

10 TIPS TO PREPARE GARDENS FOR WINTER



Weekly advice

2 November 2013

Amateur Gardening

Britain's best-selling weekly gardening magazine

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Bob Flowerdew

Why staking a new tree is so important

PLANT APPLES

We show how to get them in



GROW CONES

Sowing seeds from pine cones



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Winter care for garden critters

- ✓ Chrysanthus for late colour
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Anne Swithinbank

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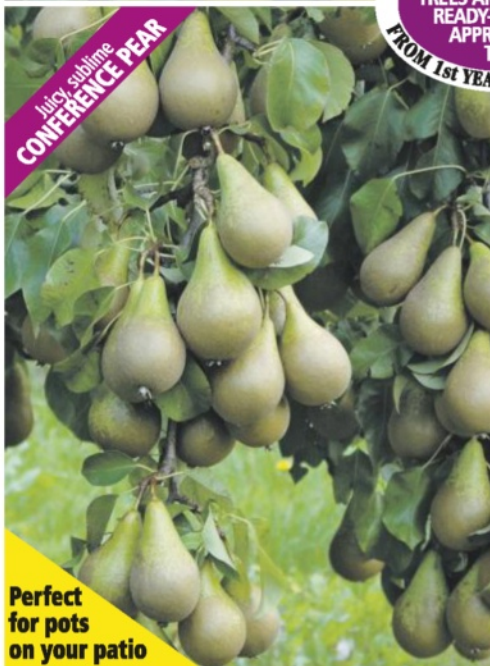
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Peter



Peter McDermott, MD



I USED to be a bit funny about figs until recently. It was to do with the skin – it looks thick and dry on shop-bought fruits, so I'd cut them in half and spoon out the sticky, sweet flesh. But it's amazing how growing your own fruit and veg can change your attitude to them.

My parents had a rampant old fig tree growing in the hedge of their garden in Hastings (it's still there, and the neighbours still complain about its unruly growth). Mum loved the fruit it produced in a good, warm summer. When she



died a few years ago I took cuttings, giving one each to my brothers and sisters, and keeping one

for myself. Mine languished in a pot for a couple of years, then I planted it into the brick rubble foundations of a small seating area at the top of the garden, and trained it against the fence.

It has grown strongly, and this year it finally produced a fair crop of figs. As soon as they'd swelled and the skin blushed from green to brown in early autumn, I picked them. Straight off the tree they tasted utterly gorgeous – skin and all! There was more fruit than Kath and I could eat fresh (even with good goats cheese and a bottle of crisp, dry white wine), so a lot went into fig tarts in pastry cases with a frangipani base. Scrumptious!

Now I'll look forward to tasty fig harvests for years to come. It's a wonderful way to remember mum. Have a great gardening week.

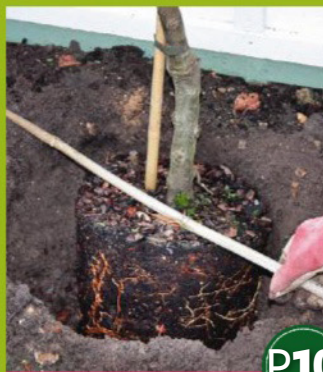


Tim
TIM RUMBALL
EDITOR



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SOW CYCLAMEN
How to start cyclamen from saved seeds, step-by-step



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PLANT APPLES
Tips on getting apple trees of all sorts going in your garden



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A sweet pea and dahlia competition winner's garden in Wales



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The best fleece jackets to protect plants in winter



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Cover picture

Chrysanthemum 'Hananburg Red' GAP

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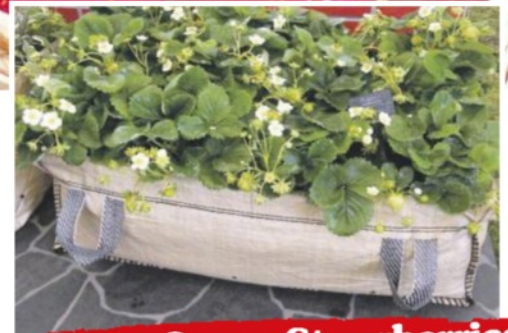
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Your *Jobs to do now!* gardening week

LATE AUTUMN and winter isn't a busy time for sowing seeds – often one of the greatest pleasures in gardening. If you're a seed sowing addict and can't wait until the busy spring season, never fear, I have two simple sowing projects for you this week: cyclamen and conifer seeds. Cyclamen seed can be collected from your own garden plants (see p8). To get some conifer seeds, you'll need to don your boots and get out for a walk in the woods this weekend in the search for fallen pine cones. Extracting seed from the cones is detailed on p9.

KRIS COLLINS
GARDENING EDITOR

Insulate taps and pipework

Use foam lagging to insulate all outdoor taps and exposed pipework against freezing weather conditions. Left uncovered during a cold snap, water inside the pipes can expand as it freezes, potentially causing splits or cracks. If you can isolate garden taps, close off the water supply and allow the tap to run dry.



MargaretH/kandros64



Bonfire etiquette

If you are planning a 5 November bonfire (or a bonfire at any time), check that the rubbish to be burned does not have any animals sheltering in it. Hedgehogs and toads are the most likely creatures to take shelter in this way. If you do find them, remove some of the heap to burn elsewhere; it is better to leave the creatures in peace.



M.O.T for mowers

A quality lawnmower is a big investment for the garden. Get the longest life from yours with an annual service. Before putting it away for winter, check electricity cables and connections to make sure they are safe. With petrol versions, drain the fuel, change oil and clean the plugs. Sharpen blades: either run a sharpening stone along them or attach a sharpener to cylinder base plates.

thrifty tip

week starting
NOVEMBER

2



All IPC Media started

ESSENTIAL MAINTENANCE

- **Lift parsnips – preferably after a frost (above)**
- Continue with digging over clear patches of soil
- **Pot-up some lily-of-the-valley for the conservatory**
- Cut out fruited canes of blackberries
- **Start pruning established apple and pear trees**
- Plant garlic outside

PRIZE DRAW

AT THIS stage of the season compost bins should be near full. Ensure a quality compost for use next season with Westland Make Your Own Compost, a natural blend of organic nitrogen & bacteria.



We have packs for five lucky readers this week. To enter, send your name and address on the back of a postcard to **Compost Draw**, Amateur Gardening, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1JG. Or email your details to: ag_giveaway@ipcmedia.com Closing date 6 November 2013

Your gardening week

10 late autumn essentials

With winter almost here, **Kris** offers some timely tips to keep on track with the seasons



Clean, sharpen and oil tools

CLEAN, SHARPEN and oil secateurs in readiness for pruning fruit trees and other woody plants over the winter months. Spare springs and replacement blades can be purchased for more expensive models, and special stones are available for sharpening blades. Clean mud off spades, forks

and hoes, and it is a good idea to wipe the metal parts with an oily rag to stop rusting.

Wooden handles and shafts can be sanded and rubbed down with a rag dipped in linseed oil to bring them up to scratch. If wooden tool handles are worn or rough, protect your hands by wrapping the handle in PVC duct tape.

Rake up leaves

RAKE OFF tree or shrub leaves that have fallen onto the lawn. If left in place for more than a few days, and especially if they become sodden, they will block out light and air penetration, so killing off areas of grass.

Leaves should also be removed from paths, patios and driveways (to make them safer to walk on), and flower border and rockeries (to stop the cultivated plants from being smothered).

Don't let the swept leaves go to waste, though. Turn them into leafmould by packing them into an old plastic or polythene compost bag. Pierce some holes in the bag for drainage and air flow, and leave it behind a shed for two years. More tips on autumn leaves next week.



Remove pumps from ponds?

MOST POND enthusiasts will run a submersible pump to create movement and aerate the water. They can be left to run all winter, and the movement will hopefully keep a part of the pond ice free.

Filter bacteria will be fairly inactive through winter however.

If you shut down the pump for winter, now is the time to do it.

