldfingers: Soft yellow leaves; fragrant white blossom

Border perennials:



Anthemis 'Daisy Bee': Sunny yellow daisies for most of summer



Campanula carpatica Blue Clips: Cup-shaped blooms from June to August



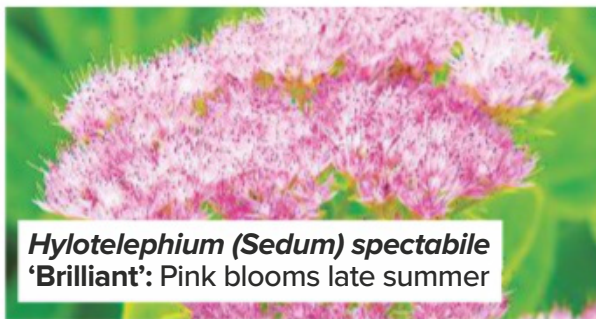
Coreopsis lanceolata 'Walter': Striking flowers from June to September



Geum 'Borisii': Intense orange single blooms from June to August



Helenium 'Moerheim Beauty': Mahogany-red daisy flowers from July to September



Hylotelephium (Sedum) spectabile 'Brilliant': Pink blooms late summer



Lilies grow well in pots

Growing pot lilies

Q Will lilies grow well in pots?
Marcus Dowling, via email

A Asiatic lilies are among the easiest to grow and the earliest to flower.

For the best results in a container, place a layer of crocks in the base and use a mix of loam-based John Innes No3 and multi-purpose compost. Add some granular feed such as Growmore, as lilies are hungry plants.

Plant the bulbs at two-three times their own depth and 2in (5cm) apart, pointy end upwards. Cover with compost to within 1in (2½cm) of the rim of the pot and water. Keep the compost damp and use a high-potassium liquid feed fortnightly throughout summer.



Soluble aspirin is thought to give cut plants a boost

The drugs do work!

Q Is it true that soluble aspirin can perk up plants?
Philip Evans, via email

A There are reports suggesting that diluted soluble aspirin provides a health boost to plants, especially if they are stressed in some way, and this in turn may help to increase growth and yields.

Diluted aspirin can also help seeds to germinate, cuttings to root and cut flowers to last longer in the vase. Take care when spraying with aspirin solution not to harm bees and other insects.

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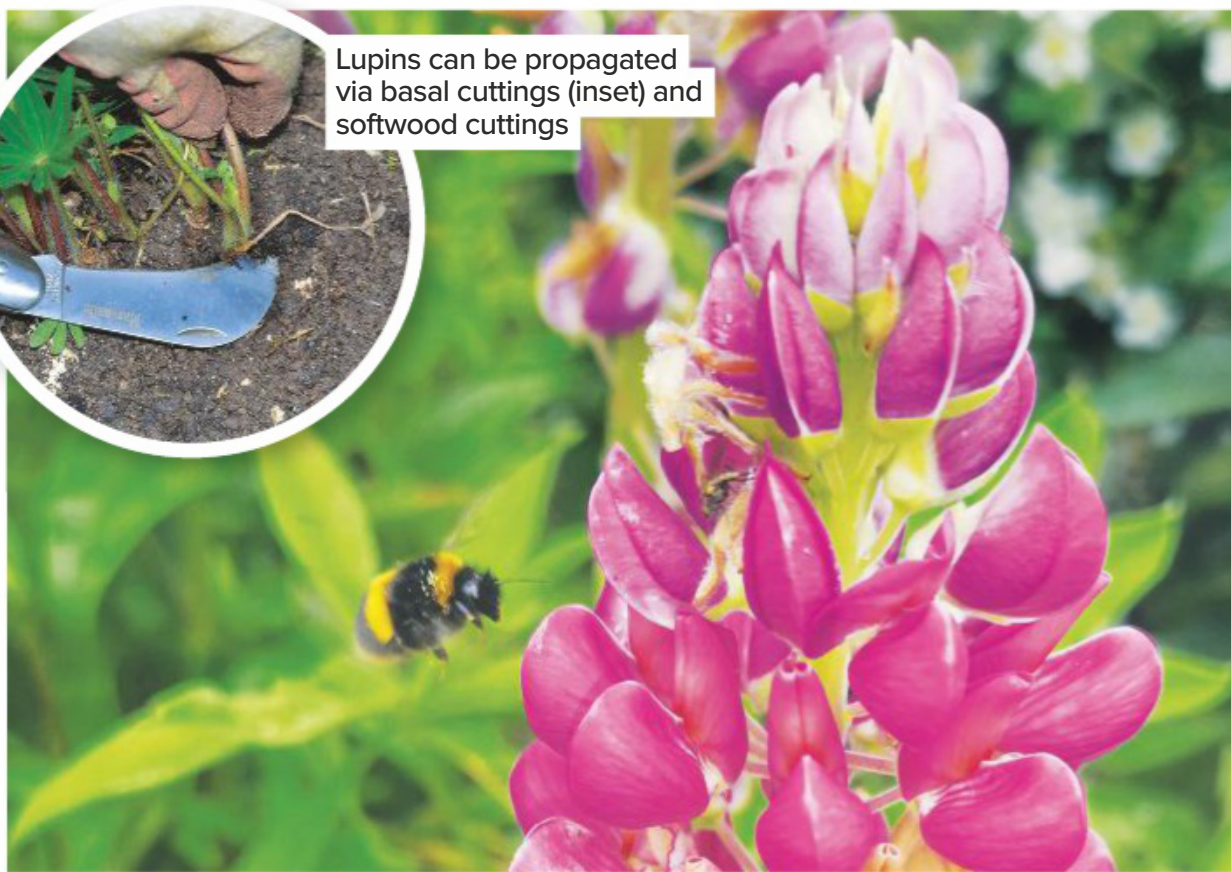


Ask John Negus

John has been answering reader queries for 50 years

John will reply personally to all your gardening questions every week

Lupins can be propagated via basal cuttings (inset) and softwood cuttings



How and when should I propagate lupins?

Q What is the best way of taking lupin cuttings, and when should I do it?

Rob Symonds, via email

A The best time to make more lupins is when they are coming into growth in spring.

Start by brushing away some soil from the base and then, with a sharp knife, carefully remove two or three of the well-rooted outer portions – these are called basal cuttings. Dip the cut ends in rooting hormone, then insert in pots of

dampened seed and cuttings compost. Seal in a clear plastic bag and place somewhere warm and light until they root, then remove the bag, grow on and pot up individually when they are large enough.

You can also propagate by taking softwood cuttings from the new shoots on the parent plant when they are a few inches long. Remove the lower leaves and insert the cuttings in small pots of seed and cutting compost and grow on as with basal cuttings.

How much wood ash should I use?

Q How much wood ash can I safely add to the soil around my trees? I don't want to damage them or alter the soil's pH.

Sarah Harries, Gosport, Hants

A For scattering onto soil use wood ash at a rate of 60g per square metre (2oz per square yard).

Apply only once a year as wood ash can very quickly raise the pH of the soil. For this reason it should not be used at all around acid-loving plants, such as azaleas, rhododendrons and blueberries.

Wood ash can have a potash content of between 4% and 15%, and small amounts of phosphate, iron, magnesium and manganese.

It can be used either fresh or stored in dry conditions before use. You can also add it to the compost heap or incorporate it thoroughly into the soil.

Wood ash has myriad garden uses



Larger ash particles may be used to lighten heavy clay soils.

Wood ash can also be used to deter slugs and snails.



Trillium seeds need a period of double dormancy to germinate

Wikicommons

Trillium troubles

Q Why am I having trouble growing trilliums from seed?

Theresa Sandling, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex

A Trillium seeds are 'double dormant', so after sowing and enclosing the pot in a plastic bag, place it in the fridge for three months. Then move it to a heated propagator for a further three, before returning to the fridge for a final three. When they are moved somewhere warm to germinate, the seedling will take a year or more to appear and compost must be kept damp.

Comfrey flowers attract pollinators and its leaves can be used as a homemade liquid fertiliser



Use of comfrey

Q What are the uses of comfrey in the garden?

Graham Jacks, Penrith, Cumbria

A Comfrey is great for attracting pollinators and its leaves can be used to make a liquid fertiliser that is nutrient-rich thanks to comfrey's deep roots that can draw lots of goodness from the soil. It is smelly, though!

The leaves are rich in potassium and can also be added to the compost and layered with compost when growing vegetables to give a boost to flowers and crops.

Annuals need good soil and plenty of moisture



How can I grow the best cut flowers?

Q What are the best conditions for successfully growing lots of annuals in a raised bed for flower arranging?
Tracey Hadley, via email

A If the raised beds were to be in use for some time, I would recommend making them at least 18in (45cm), but ideally 2ft (60cm), deep to allow the plants to root deeply and therefore make them less vulnerable to drying out.

However, given that they won't be in long-term use and that they are only going to be used for growing annuals, they can be shallower.

If the beds are on a hard surface, they may well need supplementary watering,

even if we have a lot of rain, as the soil in them is limited to the moisture that comes from above – moisture won't come from surrounding soil as it does in the ground, or in beds directly on soil.

Sweet peas need a deep root run to produce long-stemmed flowers and those grown in containers will flower with shorter stems. It might be beneficial to choose varieties that are recommended for container growing, or that are of short-medium stature, but I wouldn't worry about it too much.

Can I renovate my rhododendron?

Q My old container rhododendron is now a large shrub with some bare branches. Is it possible to prune it?
Andrew Tolhurst, Leeds

A You'll be pleased to hear that it is possible to renovate old, straggly rhododendrons. Most will respond well, but it is wise to be cautious and carry out its renovation pruning over three or more years.

First, keep your plant in its pot. Top up the pot with ericaceous potting compost without burying the trunk of your rhododendron.

Keep the compost moist, but not wet, throughout the summer. Feed with a fertiliser for ericaceous plants once a month from March to July.

Second, prune out one quarter of the



Renovate rhododendrons over two or three years for the best results

branches after flowering. Choose the worst-looking parts – you might not have to take them off at the base, maybe higher up – and just take your time so that the plant has a pleasing shape.

Do this each year and you will see your rhododendron transformed.

Quick questions & answers

Q What is this pretty shrub?
Mary Lloyd, via email



A The golden-leaved shrub appears to be *Leucothoe* 'Little Flames', a delightful evergreen that lights up the garden.

Hardy and happy almost anywhere in the garden, it makes winter special.

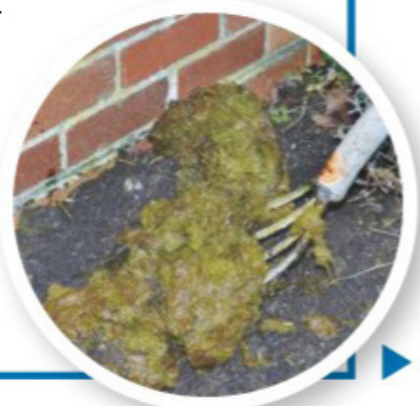
Q Our bottlebrush flowered two years ago, but there's been nothing since. Why is this?
Chris Nower, via email

A This indicates that, rather like apples, after cropping hugely it needed to 'rest' for a year to rebuild its capacity for performing. Help it by feeding monthly with blood, fish and bone meal at 1oz (28g) per sq m from April September.



Q I have some three-week-old donkey manure – can I use it on the garden straight away?
Colin Salter, via email

A As the manure is only three weeks old, it is liable to have a high level of ammonia which might, if close enough, scorch leaves or roots. I suggest that you leave it for two or three months until it turns crumbly and black and its ammonia smell has dissipated.



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Sow summer bedding now undercover where it is warmer



Can I sow this year's bedding plants now?

Q Even though the weather is bad, are there any summer bedding seeds that I can sow in my unheated greenhouse yet?

Darren Clinton, via email

A Unless you can heat a small area of greenhouse to a temperature of not less than 13°C/55°F, it is too cold for sowing most summer bedding outside.

You could try sowing sweet peas, but they are the only hardy contender. Set five seeds ½in (13mm) deep in seed compost, though they may stay dormant until the heat increases.

Undercover, lobelia, busy Lizzies, petunias, ageratum and tagetes can be sown thinly in seed compost in covered containers and placed on a warm, sunny windowsill to germinate.

When the seedlings have grown and developed their first set of 'proper' leaves (not their first pair at germination), you can carefully prick them out into John Innes No1 compost.

Grow them on for a week or so until the middle of April, then move them into the greenhouse. A small fan or paraffin heater will make a noticeable difference to their progress.

What compost for container dahlias?

Q I only have enough room to grow dahlias in pots. What is the best compost for doing this?

Theresa Dale, Oxford

A Dahlias grow well in pots. If you are planning to plant tubers, set one to a 12in (30cm) container.

Cover the base with drainage material – crocks or stones – and fill in with loam-based John Innes potting compost No3. There should be 3in (8cm) of compost over the crown buds.

As for growing them on, liquid-feed weekly with a high-potash tomato fertiliser when strong new shoots are

forming and continue until late summer.

Guard against earwigs damaging flowers by smearing Vaseline around the stem base.

Cut off faded flowers when oblong seedpods form and, if you are growing tall varieties, support them with canes.



Dahlias thrive in containers

Avocado query

Q I have grown an avocado plant from a stone. Can I plant it outdoors?

Rose Holden, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire

A Your avocado plant can spend the summer outdoors, but it must be brought indoors before the temperature falls in autumn.

They require a minimum temperature of 10°C/50°F. Keep your plant in a pot so you can move it easily.

Avocados make attractive houseplants – you can either pinch out the top to form a bushy, well-branched shape or remove the lowest leaves to form a small standard. Your plant might eventually produce a fruit, but it is unlikely to taste anything like its parent.