Either remove from the water and clean the filters thoroughly, or remove them from raised stands and set them in the bottom of the pond to prevent parts freezing. Even when shut down aim to run them for a few minutes each week in winter to prevent bearings from seizing up.



Plant roses

NOVEMBER IS arguably the best month of the year for planting roses. Bare-root roses (pictured) are being sent out by nurseries now, and of course container roses can be bought from garden centres at any time. Choose a mild day for planting, ideally when the ground is neither frozen nor waterlogged.

Avoid planting where roses were previously growing, as the new introduction may suffer from 'replant disease' (also known as rose sickness).



Order from catalogues

THE 2014 seed catalogues are now dropping onto doormats around Britain. Read through them as soon as possible as new introductions sell out quickly. If you haven't ordered from a seed firm for the past year or two, you may not be automatically sent the latest catalogue so you may need to re-order.

Why not take a moment to talk to gardening friends, relatives and neighbours to see if there is a way to save money? There are often bulk-buying deals for fertilisers, composts and seeds, if you can create a kind of gardening 'co-op'.



Hardwood cuttings

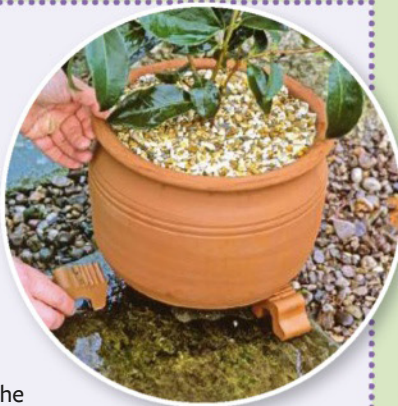
TAKE HARDWOOD cuttings of ornamental shrubs, such as dogwood (cornus), spindle bush (euonymus), golden bells (forsythia), holly (ilex) and willow (salix), as well as hardy climbers, such as actinidia, celastrus, ampelopsis, jasminum, parthenocissus, Russian vine (polygonum), rambler roses and wisteria. Part-bury lengths of healthy stem in a trench, and leave for 6-8 months to root and shoot.



Raise pots

PATIO POTS are prone to waterlogging over the winter period (particularly those out in the open, rather than under the shelter of a wall). For this reason it is important to set the pots on feet. These keep the base of the pot an inch or two above ground level, therefore improving drainage. Because of the gap, ants and other burrowing creatures (including worms), are less inclined to invade and make nests in the compost. On decking areas it will prevent staining and rotting.

Terracotta feet (*pic*) offer a nice finish but you can save money by using large stones or pebbles dug out of your garden soil. Bricks and thick wooden offcuts left over from DIY projects can also be used.



Sow broad beans and peas

IF YOU live in a mild area, sow overwintering broad bean varieties (such as 'Aquadulce Claudia', 'De Monica', 'Luz de Otono' and 'The Sutton') outside or under cloches where the soil is well drained. Or you can sow in pots in an unheated greenhouse in really cold districts. You will be able to harvest the beans in June, two to three weeks before those from the early spring sowings.

Similarly, you can try growing a hardy ('round'-seeded) pea variety, such as 'Tom Thumb', 'Feltham First' and 'Douce Provence'. Pick a sheltered site, and expect some losses if your soil is cold and wet, or if we get a severe cold snap this winter.



Mulching

YOUR COMPOST bins may now be filled with rotting matter after the 2013 growing season. So, now is a good time to open them up and take out the best (oldest) of the rotted material for use as a mulch around trees, shrubs and border plants.

This is particularly useful on and around borderline hardy plants (such as agapanthus, eremurus, kniphofia, callistemon and phygelius).



Feed birds and clean bird baths

IT IS really important to keep birds well nourished in winter; garden centres and pet stores are good sources for bird food. Ideally, you should have one feeder filled with black sunflower seeds, another with plain peanuts and another with energy-rich fat balls. However, if you have room for only one, fill it with the balls (but make sure that any netting around them is removed, as this can trap the bird's feet).

Also, clean bird tables, baths and feeders, as from now on birds will be visiting them more frequently. Use hot, soapy water and a stiff brush, and wear goggles and rubber gloves. Then rinse well with clean water.



Your gardening week

Sowing cyclamen

To make the most of seasonal cyclamen, collect and sow their seed. **Kris** shows how

CYCLAMEN ARE high on my list of top winter bedding plants. These seasonal additions come in a range of shades and sizes, all derived from the tender *Cyclamen persicum*.

Despite not being fully hardy these hybrids look great at this time of year and will soldier on through to New Year or later in a sheltered spot outdoors.

Most gardeners treat bedding cyclamen as throw-away plants, using them solely for their winter colour. But collect seed pods through late autumn and winter, and you have a perfect winter project for the greenhouse or windowsill, when little else is going on in

the way of sowing. As well as getting your green-fingered fix, you'll be producing free plants for next winter's displays, with seedlings taking 10-14 months to start flowering.

Unlike most seeds, cyclamen seeds need to be sown fresh in cool temperatures and low light for good germination. Use a heat mat or propagator base to keep compost

temperatures between 12-15°C (54-60°F), and you'll soon have seedlings to tend through winter.

So, do remove the majority of flowers as they fade, but leave the odd one to produce its characteristic seed capsules, and try sowing your own cyclamen for winter 2014.

QUICK TIP
When soaking cyclamen seeds, add a drop of washing up liquid to the water, to dissolve the mucus around the seed



As you tend bedding cyclamen, remove faded blooms but allow some to swell into seed pods for collection of fresh seed before they burst

Seed success

■ Fresh seed is essential for success. Ideally gather the pods just before they burst and the seed inside is a light brown in colour

■ Strong light inhibits sprouting, drape newspaper over seed pots and trays until growth is seen

■ Do not allow compost and seedlings to dry out at any stage - seeds will fail to sprout if allowed to dry and seedlings will quickly wither and die off



Step by step How to sow cyclamen seeds



Soak fresh seed in warm water for 12 hours to soften the outer seed casings, and then rinse them in a tea strainer. Sow them immediately.



In small pots or half trays, sow the seeds on the surface of a 50:50 mix of seed compost and sharp sand. Water in and allow to drain.



Cover with sharp sand or vermiculite, then seal pot in a clear plastic bag. Keep at a maximum temp of 15°C (60°F), in a lightly shaded place.

Instant colour

A PART FROM plants grown for their bright autumn berries or leaf tints, most of our gardens are lacking a degree of colour right now. But there is something you can do about it, says Sally.

Pot mums or 'spray' chrysanthemums are the perfect late-season perennials for injecting instant colour into borders that are beginning to die-back back for winter, or for tucking into patio pots with an autumn theme.

Their bright, showy blooms come in a wide range of colours, from reds, purple and pinks to orange and yellow, so you won't be stuck for choice. Most garden centres are selling them right now, already in full bloom,

along with other colourful autumn flowers like colchicum, asters and hardy cyclamen.

You can either buy trays of small mums in 3½in (9cm) pots – handy for popping into patio pots or windowboxes – or

bigger 2 litre pots for plunging (pot and all) into borders and large planters.

It's unlikely they'll make it through winter in the colder regions of the UK,

so treat them as temporary bedding, and dig up once the first frosts hit.

Then pot up the plants in fresh compost and cut back the stems to a couple of inches. Overwinter somewhere frost-free and take cuttings from them in spring for healthy new chrysanth plants next autumn.

QUICK TIP
Store your chrysanths over the winter in a frost-free shed, and take cuttings from them next spring for fresh plants



Chrysanths are brilliant plants for injecting instant colour into borders and patio pots



Cones are effectively the 'fruits' of the plant, and tend to change colour as they ripen; these are from the Scot's pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)

Collect pine cone seed

IT'S FUN to raise conifers from seed. Most will produce seedlings true to type and germination rates are high if the seeds are treated properly. The hardest part of the sowing process is collecting the seed from the tough cones, says Kris. The cones are produced in profusion at this time of year, but even if squirrels and birds

don't get to them first, you'll struggle to get at the seed inside.