Avocados need to be brought indoors in colder weather

Crocus tommasinianus will spread rapidly



Crocus beauty

Q Please can you identify the variety of crocus here?

Ness Stoker, Coventry

A This is *Crocus tommasinianus*. A rapidly spreading species, it's a native of light woodlands in the western and southern parts of the former Yugoslavia. Its colour ranges from pale silvery-lilac to warm reddish or pinkish-purple. Named forms include 'Whitewell Purple', 'Barr's Purple', 'Taplow Ruby', 'Pictus' and 'Albus'. The form 'Ruby Giant' is a rich purple colour and is probably a hybrid with *C. vernus*.



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HURRY OFFER MUST END MARCH 17TH

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- Drought tolerant and simply love the sun

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16333	Osteospermum 'Falling Stars' 20 Postiplugs £51.96	£18.99		
KB4284	Osteospermum 'Falling Stars' 5 Postiplugs + 35cm 'BloomAround' basket £20.98	£12.99		
KB4285	Osteospermum 'Falling Stars' 10 Postiplugs + 35cm 'BloomAround' Basket £33.97	£14.99		
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Anne Swithinbank's masterclass on: *raised bed for raw crops*



Try 'Chantenay Royal' for heavy yields of sweet carrots that are perfect raw

TopTip

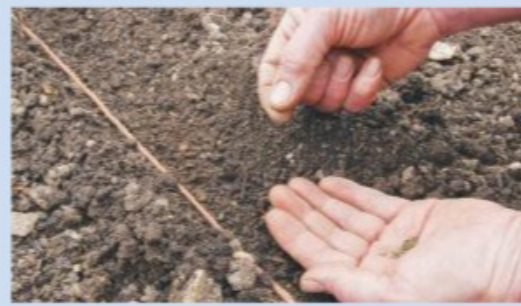
Homegrowing means you can harvest veg while it is young and thin-skinned. Many only require a wash or light scrub before slicing, and the skins provide a variety of texture and colour.

Anne's top tips

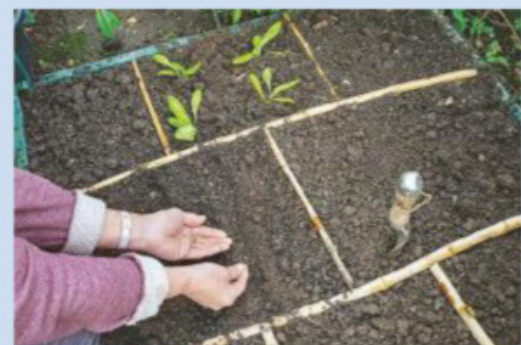
Prepping the best raw veggies



1 Now is the perfect time to start sowing most roots. If the soil is still cold and wet, start beetroot in modules. Sow celeriac in a pot or seed tray and transplant seedlings one per pot before planting out.



2 As soon as the soil feels warm and weed seeds begin to germinate, you can make drills to sow radish, carrot and kohlrabi direct. Sow them evenly-spaced.



3 Why not divide your raised bed into sections? You can sow or plant a different veg in each (here, seeds of golden beetroot 'Boldor').



4 Most gadgets work best on roots that are at least 8cm (3in) long and 1½in (4cm) in diameter, like this group of mooli, kohlrabi, carrots and courgettes.

Raised beds for best raw veg

Q For Christmas, I was given a gadget for slicing and spiralling vegetables. I would like to make a bed for growing my own crops to eat raw in various ways. What do you suggest?
Veronica Patten, Leatherhead, Surrey

A Several years ago, I accompanied a group of gardeners on part of their holiday touring around South Africa, and we visited Babylonstoren (under the same ownership as The Newt in Somerset). Here, you can explore the beautiful productive gardens and eat in the restaurant. We were served a wide variety of raw veg and edible flowers, beautifully prepared and each with its own special dressing. Everyone found the spread delicious and we were all inspired to 'try this at home'. The key to success lies in

freshness, slicing or spiralling into palatable sections and adding flavours.

A designated bed is a great plan, and I can imagine a raised bed, possibly divided into sections as for 'square metre' gardening, so you can mix things up and rotate them around.

Each square metre is divided into a grid of nine equal squares, each for one or several of the same veg.



Courgettes growing in a raised bed

Many of the best candidates for your gadget will be roots, and a raised bed filled with good, well-conditioned soil and no large stones will make growing easier and roots straighter. There is plenty of choice, from summer radish, courgettes and carrots

to winter celeriac and mooli, so have fun experimenting with different flavours and colours. Noodles or 'spaghetti' made from courgette or butternut squash are great lightly stir-fried.

Radish to relish

TO avoid bolting, the larger radish are best sown from late June to August for autumn and winter use. Try Mooli (or Daikon) 'April Cross' (🔗 seaspringseeds.co.uk). For more colour, 'Lutea' produces a long yellow root, while 'Red Flesh' is tricoloured in green, white and red (both from 🔗 realseeds.co.uk). And for pretty amethyst hues, go for 'Blumoon' (🔗 kingsseeds.com).



Mooli 'April Cross' has a crisp, juicy texture

Crunchy 'Blumoon' is mild in flavour

Breathtakingly Beautiful Lilac

Standard Dwarf Lilac

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Standard Dwarf Lilac

Not only is Syringa Meyeri 'Palibin' a dwarf standard lilac, which is pretty unusual, but it is highly regarded for its strong fragrance and it's long flowering period. Clusters of red buds open to reveal a mass of exquisitely perfumed lavender-pink flowers in May and June and again in August and September. Compact and slow-growing, this pretty lilac tree is perfectly suited to borders and patio containers. Height: 1.5m (5'). This deciduous shrub is supplied as a 60cm (24") plant in a 2 litre pot. *Delivery from March.*

SPECIAL BONUS OFFER

Lilac 'Fragrant Trio'

Lilacs are well-loved by gardeners for their sweetly perfumed, late spring blooms. This elegant trio offers 3 choice varieties that are less commonly seen in UK gardens, but certainly deserve to be more widely grown! These hardy, deciduous shrubs are cottage garden essentials - easy to grow and enchanting as a cut flower. Grow them in sunny borders, or as stand-alone specimens to break up wide expanses of lawn.

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A Gardener's Miscellany

Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, Graham Clarke

This week it's:

Numbers in the garden

We reveal some of the fascinating facts relating to numbers in the garden

THIS Wednesday, 4 March, is World Maths Day. This online international mathematics competition was first held in 2007 and takes place every year on the first Wednesday in March. Participants across the world solve age-appropriate mental maths problems to test their accuracy and speed. I was never much of a whizz with numbers, but I've come to

realise they are everywhere – even in the garden. So, let's take a look at some of the amazing numerical stories as they relate to our favourite pastime.

■ In 2017, around 568,700 jobs in the UK were connected to horticulture and/or landscaping. That works out at one in every 62 jobs (Horticultural Trades Association report, 2018).



In 2017, more than half a million jobs involved horticulture and/or landscaping

TI Media

How many plants exist?