There's no need to climb the trees to get the cones, autumn winds helpfully blow them down for easy collection.

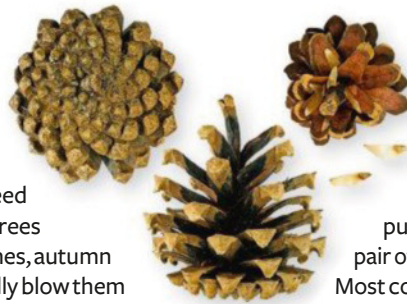
Avoid picking up any cones with signs of animal damage, and those that have already opened up – the seed will likely have been blown away. When looking for cones, seek those that are tightly closed and take them home for a bit of TLC.

Cones from most species spontaneously open their scales to reveal their seeds in warm dry conditions, and this can be encouraged with artificial heat. Once home, place your chosen cones into a paper-lined cardboard box, in an airing cupboard or over a radiator. Check them often and tip out the

winged seeds once the scales have opened.

Seed that's reluctant to move can be pulled out with a pair of tweezers.

Most conifer seeds need a period of cold before germination can occur. We'll look at two simple ways of doing this in a later issue. For now, focus on collection and warming the cones. And don't throw out the empty cones once you have the seed – they make great Xmas decorations.



Your gardening week

Planting apples

It's the perfect time to plant apples, but don't just buy one on impulse, says **Kris**

A HAPPY APPLE tree can last a life time in the garden, but it pays to take a few simple things into consideration before rushing out to buy a new tree.

There are dozens of varieties to choose from (both eaters and cookers), but firstly, where will you site it? Do you want to train it against a wall or have it free-standing?

What size do you want it to reach? You may need more than one tree for pollination, so which pollination group will you choose from to ensure good fruit set each year?

Then of course you'll have to decide between a bare-root or container-grown tree. Both can be planted now through winter.

Container plants are readily available at the garden centre and can be set out at any time, although the dormant season is still the preferred time to plant.

The main deciding factor

between bare-root and pot-grown is price. Bare-root trees are a much cheaper way of adding fruit trees to the garden. Just be sure to dig out a planting hole large enough to fan out the

roots without cramming them in. If needed, trim one or two of the longest roots – but don't remove too many of them.

Choose a mild day to plant, when the soil is neither frozen or waterlogged. The steps below will get container-trees off to the best of starts.

QUICK TIP
The only difference between cooking and eating (dessert) apples is that the former are too tart or sharp to eat raw



This fan tree will produce fruit without crowding the border in front

Apples in pots

MANY TYPES of apple will grow well in a large patio or balcony pot. Buy trees grafted on to dwarfing rootstocks such as M9 and M26 or the very dwarfing M27 rootstock. The pot size needs to have a diameter ideally of 12-15in (30-38cm).

Wooden tubs are recommended for growing fruit (of all kinds) as they help insulate roots through winter. Terracotta pots can crack in winter frosts and dry quickly in summer heat. To plant, use a John Innes No 3 compost, and make sure that the tree is well staked.



Step by step

Setting out container-grown apple trees



Dig a hole 2x wider than the tree's pot, and a few inches deeper. Fill the extra depth with compost and fish, blood and bone, and mix in.



Set the rootball in place, first teasing out any densely matted roots. Set a cane across the top to check it is level with the surrounding soil.

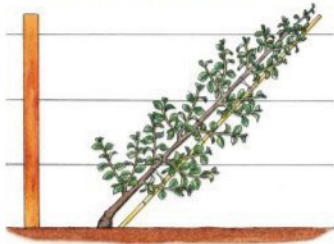


Loosen the stake, drive it into the soil below for anchorage, re tie it then fill around roots with a soil, compost and fertiliser mix, heeling to firm.

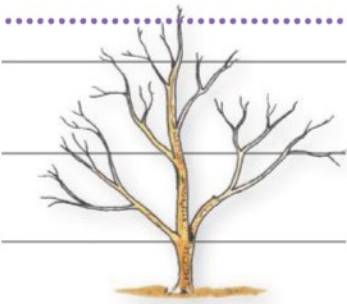
Shapes and rootstocks



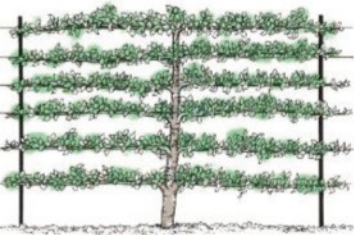
■ **Free-standing:** Unrestricted trees grown either as bush, half-standard or standard, with the latter being the largest. With a bush tree there should always be a clear stem of at least 30in (75cm) before the branches start. This increases to 4½ ft (1.35m) for half-standards, and 6ft (1.8m) for standards.



■ **Cordons:** Restricted forms grown as a single stem, often trained at a 45° angle, and closely spaced to grow several trees in a small area. They flourish on post and wire supports (*pic*), walls and fences. Double stemmed, U-shaped cordons are also widely available.



■ **Fans:** Here, the apple tree's branches are trained and pruned to radiate out on either side of the central stem, and are attached to wires. Fans can be trained on free-standing posts and wires, or a fence or wall. This is a great space saver for small gardens.



■ **Espalier:** This consists of a central stem with horizontal arms set about 18in (45cm) apart. An espalier can be grown on free-standing posts and wires, or on a wall or fence. Although productive, these trees take longer to reach maturity than cordons.



■ **Step-overs:** This could be called a 'horizontal cordon' – it's a highly decorative tree form, making an unusual and productive edging to a path or bed and picking is made easy. The tree is trained on a single wire 18in (45cm) from the ground so that the tree forms a low barrier.

Supporting

WITH ANY of the trained forms of apple tree it is important to regularly tie in growths throughout the growing season. If you do not do this, the shape of the tree is soon lost and, in time, will be difficult to re-establish. At the same time as tying in, cut away any wayward growth.



Flowering time & varieties

ALTHOUGH MANY varieties of dessert (eating) apples produced these days are self-fertile, most of the tried and trusted (ie older) varieties are self-infertile, which means they will not set a good crop without another 'pollinator' tree nearby. Bees then buzz to and fro, between the trees, fertilising the flowers as they go. That's why apple varieties are divided into seven groups according to when they flower:

- **Group 1** – very early
- **Group 2** – early
- **Group 3 and 4** – mid-season
- **Group 5 and 6** – late
- **Group 7** – very late

For best pollination, and therefore good fruiting, select two or more varieties from the same group. It is possible to choose an apple from the group above or below and still achieve satisfactory results. Where there is only room for one tree, look out for 'self fertile' on labels. My recommended varieties below are listed according to their flowering groups, and I've chosen those just from groups 2, 3 and 4 as this represents more than 95 per cent of the total number of apple varieties available.

Group 2:

- **'Alkmene'** (*right*) – aromatic and like a 'Cox's Orange Pippin'
- **'Egremont Russet'** – a good old variety with a nutty, russet flavour
- **'Idared'** – firm, crisp and juicy with a fine flavour
- **'Lord Lambourne'** – sweet flavour and scab-resistant



Group 3:

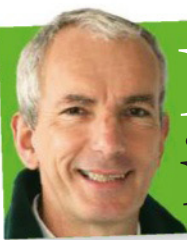
- **'Discovery'** (*left*) – good flavour, crisp, juicy and sweet
- **'Greensleeves'** – crisp, juicy and with a very good flavour
- **'Kidd's Orange Red'** – rich, aromatic flavour
- **'Sunset'** – compact and reliable; fruits have a Cox-like flavour



Group 4:

- **'Ashmead's Kernel'** – excellent fruit, firm and aromatic
- **'Ellison's Orange'** – hardy, reliable and with fruits that have a slight aniseed flavour
- **'Pixie'** (*above*) – juicy and aromatic
- **'Winston'** – firm with a good flavour





Fruit & Veg in containers

Courgettes

Good sun and good soil are essential for success with the squash family, says **Tim**

AS MEMBERS of the vigorous squash family, I expected courgettes to be easy to grow in pots. My first attempt in 2012 resulted in a crop of about half a dozen tiny fruits, each 2in (5cm) long from two plants! Thanks to the gloomy summer weather the plants never got growing.