NOBODY will ever know the total number of plants growing on the planet, but we can take an educated guess at the number of different kinds, or species, out there.

Scientists reckon there are more than 400,000 plant species, of which around 150,000 are spore-bearing (meaning they produce neither flowers nor seeds – think of mosses). Around 250,000 plant varieties are grown for food, fodder or horticulture.

■ In 2015, a study led by researchers at Yale University in the USA found that there are more than 3 trillion trees on Earth (around 422 for each person on the planet). This was worked out from the number of trees counted in each of more than 400,000 plots of forest, from all continents except Antarctica.

Researchers reckon there are over three trillion trees on Earth



How many pollinators exist?

AGAIN, nobody will ever have an accurate answer, but the Hymenoptera family of insects (bees, bumblebees, wasps, gall wasps, ants, sawflies and more) contains more than 100,000 different species. There are more than 2,000 species of bees alone, all making backwards and forwards movements (yes, bees can fly backwards) to and from flowers in their never-ending quest for nectar and pollen.

■ Apart from the insects listed above, other efficient plant pollinators include slugs, snails, beetles, butterflies, moths, birds, bats and mammals. And Man, of course. We sometimes need to hand pollinate garden vegetables or fruits, either because of natural pollinator decline or to keep a strain genetically pure.



Man sometimes helps with the pollination process

TI Media

How many gardens?

Surprise! Nobody knows for sure, but...

■ In the UK, according to 2018 figures, there are around 27 million people who partake in gardening. And the gardening market is said to be worth around £7.5 billion annually.

■ In 2015 there were 300,000 council-owned allotments in Britain, with a further 10% on private land or newly created by the National Trust, British Waterways and others. But it was estimated that more than 90,000 people are on waiting lists.

■ The National Gardens Scheme lists 3,700 gardens in England and Wales that open at least once a year for charity.

■ The Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, established in 1983, is managed by Historic England and currently lists some 1,600 sites.



Over 90,000 people are waiting for an allotment

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5 plants with numbers in their cultivar names



Dahlia 'Julie One'

All photographs Alamy unless otherwise credited



Climbing Bourbon rose 'Blairii Number Two'



Erigeron 'Four Winds'



Hedera helix 'Schäfer Three'

Wikicommons



Camellia x williamsii 'Bartley Number Five'

Macpennys.co.uk



A Gardener's Miscellany

Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, Graham Clarke

Prize draw

Miracle-Gro is giving AG readers the chance to win one of two gardening bundles, each worth £27.99. The prizes are perfect for those wanting to get ahead this spring and get started on their immaculate lawn.

The two winners will each receive Miracle-Gro EverGreen Luxury Lawn Seed (420g), which is ideal for creating a new lawn or for over-seeding. It is specially selected to create a fine luxury lawn with strong roots for optimum absorption of water and nutrients. Winners will also receive Miracle-Gro Patch Magic Grass Seed, Feed & Coir (1½kg) that will regrow bare patches 2x thicker than ordinary grass seed, with first shoots being seen in just four days. It has been developed to survive virtually every condition and grow grass anywhere – even on concrete!

How to enter

Send your name and address on the back of a postcard to Miracle-Gro Lawn Bundle Draw (7 March), *Amateur Gardening*, Pinehurst 2, Pinehurst Road, Farnborough, Hampshire GU14 7BF. Or you can email your details to ag_giveaway@ti-media.com, heading the email Miracle-Gro Lawn Bundle Draw (7 March). The closing date is 13 March 2020.



Average size of UK gardens

ACCORDING to the Horticultural Trades Association (2018), the overall average UK garden is 150.6 square feet (14m²). However, the actual area averages vary depending on the ages of the householder:

- For those aged 25-44, it is 129 square feet (12m²).
- For those aged 45+, it is 161.4 square feet (15m²).

These figures do not include window boxes, balconies or roof gardens.



Garden size varies with your age

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Two more potatoes

POTATOES have two more chromosomes (48) than a human (46). Gorillas have 48 chromosomes, as do beavers, chimpanzees, deer, mice – and tobacco.

Spuds have more chromosomes than humans!



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WIN
£30

Word search

No:
508

This word search comprises words associated with numbers and gardening. They are listed below; in the grid they may be read across, backwards, up, down or diagonally. Letters may be shared between words. Erroneous or duplicate words may appear in the grid, but there is only one correct solution. After the listed words are found, there are 11 letters remaining; arrange these to make this week's KEYWORD.

E	Z	I	S	E	I	C	E	P	S
L	M	D	E	E	S	E	N	P	T
A	S	A	O	L	L	V	O	I	N
C	L	Y	T	N	A	E	I	N	E
I	A	S	P	H	D	N	L	U	M
R	T	D	T	L	S	S	L	M	T
E	E	D	R	E	A	O	I	B	O
M	P	O	C	R	S	N	R	E	L
U	W	T	S	E	E	R	T	R	L
N	S	E	R	U	G	I	F	S	A

HOW TO ENTER: Enter this week's keyword on the entry form, and send it to AG Word Search No 508, *Amateur Gardening*, Pinehurst 2, Pinehurst Road, Farnborough, Hampshire GU14 7BF, to arrive by Wednesday 18 March 2020. The first correct entry chosen at random will win our £30 cash prize.

This week's keyword is

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

Tel no

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Historical gardening event of the week: 9 March 1712



ON this day, John Fothergill was born in Yorkshire. A physician, plant collector, philanthropist and Quaker, he was highly influential as a doctor and wrote about medical matters. In his spare time, he built up a botanic garden at his home, Upton House, in what is now London's West Ham Park. He grew thousands of rare plants, obtained from around the world, many of which grew in his greenhouses. One colleague wrote that, within the greenhouses, "the sphere seemed transposed, as the Arctic Circle joined with the equator". The witch alder genus (*Fothergilla*), related to witch hazels, is named after John Fothergill. He died in 1780.

Crossword

...just for fun!

Fibonacci in plants



IN nearly all flowers, the number of petals is one of the numbers that occur in the Fibonacci sequence, in which each number is the sum of the two that precede it: 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89 and so on. Lilies have three petals, buttercups have five, many delphiniums have eight, marigolds have 13, asters have 21, and most daisies have 34, 55 or 89. You don't find any other numbers as often.

The same numbers can be found in the spiral patterns of florets or seeds

in the head of a sunflower. They are arranged in two intersecting families of spirals, one winding clockwise, the other anti-clockwise. In some species the number of clockwise spirals is 34, and the number of anti-clockwise spirals is 55, in others it is 55 and 89, and in some it is even 89 and 144 (the next number in the sequence).

■ Pineapples have eight rows of scales – the diamond-shaped markings – sloping to the left, and 13 sloping to the right.