This year was better, but still not a patch on the huge crops I used to get from plants in the deep, rich soil of my allotment. These open soil beasts could crop for six weeks. My potted plants this year gave two modest flushes of reasonable sized fruits, then collapsed.

I can only assume vigorous squashes don't like growing in containers. The position of my pots on the side drive, which is bright but only gets a couple of hours sunshine each day, may have been a factor.

I start in mid April (if you live in the Midlands or the north, start in late April) by sowing seeds singly in small 3in (7cm) pots filled with multipurpose compost. Water the compost then push a seed about half an inch below the surface and cover it with a sprinkling of compost or vermiculite. Pop the pots in a heated propagator, or in clear plastic bags on a warm windowsill indoors.

As soon as the seeds germinate, remove the bags or ventilate the propagator.

Grow the plants on in warm conditions and good, bright light, potting on if necessary into slightly larger pots. After hardening off, plant them out at the end of May (or when frosts have finished) into big containers (20 litres or bigger) filled with multipurpose compost enriched with garden compost or well rotted manure.

Position the pots in a sunny spot that's sheltered from wind. Water plants regularly, but avoid saturating the compost. Push short canes into the compost between the paddle-like leaves to stop them being blown around in strong winds. As plants are outdoors the bees and hover flies should do

all the necessary pollination. But if they're in short supply, snap off a male flower, peel back the petals, and tickle it inside the female flower (which has a fruit swelling behind it) to ensure fertilisation.

After six weeks, feed plants once a week with a general liquid fertiliser such as Miracle Gro or Phostrogen.

Pick fruits as soon as they're big enough – 6-8in (15-20cm) is about right. Check plants every day once fruiting starts. Unpicked courgettes turn into marrows, then cropping stops.



Courgettes on the allotment (above) crop for weeks but green 'Alfresco' and yellow 'Sunstripe' I grew in pots (left) gave a more modest harvest



"The squash family don't really like growing in containers"

Position the pots in a sunny spot that's sheltered from wind.

Water plants regularly, but avoid saturating the compost. Push short canes into the compost between the paddle-like leaves to stop them being blown around in strong winds.

As plants are outdoors the bees and hover flies should do

Step by step

Sowing Courgette seeds



Fill small pots with multipurpose compost in April, water, press one seed into the surface of each



Cover the seeds with a sprinkling of dry compost, or vermiculite, and label the pots



Place the pots in a heated propagator, or in a clear plastic bag on a warm windowsill



In late May harden off sturdy young plants and set each one in a large pot filled with good compost



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Ask our experts



ANNA TOEMAN
has 15 years' experience
working in historic gardens



DR JANE BINGHAM
has a plant science PhD
and a MSc in plant ecology



JOHN NEGUS
trained at the RHS and is
a specialist garden writer



Wisteria cuttings

Q “We’re moving, and leaving my wonderful old wisteria climbing on our current house. Can I take cuttings from it and grow these on at the new house?”

*Eileen Beckman,
Nottingham*

A Most modern wisterias are grafted onto vigorous rootstocks, but yes, you can. For now, take root cuttings using pencil-thick roots $\frac{3}{4}$ -1½ in (20-35mm) long, inserted in pots of cuttings compost so that they are just covered. They do best in a heated propagator, but a kitchen windowsill could work well. Keep the compost moist. Don't move them until the roots have developed, then pot up singly.

If you are still in your current property in the spring you could take softwood cuttings – of young, new shoots with closely spaced nodes. Cuttings should be 2½-3in (60-75mm) long, and rooted in individual pots of cuttings compost.

Anna Toeman

Q “My lawn is in a very sad state, with bare patches and sparse growth. There are also lots of holes (dug by badgers), and I’ve been told that they were searching for lawn chafer grubs. Could this be true?”

Stuart Dawes, Edinburgh

A It is quite likely. You can check this by lifting a patch of dead or dying grass. If these grubs (pictured above) are the cause of the problem, control them with Bayer Provado Lawn Grub Killer. But note that since September this product has been banned for sale, and gardeners may only use it legally until 30 November 2013;

after this time it will be illegal to use it. Any remaining samples of the product should be taken to a manned local authority household waste site where they should be handed over to the staff.

You can also buy nematodes, stocked by many garden centres, or online. This biological control comprises microscopic creatures that attack the chafer grub larvae by infecting them with a fatal disease. The nematodes can be watered onto the lawn – but the best time to do this is during the summer to early autumn when the ground is moist and soil temperature between 12-20°C (55-68°F).

John Negus



Q “My thorny quince bush produces scarlet flowers and loads of fruit – but the fruits are round and small. Are they edible, or is my quince purely ornamental?”

Joan Church, Bedale, N. Yorks

A It sounds as though yours is *Chaenomeles japonica*, the ornamental quince. This is a vigorous, very thorny, deciduous shrub with beautiful clusters of 5-petalled, cup-shaped orange or red flowers in spring. The small fruits are yellow or yellow-red, quite round, aromatic, and tasty

only when softened by cooking and made into jelly or jam.

The true, or fruiting, quince is *Cydonia oblonga*, usually grown as a thornless tree. The big fruits, which are the ones sold in shops occasionally, are golden, aromatic, edible, and slightly pear-shaped.

Dr Jane Bingham

AG Expert



tip of the week...

SAINTPAULIA SPLITTING

“Jill Norman from Fyfe rang to say that her African violet has not flowered this year, and there are clusters of small leaves in the centre. I think the clump is congested, so told her to tap the plant out and, with a knife, carefully tease it into individual leaf rosettes, each with a piece of root. Each should then be set singly in a small pot of loam-based ericaceous compost. When established, flower buds should appear.”

Q “My phyllostachys bamboo clump is spreading across the garden. How can I halt its progress?”

Ashleigh Macken, Portsmouth

A Certain bamboo types have invasive root systems that spread horizontally through the soil, sending up shoots that form into new clumps. Although phyllostachys is not amongst the most invasive, in mild, damp parts of the country, established plants can break out of their usual clump-like nature, and become invasive. These are best grown in a large pot, or in the ground confined within a rigid barrier.

Manually digging out the



unwanted stems and their runners is one way to halt an established bamboo. Or install a rigid barrier as mentioned above.

To eradicate the whole plant use a herbicide containing glyphosate (such as Roundup). This travels through the plant killing all of it. But take care not to get the chemical on other plants nearby, as it will kill them too.

Dr Jane Bingham

Christine Walkden's problem solver



Ian Meen

Wounded cherry

Q “I am sending a photo of a ‘hole’ in the trunk of one of our cherry trees. My Mum is concerned that it may lead to the tree falling down. Is she right?”

Ian Meen, via email

A The photograph you have sent shows a trunk with a very large wound, probably the site of a branch, which may have been torn off at some stage in the past resulting in a wound which appears to be infected with bacterial canker.

This is a very large wound and I am surprised you have not mentioned that the tree is looking unhealthy or stunted, or that there are any leaf

symptoms, such as yellowing.

It may be possible to cut out the wound back to healthy wood and see if it heals over naturally; a good tree surgeon may be the best person to tackle this.

This wound will certainly weaken the tree and, with time, may result in it falling over or breaking in a storm. This really depends on how healthy or otherwise the tree is, and if this is the only infected wound present.

facebook Live

Rebecca Steliaros Any ideas of how to get rid of pigeons? We are fortunate to have lots of trees in a town plot so they just love to roost up there.

John Negus Pigeons can be a menace. One of the best ways to deter them is to frighten them by attaching an imitation hawk to a long pole, which moves in the wind.