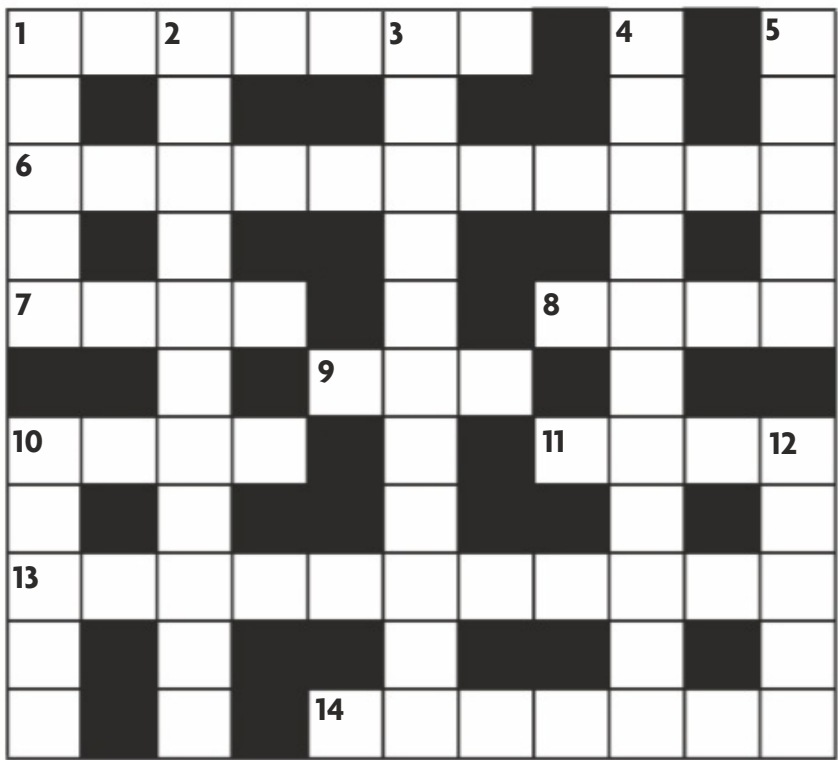
Wow! I didn't know that...



■ When planting, an odd number of plants stimulates the brain to look everywhere. Therefore, as in nature, more successful schemes occur when three, five or seven of the same, or similar, plants are grouped, rather than in groups of two, four, six or eight.

■ Charles Darwin once calculated that an average acre of garden soil contained around 50,000 worms, but their numbers do vary: from 20,000 per acre in the flinty soils of Romania, to eight million per acre in a New Zealand pasture.

■ The average UK household spends around £150 on their garden each year (Horticultural Trades Association report, 2018).



ACROSS

1 The subjects of this week's *Miscellany*, figuratively speaking! (7)

6 Common name shared variously by *Centaurea cineraria*, *Lychnis coronaria* and *Cerastium tomentosum* (5,6)

7 *Gladiolus cardinalis* is known as the 'new ____ lily' (4)

8 The wild plant *Convolvulus arvensis* is more commonly referred to as ____ weed (4)

9 See **5** down

10 When flowers do this, they should be deadheaded (4)

11 Genus of shade-loving plants known variously as lords-and-ladies and cuckoo pint (4)

13 Her cacti! He's mixing to create a grinning animal (and the cultivar name for a no-longer available ball dahlia) (8,3) (anag)

14 Like climbing roses (with no 'R') slowly walking along! (7)

DOWN

1 Decorative dahlia cultivar 'My ____', and the name often given to a donkey (5)

2 Hot, fertilised embryonic ovules of *Brassica nigra* (black), *B. hirta* (yellow) and *B. juncea* (Indian) (7,4)

3 Mr Olive Farm – to help you with a house move, or transplanting! (7,4) (anag)

4 Genus of plants, including the star grass and water fennel (11)

5 and **12** down and **9** across Name given to this Wednesday (4 March), inspiring this week's *Miscellany*! (5,5,3)

10 Genus name for the rubber plants – and fig (5)

12 See **5** down

ANSWERS TO ABOVE CROSSWORD

ACROSS 1 Numbers 6 Dusty Miller 7 Year 8 Bind 9 Day 10 Fade 11 Arum
13 Cheshire Cat 14 Ambler
DOWN 1 Noddy 2 Mustard seed 3 Removal firm 4 Callitriche 5 World
10 Ficus 12 Maths

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Begonia coccinea, also known as the angelwing begonia – so-called for the shape of its wings

TopTip

Begonias are fun to propagate. Soft shoot tips root easily, and rhizomatous kinds take from leaf cuttings.

Begonia 'Glowing Embers' is a trailing beauty, with pointed leaves that have purple undersides, and glowing orange star-shaped flowers from mid-summer into autumn

A begonia plug plant has settled well into its new pot but it may need potting on again before it takes pride of place in a tub or basket

How to grow... **Begonias**

Whether you fancy a cascading trail of dainty blooms, exotic specimens, or just some striking and unusual foliage, begonias really do have it all, says **Anne Swithinbank**

STEP into the world of begonias and be amazed at the variety of leaf shapes, forms and blooms displayed by one of the largest genera of flowering plants. There are around 1,800 different species, most of which share the characteristic of asymmetric, odd-sided leaves.

Begonias were Victorian favourites and a speciality of the renowned Veitch Nurseries, which sent out plant hunters to find unusual and exciting specimens for its customers. On one trip to Brazil, William Lobb discovered *Begonia coccinea*, known as the angelwing begonia and the parent of many hybrids. *Begonia rex* arrived from Assam circa 1856 and was an instant hit as a tough parlour plant, able to cope with low light.

The Victorian plant craze supported a growing number of nurseries and towards the end of the 1800s, Covent Garden had 300 grower's stalls. For advice, enthusiasts turned to *Amateur Gardening*, launched in 1884 by its first editor, horticulturalist and writer Shirley Hibberd.

Begonias remain popular, and with the help of breeding work they can satisfy the needs of most gardeners. Do you want showy cascading plants for hanging baskets on a north wall? Look no further than the many trailing tuberous cultivars. Fancy huge blooms to win prizes in shows?



Begonia 'Million Kisses Elegance' is ideal for vertical gardens, tubs and baskets

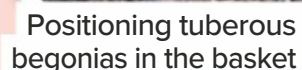
Large-flowered upright tuberous varieties are available. For an exotic, sub-tropical border, *B. luxurians* (a tall 'cane' species) can stand out for the summer. Or how about a curious and handsome foliage houseplant? There are plenty of rhizomatous choices whose leaves, arising from horizontal, pot-hugging rhizomes, could be compared to rich tapestry, mossy rocks, shells, lizards or sea creatures. In general, begonias need a minimum winter temperature of 50°F (10°C).

Deep and wide and tall

The upright or trailing tuberous begonias that are widely used as summer bedding for borders, baskets and planters prefer cool, humid and lightly shaded growing conditions. There are no rules for the number of plants per basket but too few won't give you the cover you need, while an excess will compete and run out of steam. For a basket 12-14in (30-35cm) across, three to five plants is about right.

Main image and top inset: Alamy

■ Tuberous begonias are a good investment. After plants have died back, store dormant tubers cool and frost-free over winter in pots of old compost.



- & M

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Robies

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Eye-catching rhizomatous begonia with indented leaves curling inwards at the edges. Would look at home on the ocean floor. Reaches a dome-like 8in (20cm).

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- 7th March 2020/TM AG324

Letters to Wendy



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Barbara is fan of her easy to use Dalek-style compost bin



Star letter

The wonder stuff

I HAVE come late to the wonder of composting, but decided to give it a go when a neighbour gave me an unwanted Dalek-style compost bin. Last autumn, this was full of garden and kitchen waste, but during the winter the contents have been magically transformed into this beautiful rich compost. This has now been spread over the borders to allow the worms and

the frost to do their bit, too. It has cost me nothing and has saved a lot of unnecessary kitchen waste heading to landfill, and I feel I've done a small thing for the environment while being richly rewarded for such small effort.

Barbara Trevitt, via email

Wendy says: That's the way, Barbara. We love to hear these success stories!

Making a point: my 'planted' strawberry



Forbidden fruits...

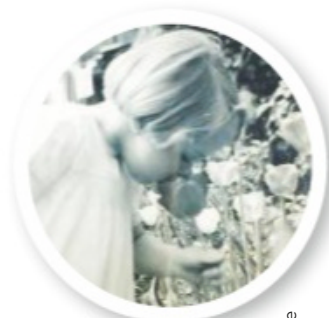
I ABSOLUTELY adore fresh strawberries, and every year I have two or three hanging baskets of them. However, whenever I spot a huge, juicy fruit that I allocate for myself, another family member beats me to it. So last year, I 'planted' an extra big specimen. Funnily, there were no takers for it!

Lucy Travell, Gloucester

... forbidden flowers

THE recent letter (AG, 1 February), reminded me of the story my mum used to tell of me picking all the tulips along the garden path at a similar age to your reader, Linda Kettle. I think my mum was too angry to take a photo, and that was 68 years ago!

Sue Jones, via email



Linda Kettle

Marching towards spring...



Pat's snowdrop surprise

WHAT a lovely surprise this morning – so bright and cheerful amongst the grass. The grass actually could do with a light cut after all the rain we've had!

Pat Coomer, Essex

IT'S a cold and damp morning, but I've just taken this photo of a very brave tulip! Looking at it, I suspect it's been attacked by slugs, or maybe it's trying to go back down!

Margaret Oakley, via email

HERE is a picture of one of our hellebore plants. It was taken on a cold, dark winter's morning this week. I thought it brought hope of brighter days to come – especially as we are awaiting



Tough tulip!

the birth of our first grandchild.

Jennifer Town, via email

I JUST thought I would send you some pictures of my little irises. I absolutely love their colours, showing off and standing out against the pretty snowdrops. Their early brightness makes me smile throughout the colder and shorter days.

Alexandra Watts, East Yorkshire



Helleborus niger



Reticulata irises



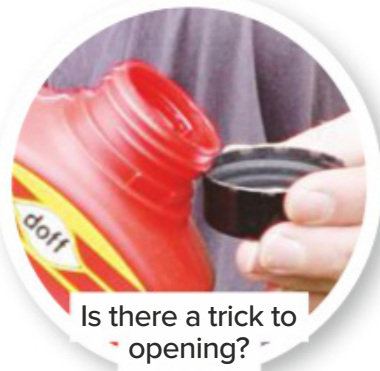
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Childproof caps are adult-proof!

DOES anyone else have problems with childproof caps on products like Tomorite and Baby Bio? I end up using pliers, a Stanley knife or, in extreme cases, a saw!



Is there a trick to opening?

With arthritic hands, they are very difficult to get in to. I expect the manufacturers would say it is not cost-effective to give the customer a choice as to cap type.

Doreen Biddle, Birmingham

Wendy says: I know, I have the same problem. Perhaps we should all let the manufacturers know? If they get enough complaints, they might just change the design of these difficult lids.

Reader's Quick Tip



AT this time of year, there is a great urge to be sowing seeds, and propagators are a wonderful tool. However, they all too easily run out of headroom, with seedlings pressing against the underside of the top. So here's a simple idea: a few lengths of old scrap wood tacked together and painted white on the inside to reflect light around the young plants. It costs virtually nothing, is easy to make, and is so effective.

Steve Wade, Shropshire

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Guess this plant!



Wendy says: This lovely perennial plant has largish daisies and is perfect for the edge of a border – it's also bee-friendly!

Answer to 'Guess This Plant': *Stokesia laevis*, 'Blue Star'



How to use tools

Best techniques to get the job right with Tim Rumball

Seed tapes and growing mats

If you find sowing seeds fiddly or awkward, seed tapes could be the answer, says **Tim**

GROWING flowers and vegetables from seed is a thrilling experience, but aspects of it can be challenging. Many people find the very first step, sowing seeds, difficult. In recent years arthritis and rheumatism have made my fingers clumsy, and sowing things like carrots is a real problem. Once I could accurately drop a single seed every half centimetre, but nowadays great splodges of seed cascade from my fingers. It's a waste of seeds and the subsequent thinning a few weeks later is a nightmare.

Seed tape is the answer

Seed tapes solve this problem. They are also a brilliant device for introducing children to growing from seed – toddlers find it much easier to handle a tape or mat than small, individual seeds.

Seed tape is a paper tape with seeds embedded in it at the correct spacing. To sow a row of veg, just buy the relevant tape (I'm using tapes containing carrot 'Nantes 5' and lettuce 'Little Gem' from Mr Fothergill's), rake the soil flat, removing stones, and mark a drill. Pin one end of the seed tape at the top of the drill, roll it out taut along the drill, tear off when you get to the end of the drill, pin the end down and then sieve soil over the tape. Water lightly, mark the row and the job is done.

How it works

Accurate spacing means a lot less thinning is necessary after germination, so you save time and effort. You get 18ft (6m) of tape so there's plenty for multiple rows – just tear it off when you get to the end of the row and roll out more in the next drill alongside. The paper rots away as the seeds germinate and grow. There's no waste as you can harvest alternate plants as baby carrots or salad



Seed tapes are a quick and easy way to sow rows of fiddly seeds, especially tiny veg seeds like carrots

leaves, leaving the rest to grow on to maturity. It's also a lot quicker when sowing so it saves time.

Seed mats are also available for sowing herbs in pots. I'm using Mr Fothergill's coriander 'Cilantro' and sweet basil mats. Each packet contains five mats to fit 3in (8cm) pots.

Fill the pot with multi-purpose compost, lightly firm the surface, then water and let it drain. Place one seed mat on top, sprinkle compost or vermiculite evenly over it, then label the pot. Pop the pot on a warm, bright windowsill or into a propagator and await germination. It really couldn't be simpler, and it'll certainly save money over buying the little pots of living herbs from the supermarket. Sow one mat a week for a steady supply of tasty herbs.