Check in to AG on Facebook to find out when the next weekly live Q&A session will take place - normally Thursday evening or Friday Morning

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Amateur Gardening

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Anne Swithbank is a regular panellist on *Gardeners' Question Time*

The Family Gardener

Mix and match colours

It's time for **Anne** to get creative with her colour choice of tulip varieties



DEEP DOWN

I'm planting tulips into the exotic border. As it has been recently cultivated, I'm having no trouble digging deep planting holes with my trowel. (Inset) Place the tulip bulbs where you want them first and then plant 6in (15cm) deep

Photographs by John Swithbank

NOVEMBER IS the best month for tulip planting, so I bought glowing, cherry-red 'National Velvet' and the fabulous 'Flaming Spring Green'. Their flowering time is similar, so we mixed them together and planted them through the exotic border.

In retrospect, it might have been wiser to buy one of the blends of bulbs put together by suppliers to bloom reliably at the same time but I quite like the surprise element of my homemade mixture. Other spring flowering bulbs such as narcissus, hyacinth and chionodoxa are best planted as

“Every time I went in or out of my office, they rose in great numbers”

early as possible during September or October, so they can put down good roots but tulips respond better to a later planting. They are generally less eager to make an early start and the onset of colder weather helps them resist virus and fungal diseases.

For tulip planting, soil should be well-cultivated so that digging their deep planting holes is not too much of a struggle. I like to see a good 6in (15cm) of soil above the bulb to give it the best chance of stabilising and flowering again in the following year.

Fluttering by

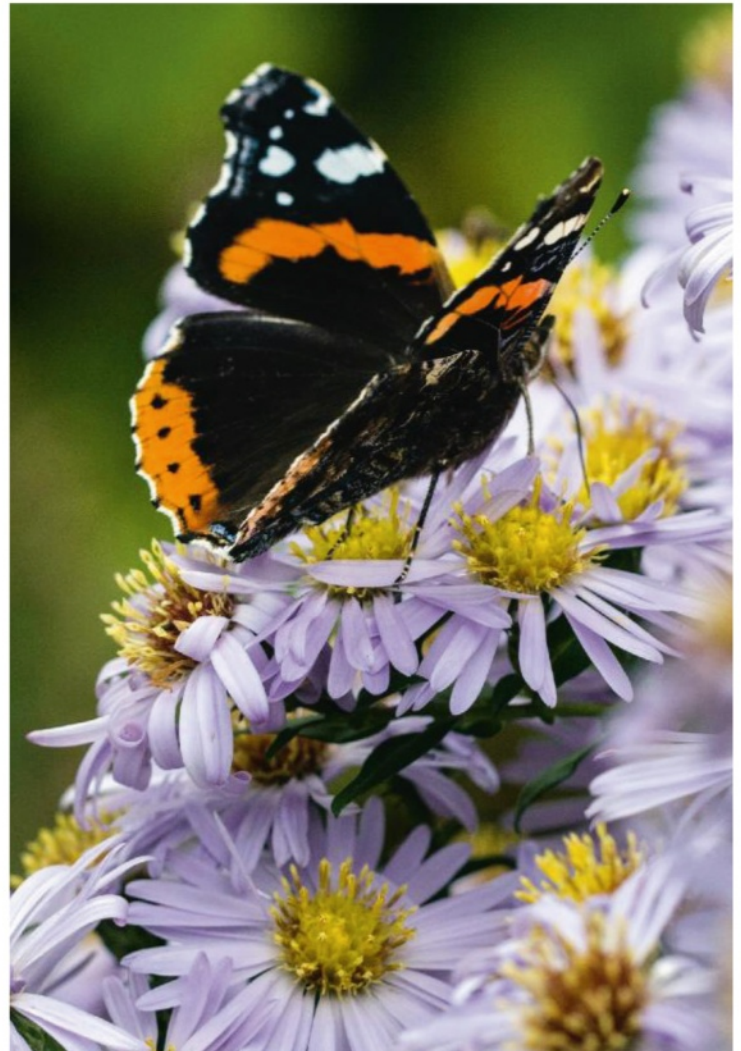
Butterflies did well this summer and we enjoyed a last fluttering of red admirals taking nectar from Michaelmas daisy flowers in the garden. Every time I went in or out of my office, they rose in great numbers. A combination of nettles sited in the sun (for

laying eggs), a good summer and nectar rich flowers enabled them to thrive. This migratory species comes to our shores from Europe every year and can only hibernate successfully in Britain during mild winters.

Houseplants deserve some attention now, as temperatures fall, the evenings draw in and central heating is switched on more often. Go around them all removing dead leaves; feel the compost surface to see if it needs watering; and consider whether they are still growing actively or not. Growers will benefit from a general purpose liquid feed every month but those gone dormant should not be fed, as they won't know what to do with it.

Form a group

Positioning is vital and some plants might need moving closer to natural light or away from radiators. The air is likely to be drier with the heating on, making plants like maidenhair fern more vulnerable to scorching. Move several plants into a group, to benefit from the moist micro-climate they create from leaves and compost. I enjoyed cleaning up my ferns, which had grown large in our frost-free porch. ▶



SEEING RED

A veritable cloud of red admirals has risen from the clump of Michaelmas daisies by my office doorway every time I go past

ANNE'S FERN CARE TIPS



CHECK-UP

*I spent time hunting out tiny slugs and snails on our *Asplenium bulbiferum**



TIDY UP

*The *Davallia mariesii*, which grows to 30in (75cm) across, needed dead fronds removing*



GROUP TOGETHER

Maidenhair fern will remain moist at the roots and around its fronds, when grouped with other plants

Anne Swithinbank is a regular panellist on *Gardeners' Question Time*

Anne's Kitchen Garden

The unruly kiwi gets it!

Anne acts decisively when two vigorous kiwi fruit plants get a bit out of hand

I KNEW the kiwi fruit was climbing up into a crab apple but had quietly turned a blind eye. Now, I've decided on a tidy up and want to bring the kiwi back to the parameters of the kitchen garden fence by pruning and tying it into submission. I made a few experimental cuts and tugs before deciding this was a bigger job than I

"We had no flowers at all and therefore no fruit"

imagined. *Actinidia deliciosa* is a twining thug of a climber and ours (they're a couple consisting of female 'Hayward' and male 'Tomuri') have made a thorough job of wrapping themselves around this tree. I'll have to go up a ladder and patiently prune out the stems but it will be worth it.

Missing fruit

Last year, we had several good fruits on the female kiwi 'Hayward' as it had enjoyed a wet summer and we'd removed a huge bay tree, which previously sucked all the moisture from the ground. This year we had no flowers at all and therefore no fruit. Whether this was from lack of pruning or simply a cold spring (the apricot failed to flower as

well and both are susceptible to frost) I don't know.

Once I've cut back or tied in the long climbing stems I shall shorten the leaders and prune all side shoots to shorter spurs, ready (hopefully) to produce flowering shoots. I have it in mind to plant a self-fertile variety around the south-facing front of our house, as fruits ripen better where exposed to prolonged spells of sunshine.

Garlic pots

Gardeners are famously stoic, and rather than be beaten by the onion white rot that is endemic in our garden I decided to try my hand at growing garlic in containers.

Plenty of other people have done this (mainly due to shortage of ground space) but



MAJOR WORK

Our runaway kiwi plants have scaled a nearby crab apple and need some radical pruning to bring them back under control

it is new to me. Full of enthusiasm I went shopping for fat bulbs of 'Germidour', a purple-streaked, soft neck variety promising mild flavour.

Next, I found two large pots 12in (30cm) across at the top and a smaller one at about 9in (23cm) and gave them a good wash. Normally, I'd use some garden soil and compost for

veg in containers but as ours is likely to be polluted with the resting bodies of white rot, I opted for new potting compost. Soon, I'd mixed 50:50 John Innes no 2 with a peat free multipurpose and some Cornish grit for improved drainage. After planting the cloves the pots were stood outdoors. ■

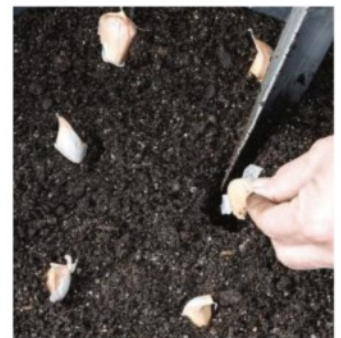
STEP BY STEP: PLANTING GARLIC



CLEAN POTS
Wash large pots to remove traces of soil that might harbour white rust spores



LOOSEN AND SEPARATE
Separate into individual cloves and loosen the papery tips to help shoots emerge



COMPOST AND POSITION
Use good potting compost to fill the pot. Set cloves 4in (10cm) apart and plant 1½in (4cm) deep.