Big range of seeds are available

Mr Fothergill's (mr-fothergills.co.uk) offers a range of seed tapes and mats for vegetables and herbs. Vegetables, herbs and salads seed tapes are also offered by Suttons (suttons.co.uk) and DT

Brown (dtbrownseeds.co.uk). Mats carrying wildlife-friendly flower mixes for borders, and colourful mixes for large pots and hanging baskets are offered by Bees Seeds (www.bees-seeds.co.uk). The wildlife mats, generously sized at 20x80in (50x200cm), are impregnated with seeds of flowers that attract bees or butterflies. To 'sow' one, weed and then rake the soil level, removing big stones, and water well if the soil is dry. Lay out the seed mat in strips, cutting to fit the space and ensuring the edges touch where they meet. Sieve soil or compost lightly over the mat and water. Mats are also available at crocus.co.uk.

Colour-themed flower varieties

Mats impregnated with flower seeds are also available at Bakker.com. Mats with colour-themed mixed varieties of white, pink, blue or yellow for sunny borders, and others for semi-shaded spots. There's an English border mix, one for picking flowers, and one for window boxes. The border mats measure 9x100in (22x250cm).



Place a herb disc on the surface of a small pot of compost, cover, water and pop it on a warm windowsill



Bees Seeds wildflower mat can be cut to fit different border shapes



Young children cope better with seed tapes and mats than small loose seeds

The language of seed tapes and mats

Seed tape:

A strip of biodegradable paper with a single row of seeds embedded in it at optimum spacing.

Seed mat:

A small disc for pots, or a large

'blanket' for flower beds, of paper impregnated with herb or flower seeds.

Optimum seed spacing:

The best spacing between individual seeds to ensure good germination and growth.

Step by step

How to sow seed tapes



1 Thoroughly rake over the sowing area on well-prepared soil, breaking down clods and removing large stones. Draw a straight, shallow drill.



2 Pin one end of the seed tape to the soil at the top of the drill (I use a wooden toothpick), unroll the tape down the drill, pull it taut and pin it down.



3 Sieve a thin layer of soil over the tape, or scatter well-crumbled compost over to just cover it. Compost is better because it doesn't contain weed seeds.



4 Mark the row clearly with a label, then water with a can fitted with a fine rose. If sowing multiple rows, draw another drill alongside at the appropriate distance.

Types of seed tapes, discs and mats

1. Large seed discs carrying bedding flowers for large pots and hanging baskets.



2. Large seed mat for wild flowers.



3. Small seed discs for growing herbs.



4. Seed tapes for vegetables.

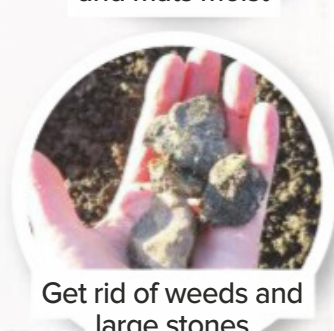
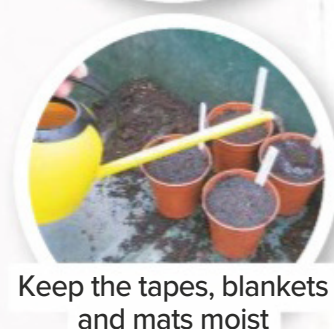
Do's and don'ts of seed tapes and mats

Do

- ✓ Follow instructions on the packet, and 'sow' at the correct time of year.
- ✓ Keep mats, tapes and blankets, and the compost or soil they're sitting on, moist.
- ✓ Harvest alternate vegetable plants from the row as baby veg once they're big enough to give those that are left room to grow to maturity.

Don't

- ✗ Be careless about soil preparation. Get rid of weeds, large stones and any slugs and snails.
- ✗ Use tapes and mats that are a year or more old – buy fresh for the best germination rates.
- ✗ Overlap flowerbed mats as this will affect seed spacing. Just butt edges together.



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Your Get the look

Ideas for gorgeous gardens

Embrace natural features: block-paving pathways allow year-round access to an area prone to wetness, while an arbour provides the perfect spot to enjoy the sight and sound of a stream



The split-level garden

Teamwork has enabled Graham and Judy White to transform the challenging plot around their Staffordshire home into a garden to be proud of, says **Sue Bradley**

GOING with the flow has proved to be the key to creating a truly beautiful garden for Graham and Judy White. Faced with a split-level and L-shaped plot containing a natural stream, swamp and thicket, and very little else, the couple from Uttoxeter in Staffordshire took their time in making it beautiful and accessible, while imbuing it with their own personality.

All in all it took 17 years to complete the hard landscaping and key planting, with the Whites developing their ideas as they went along rather than working to an overall design.

"I think we would have lost heart if we had planned it," laughs Graham. "We just kept doing a bit at a time."

Among the first tasks was the need to bring in plenty of topsoil to replace the layers scraped away by builders when the Whites' home was constructed 28 years ago.

Further challenges were presented by the steep 250ft (76m)-long embankment between the level 'top garden' and the natural stream below,

which Graham tamed with flights of steps and quirky structures such as a 'bell tower'.

Challenging water issues

Water retention has been another issue, with the Whites placing herringbone drains under their upper garden and laying block paths around walled raised beds in the area above the stream to make it more accessible.

"We could have gone for bark or stone chippings for the paths, but they would have soaked up the moisture at certain times of the year," says Graham.

While the stream presented some challenges, the Whites quickly discovered there were plenty of

"I think we would have lost heart if we'd planned it"



Picea abies produces attractive pale-green tips over the summer



These scales look great teamed with sempervivums

Use lawns, bedding and clipped shrubs to bring an air of formality to the area of garden closest to the house. Cornus, berberis and pyracantha provide year-round colour and interest



advantages in having such a picturesque feature running along the bottom of the garden. The stream encourages slug-eating amphibians – something Graham and Judy encourage with a stumpy, wildlife-friendly streamside planting using ferns and other plants more suitable for boggy areas, and a tranquil woodland walk.

When he wasn't working on the garden's hard landscaping, retired engineer Graham kept busy building up



Merge the edge of a patio with the garden beyond with a collection of potted plants and ornaments. Add summer-flowerers such as busy Lizzies and violas for colour

Your Get the look

Ideas for gorgeous gardens

his collection of vintage horticultural and agricultural tools, all of which have been painted in a unifying dark green colour so that they complement the planting around them.

“Originally Judy was the gardener and I was the collector,” Graham explains. “When I said I wanted to put some of my artefacts around the garden the one condition was that they wouldn’t stand out and detract from any of the plants, so I came up with the idea of painting them the same colour.”

Themed vintage tools

Many of Graham’s tools are displayed in themed groups, such as the blacksmith’s implements arranged around an anvil. Meanwhile, his pride in his vintage firemen’s hose winding machine and accessories led him to fashion an attractive roofed stone structure to protect them from the elements.

“Judy has nicknamed this feature ‘Graham’s Folly’, the folly being that I only paid £5 for the hoses and machine but have spent hundreds of pounds protecting them,” he laughs.

Old tools aren’t the only things Graham has been collecting, either, with cacti, succulents and sempervivums all attracting his attention over the years.