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Peat composts: they're back

- PEAT CONTENT IN BAGS SET TO RISE IN 2014
- QUALITY OF COMPOST TIPPED TO IMPROVE

by Marc Rosenberg

SPECULATION IS rife in the horticulture industry that peat content in composts is to rise.

But manufacturers last week refused to say how much more peat will be packed into bags for the 2014 season.

Gardening pundit Peter Seabrook told *AG* that Ireland had a bumper peat harvest this year, leading to a plentiful supply of sphagnum moss peat for composts.

"There are big reserves of good quality dry peat," Peter explained.

"I don't think the price of compost will go down, because the cost of packaging and transport is going up.

"But I don't expect prices to rise either, while good

availability of peat should lead to a considerable improvement in overall quality of compost."

A summer of rain in 2012 led to a dismal peat harvest, prompting manufacturers to bulk up composts with alternatives such as bark and green waste.

Manufacturers also face pressure from environmental groups to cut peat.

Scotts Miracle-Gro confirmed that its Levington Original compost and Miracle-Gro

Potting Mix would

contain "slightly higher levels of peat". However, the company would not provide figures on peat content.

A spokesman said the firm "remained committed to long-term peat reduction in line with government targets".



The peat content of compost remains a hot topic in gardening

"There are big reserves of good quality dry peat"

He added: "The peat content of our composts is displayed on packs, allowing consumers to make an informed choice."

But compost giant Westland, which makes peat-free and

peat-reduced compost, as well as Jack's Magic, a traditional peat compost mix, denied that its overall peat use would rise.

Westland's head of technical development, David Coop, said: "In total, the amount of peat included in our complete range reduces year-by-year and we expect this to continue to be the case in 2014/15."



Cash incentives to cut peat use

THE GOVERNMENT has set aside £50,000 of cash in a bid to wean community gardeners off peat.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will stump up the funds while the Royal Horticultural Society will administer the scheme.

Nine RHS Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups will receive funding to help them increase their use of peat-reduced and peat-free growing media – as part of the Sustainable Horticulture in Partnership Scheme.

Britain in Bloom is the UK's largest community gardening contest, involving

over 300,000 people. RHS principal scientist Dr Paul Alexander said: "The interest confirms our belief that there is a real willingness to embrace peat-reduced and peat-free growing media."

For example, friends of Evington in Bloom gained a grant of £2,000 for a two-year project to use a growing medium based on composted bark and coir – to grow plants from seeds and cuttings in home greenhouses.

The RHS said no formal monitoring of growing media use was planned.

Participants will "provide feedback on the progress of their projects".



TOP OF THE CROPS

Veg grower Sherie Plumb of Essex won a best-in-show award at last month's RHS London Flower Show. AG's Peter Seabrook praised Sherie's "stunning" veg exhibit.

GARDENERS' QUESTION TIME

CHRIS BEARDSHAW, Bunny Guinness and Pippa Greenwood join chairman Eric Robson in Tilsworth, Bedfordshire. Tune in to BBC Radio 4 at 3pm on Sunday 1 November (repeated at 2pm on 3 November)

BBC RADIO

4

Grower breeds coloured caulis!

THE FUTURE is about to become a lot brighter for the humble cauliflower.

Grower Andrew Burgess has revolutionised the veg plot staple by turning caulis purple, green and orange.

The 48 year-old is on a mission to improve our diets by making veg interesting.

He has set aside a tiny patch of the 15,000 acres he farms to experiment with weird and wonderful veg.

Hand-pollinated

Andrew's 'rainbow' caulis are the result of years of breeding using old varieties which are hand pollinated. And they are organic, too. No genetic modification has been carried out.

As well as brightening up dishes, Andrew said his multi-coloured caulis are healthier than regular ones.

The purple variety 'Graffiti' is packed with antioxidants while the orange type called 'Ortoli' contains carotene, which encourages healthy skin.

The green variety 'Vitaverde' is a hybrid



Rainbow caulis: Andrew's novelty vegetables are organic

cauliflower with similar features to broccoli.

Andrew, who is director

"The orange ones have a nutty flavour"

of agriculture at Produce World in Peterborough, said: "We started off growing the coloured

cauliflowers for show.

"The purple and the green varieties tasted like normal cauliflower but we found the orange ones have a nutty flavour."

Andrew hopes orange caulis could be on store shelves "in the near future".

He added: "One idea we had was to sell the caulis ready floreted – perhaps as a mixed colour bag."

Bid to save UK's historic pears

THE FIGHT is on to save the nation's historic pears.

The National Heritage Pear Project is to be launched at RHS Garden

Harlow Carr in Harrogate on 16 November.

It aims to locate, identify and conserve surviving heritage pears.

There are many English varieties of apples but most pears originate from the Continent. Many were brought over during the 17th century.

Apple trees have a life of about 150 years but pears can live for 400 years. A lot of trees are now coming to the end of their lives.

Simon Clark, secretary of the Northern Fruit Group said: "There are lovely old trees but they are dying. If they are worth preserving they can be saved; if not grafts need to be taken."

One pear enthusiast has 50 varieties propagated from old trees, growing on his allotment.

If anyone has an old pear and needs advice, or wants to attend the launch, call Simon Clark on ☎ (0113) 266 2456 for details.



A bloomin' good week for...



Plant collections

A new national collection of eucomis has been announced by Plant Heritage. The status was awarded to Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, a National Trust property which has grown hardy eucomis since 1985. Spokesman Ian Hunt said: "We were keen to fulfil the Trust's remit of plant conservation, and establishing a collection seemed the right thing to do."

☎ nationaltrust.org.uk/hardwick for details.

A bloomin' bad week for...



Controlling slugs

Gardeners are being urged to help track the spread of Spanish slugs. The pests, which can lay up to 400 eggs each, feast on crops, dead animals, excrement and cannibalise their own species. While the bright-orange to rusty-brown slugs (*Arion vulgaris*) have slowed down for this year, experts fear they could be a big problem next season. Go to ☎ slugwatch.co.uk to report sightings.

Hardy Gardenia Trio

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Sturdy, easy grower that will withstand British winters

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Gardenia jasminoides 'Crown Jewel'

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PLANT HEALTH

The RHS has named Gerard Clover (left) as its first principal scientist for plant health. His mission will be to help gardeners identify and control plant pests – and to tackle new threats to gardens and trees.

Pumpkin is a record-breaker

HE'S DONE it! Young veg fanatic Mark Baggs has grown the UK's heaviest pumpkin.

Mark, 30, from Dorset, tipped the scales with a 1,520lb (689kg) bruiser at last month's Autumn Pumpkin Festival in Southampton.

His pumpkin beat the previous record, set by Ian and Stuart Paton of Hampshire, by 16lb (7.3kg).

Oversized veg

Mark, a dairy farmer, said his interest in growing pumpkins began while he was at school.

But it wasn't until a visit to the National Amateur Gardening Show at Shepton Mallet in 2004, where Mark was wowed by oversized veg at the show's National Giant Vegetables Championship, that he was inspired to grow record-breaking whoppers.

"I had almost daily contact with growers in the US and elsewhere," said Mark.

"People were getting in touch via [internet] message



Mark (right) with pumpkin and prize from T&M's Sarah Curtis

"People were getting in touch via the internet"

boards and by email with tips and advice. After the weigh-in they sent congratulations."

The prize-winning specimen grown by Mark was nurtured from seed of a German giant pumpkin that weighed 1,391lb (631kg).



Prize sponsor Thompson & Morgan handed Mark a cheque for £1,000. T&M horticultural director Paul Hansord said: "We're absolutely thrilled to have found a record-breaker."

Garden honours late rose experts

A FAMILY nursery hit by a string of tragedies is to redevelop its rose gardens.

Peter Beales Roses at Attleborough in Norfolk is

planning a memorial garden as a tribute to founder Peter Beales (circled), his wife Joan and daughter Amanda – all of whom died

within a few months of each other during the last year.

Richard Beales, the surviving son and managing director, said: "I want to create a lasting, living

tribute to my parents and sister. It will acknowledge their lifetime legacy of

developing and introducing so many delightful roses."

Developments at the gardens include a pergola, rose walkway and

modern roses as well as old-fashioned classics.

The redevelopment should be complete by Christmas. Most parts of the gardens remain open to the public.



Grow organic, says celebrity chef Raymond

CELEBRITY CHEF Raymond Blanc says more communities should grow organic food.

Raymond, owner of the two Michelin-starred Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons in Oxfordshire, said community plots could help ease hardship for families in deprived urban communities.

Frenchman Raymond explained: "Many children in Britain are going to school hungry because families can't afford supermarket food."

Raymond (below) spoke to coincide with the RHS Britain in Bloom award ceremony in Cleethorpes on 12 October.

He added: "There are great examples of Bloom groups like 2013 finalist The Meadows in Nottingham – where residents took charge of a fly-tipping site and turned it into an organic farm serving 7,000 locals."



RHS chief horticultural advisor Guy Barter said more home-grown produce was the key to cutting food waste.

Guy said: "We waste an unbelievable amount. Latest figures suggest around 15million tons of food a year gets thrown out – and 50 per cent of this comes from our own households."

He added: "People will be less inclined to discard produce that has been grown in their own backyard."

Know your grasses

Briza media (Quaking grass)

Lovely dainty lockets; looks great in the garden, or dried

THE ONLY one of three familiar quaking grasses that is perennial – although short-lived. Every whisper of wind flutters the dainty triangular lockets on their fine wiry stems. Purple-tinted at first, they mature and dry to a pale sandy shade and remain intact until spring, when they finally start to break up. Lovely in gravel and in dried arrangements for winter. ‘Limouzi’ has blue-tinted leaves. 12-18in (30-45cm)

How to grow

Best in full sun, in soil that is not wet.

Supplier

Knoll Gardens

🌐 knollgardens.co.uk

☎ 01202 873931

Splendour *in the grass*

WordMags.net

The fifth largest plant group in the world, the grass family contains a mind-boggling array of species. **Graham Rice** takes a look at 10 of our best – and worst – fronds

WITH MORE than 10,000 species spread around the world – from the hottest to the coldest places, dry tundra to swamps – the sheer diversity of grasses is, quite simply, incredible.

They range in height from lawn grasses to towering perennials – the smallest to the largest of non-woody plants – and have an extraordinary variety of uses. From lawns and golf greens to cereal crops and other edibles; from thatch to sugar and biomass and ethanol production; brewing

“ The diversity of grasses is, quite simply, incredible ”

to scaffolding and flooring – even making reeds for woodwind instruments – grasses have it covered. Not that it's all good. Some of the most intractable agricultural and garden weeds, and invasive plants are grasses. However sedges and rushes, although related, are not.

If it is ornamentals you want you can choose between annuals or perennials – deciduous or evergreen – ranging from ground cover to bold specimens, grown for flowers, foliage or both. Some are extremely hardy, others are summer container or conservatory plants; some remain in tight clumps, others spread strongly. Most are easy to propagate – so take your pick. ■

Hordeum vulgare (Barley)

For brewing, juicing or drying

BARLEY IS cultivated on a huge scale as animal feed, as well as for use in brewing and distilling. Some gardeners grow it as a dried flower or, increasingly, as a healthy food source. It can be added to winter soups, while juice from the leaves is said to contain eight times the vitamin C of oranges and 30 times the vitamin B1 of cow's milk. 6in-3ft 3½in (15cm-1m)

How to grow

For juicing, barley can be grown in a tray on the windowsill, or in the greenhouse.

Supplier

Brow Farm

📍 browfarmonlinestore.co.uk

☎ 01704 821232



Miscanthus x giganteus (Giant miscanthus)

Biofuel crop and garden screen

REACHING OVER 11ft (3.5m) in height (but without the spreading rhizomes of one of its parents, and so not invasive), this imposing specimen makes an effective screen in large gardens. Selected cultivars are now grown commercially for biomass energy production, providing a valuable renewable fuel source or blighting the landscape – depending on your viewpoint. 8ft 2in-11ft 6in (2.5-3.5m)

How to grow

Happy in any open position in most soils. Cut back to the ground in spring every two or three years.

Supplier

Coblands 📍 coblands.co.uk ☎ 01732 350517



Saccharum officinarum (Sugar cane)

Widely grown as food for animals – and us

THE ORIGINAL source of natural sugar in the tropics, the stems of this huge plant (related to *Miscanthus*) are refined into cane sugar and ethanol, the waste product used as animal feed. The strongest concentration of sucrose is in the portions of stems between the nodes. More land is used for sugar cane than for any other crop.

How to grow

Purple-leaved var. *violaceum* will grow outside in summer; others need a conservatory.

Supplier

Jungle Seeds 📍 jungleseeds.com ☎ 01491 614765



TRY IT

Letting a patch of lawn grass grow slightly longer is good for wildlife, providing a moist, sheltered 'mini jungle' for caterpillars, grasshoppers and beetles



Elymus repens (Couch grass)

Public enemy number one for many of us

ONE OF the most hated plants in the garden – and one we'd all wish we didn't have – couch grass is the weed that just keeps coming back. If you ever see it flower then your garden really must be a mess, although it is not usually seed that spreads but the white rhizomes, which can easily take over. Dried, these rhizomes are used by herbalists. 12in (30cm)

Getting rid of it

Dig out carefully by hand – then repeat the process. Or use a glyphosate weedkiller such as Scotts Tumbleweed.

Supplier

Glyphosate weedkillers are available to buy at all good garden centres.

Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola' (Variegated hakone grass)

Neat, elegant clumps of attractive foliage

ONE OF the loveliest of ornamental grasses, it offers something all year – from the vertical yellow slivers that emerge in spring to the cascading fountain of summer foliage, the red-tinted autumn colour and biscuit brown winter look that follows. It makes a lovely plant at the front of the border – with blue-leaved hosta perhaps – and matures into a spectacular container specimen. Best left undivided for many years. 13½ in (35cm)

How to grow

Likes sun or partial shade, and soil that does not dry out.

Supplier

Hoecroft Plants
hoecroft.co.uk,
01362 684206



Agrostis capillaris (Browntop bent)

The best grass for a fine finish

THE SORT of lawn you're after – be it hard-wearing or luxury – will determine the seed mix you choose. Luxury lawns and golf greens contain a high proportion of fine-leaved varieties such as browntop bent and red fescue, while a general-purpose lawn that is likely to receive a lot of wear and tear will have tough-leaved ryegrass in the mix.

How to grow

Full sun gives best results, but it will also thrive in light or partial shade.

Supplier

Johnsons Lawn Seed Luxury Mix
johnsonslawnseed.com
01386 791113

Zea mays (corn)

A highly versatile grass

ANOTHER MULTI-use species, many veg gardeners grow fresh corn cobs (the flavour is best straight from the plant), while dried corn is used as animal feed. Varieties are grown for ethanol production and many of those intended for large-scale agricultural use are genetically modified. There are also ornamental forms including 'Field of Dreams', which has two-tone foliage and looks good in summer containers. 6ft 7in (2m)

How to grow

For cobs, sow indoors and plant in a sunny site after the last frost.