The Whites have taken a challenging site and made it their own, to the delight of the many people who visit it under the National Gardens Scheme.

“We work well together and always have done,” says Judy. “We took our time and are pleased with the result. Now it’s a case of keeping it looking good.”



The ‘bell tower’ provides space to display some of Graham’s tools, including a Webb’s children’s lawnmower and upcycled car suspension springs



Combine vintage artefacts with bold planting. Here the yellow flowers of *Lysimachia punctata* surround an old wet-stone grinding machine



This flamingo willow *Salix integra* ‘Hakuro-nishiki’ produces attractive cream and pink leaves. A lawn spiker continues the vintage tools theme



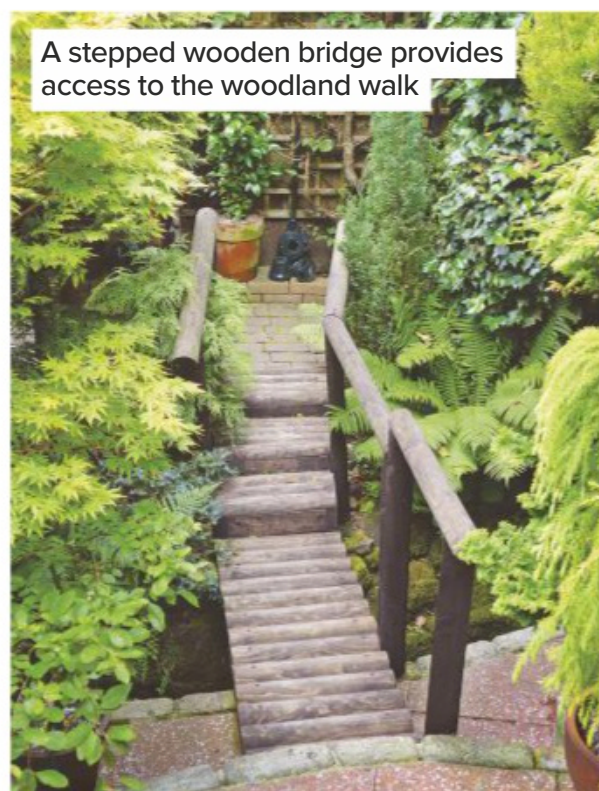
Make a collection of a particular plant and marvel at the many variations



Cultivate cacti: Graham loves the shape and diversity of these spiky plants, while Judy revels in their exquisite flowers



Team contrasting plants: here the strap-like leaves of a phormium rise above a bed of *Heuchera villosa* 'Palace Purple' and a hebe



A stepped wooden bridge provides access to the woodland walk



Build an archway to accentuate the feeling of moving from one garden to another. An old blacksmith's anvil and various tools are painted with a unifying dark-green colour



Display vintage finds with pride: this roofed structure clad with a Virginia creeper protects old firefighting equipment from the elements



A coat of paint turns this fluted wash tub into a container for a *Hosta* 'Francee'



This attractive bug hotel is 6ft (1.8m) tall and provides an eye-catching feature



Bring a lease of life to a tree stump by drilling holes for planting pockets for attractive sempervivums

Meet the gardeners

Owners:

Graham and Judy White

Address:

Woodleighton Grove, Karibu Garden, 9

Woodleighton Grove, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, ST14 8BX

Garden size: One-third of an acre including house

Month visited: July

Aspect: South facing

Soil: Mix of imported soils

Special features: Garden on two levels, with natural stream, stumpy, bell tower, folly, giant insect hotel and collections of cacti, sempervivum and vintage tools.



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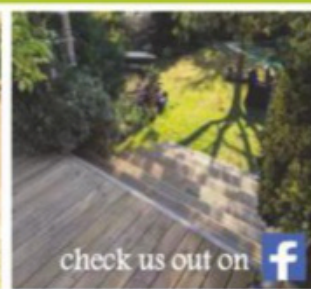
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Toby Buckland

Plantsman and BBC gardening presenter



When cut every few years, shrubs such as this *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' come back stronger and are more colourful



Chopping back winter stems – a practice that dates back to a time when much larger, hairier, tusked gardeners did the work!

Never feel bad about coppicing – it's a job as old as time itself!

Inset: Toby Buckland

Mammoth undertakings

Toby taps into his inner mammoth as he makes a few cuts that are reminiscent of prehistoric coppicing creatures

THE ancient art of coppicing involves felling a tree to stimulate new growth from the stump, and it dates back to prehistoric times – long before Percy Thrower had picked up a pipe and pruning saw.

To our bucolic ancestors, the woodlands were workshops, where the straight poles of coppiced hazel, oak and ash were fashioned into homes, fences, spears and spits for the barbeque. But even before then, when mankind was a twinkle in a monkey's eye, coppicing was the work of woolly mammoths and giant mastodon that knocked over trees and ate the regrowth for breakfast (see the panel below).

A benefit of all this felling was that the dense canopy of our deciduous woods was opened, and the light that flooded the woodland floor encouraged spring-flowering celandine, daffodil, wood anemone and bluebells to cover the ground like a carpet. And in summer, these were followed by sorrel, cranesbill,

honeysuckle and other wildflowers that basked in the sunshine.

I mention this because standing in a garden, secateurs in hand, might seem like a controlling, unnatural thing to do but, for most plants, it emulates the ancient grazed ecosystems in which they have evolved to thrive. In short, pruning predates us!

So never feel bad about making like a mammoth and doing a bit of coppicing of your own. This week, I've chopped back the winter stems of dogwood and willow that grow back and are more colourful when cut at least every few years.

Most shrubs are hardwired to survive a similar treatment. That said, it's best to

Toby's top tips



1 Always check before pruning that birds aren't nesting among the branches. If they are, wait until they have fledged before you reach for the wood saw.



TI Media

2 How often you prune cornus (aka dogwood) depends on the soil. If yours is dry, prune every three or four years. If wet, then every two three years is fine.

'nibble' at shrubs if it's lots of flowers you're after, pruning out a fifth of the older wood right to the base, rather than make a mastodon-meal and cut back the lot.

That way, with winter-flowering viburnum, mahonia and honeysuckle that are coming to the end of their season, plenty of the older, blossom-bearing wood is kept but new healthy shoots encouraged to grow from the base. And extra sunlight reaches bulbs and flowers below, just as nature intended.

Calling out for carbon...

MAMMOTHS and other giant animals of prehistory had a huge effect on plant life. From Spain to Siberia, their grazing increased nutrient levels, especially where temperatures were too low and summers too short for leaves to decompose into food for plants. This wasn't a problem inside these megalithic mammals' stomachs, and thanks to their dung, lush grassland and carbon-capturing microscopic soil-life thrived between the trees. Today, Russian scientists are looking at the viability of reintroducing elephants – the descendants of mammoths – into Siberia to re-create the diverse plant life of the Pleistocene period and lock carbon into the earth.



Mammoths did their bit to boost vegetation back in the day

Zdeněk Burian

“Most shrubs are hardwired to survive it”