Supplier

Marshalls Seeds

📍 marshalls-seeds.co.uk

☎ 0844 557 6700



Cortaderia fulvida

Large and dramatic flowering perennial

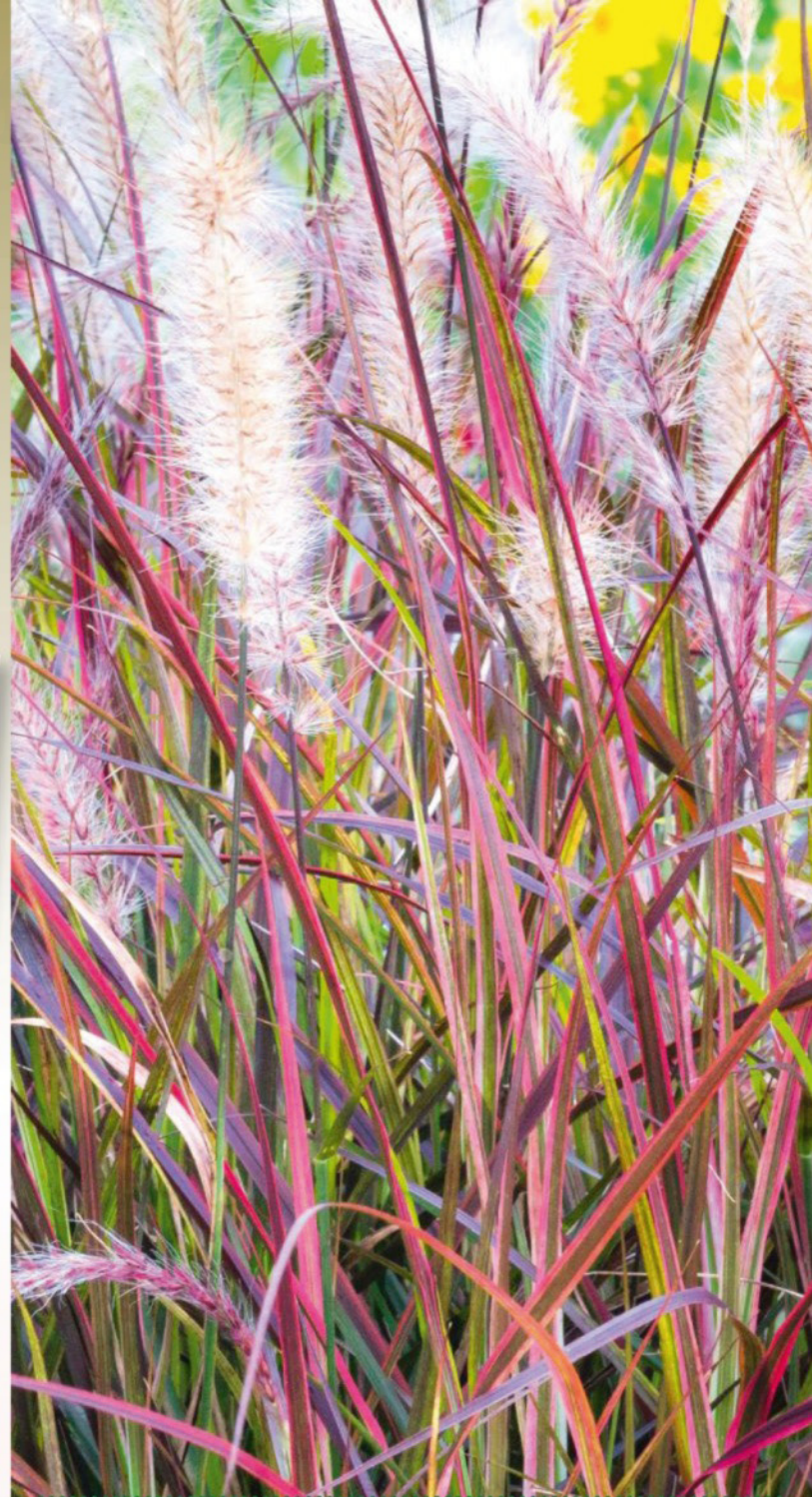
IN LARGE gardens this clump-former with its elegant, arching, one-sided plumes – opening in gold-tinted cream and aging to pink or cream – makes a real statement. Plumes open in July and, unlike many cortaderias, look lovely well into the new year. The silvery colour of the ridged leaves flickers in the wind. 6ft (1m 82cm)

How to grow

Best in a sunny, open space, in soil that does not dry out.

Supplier

Cottage Garden Flowers 📍 cgf.net ☎ 01386 422829



Pennisetum x advena 'Fireworks' (Fountain grass)

Stunning foliage plant for summer containers

THE MOST colourful of container grasses, each long, slender arching leaf features a central purple stripe edged with vivid pink. Growth in the middle of the plant, and in shady situations, may tone down to green and cream, but in full sun this looks startling, especially with coloured foliage forms of *Ipomoea*. Reddish bottle-brush plumes open in late summer. 2ft-2ft in (60-75cm)

How to grow it

Not hardy, but an ideal choice for exotic summer containers. Keep in full sun for the best colour.

Supplier

Crowders 📍 crowders.co.uk ☎ 01507 528602



Horticultural expert and former Gardener's World TV presenter

The Classic Gardener

Peter Seabrook

Mum's are wonderful!

Peter reviews the year for chrysanthemums, and looks at what to do now with them

CHRYSANTHEMUMS HAVE been a great success this year. Like many crops on the vegetable plot, chrysanthemums have benefited from the summer rain, and developed nicely in warm September weather.

Earlier this year I put down a length of galvanised pig netting

“Cuttings must be from the new spring growth”

over a patch of well-cultivated soil, and then planted rooted chrysanthemum cuttings through it. The netting was lifted and supported by wooden stakes as the cuttings grew, and that was all the support they needed, even though some stems reached close on 4ft (1.2m) high.

I have used plastic pea and bean netting for this support in the past. It works equally well,

except the thin plastic gets caught in clothes, and buttons, and if you are not careful it can tear foliage as it is lifted.

Several people expressed the comment that chrysanthemums “are a lot of work.” But, in practice, they are easy to grow especially if you choose the spray type.

Preparation must now be made for next year, by saving the best, healthiest plants, all carefully labelled. Each one, once all the flowers have finished, will be lifted; the main stem will be cut back to 4in (10cm) or so, and any old leaves stripped off.

A careful watch will be kept for any sign of chrysanthemum eelworm; the symptoms for this pest are brown to black areas between the veins on leaves, and growth dying from the base up. Check by tearing affected leaves into small pieces and leaving in a narrow glass jar of water for half an hour. Where present, the eelworms will transfer from the foliage and



Chrysanthemums were good this year, enjoying summer warmth and rain

accumulate in a wriggling mass at the bottom of the glass.

You can clean off infected cherished plants by washing off all the soil, and immersing in hot water – 46°C (115°F) for five minutes, or at 43.5°C (110°F) for 20-30 minutes. These temperatures are critical and as soon as treatment is complete the roots (or ‘stools’) must be plunged in cold water.

Both hot water-treated, and uninfected stools lifted from the soil, will be boxed up in potting compost in trays,

watered in and then placed in a cold frame for the winter. Last year my frames were full, and boxed stools were kept safely under sheets of glass propped against a south-facing wall.

New growth from these trays in early spring will provide cuttings for the next year's flowers. Note that these cuttings must be from the new spring growth; soft thinner stemmed cuttings root quickly and make better plants. Old, thick shoots that over-winter, are best cut back. ■

Peter's tips

Getting the best from chrysanthemums



The centre is taken out of old, thick chrysanthemum stools to encourage thinner new growth



Chrysanthemums set out through wire netting in June; growing tips are removed so more stems develop



Just sixteen weeks from planting, the chrysanthemum flowers open – and fill the plot with colour

9ft 2 1/4" REACH!

LONG REACH

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Hedge Trimmer

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Features: double safety switching and a clever 'double-fixing' padded shoulder strap for greater control and comfort. Manufactured to the highest CE/GS/TUV European Safety Standards with 1 year manufacturer's guarantee.



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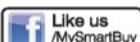


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Tried & tested

Fitted plant f

With frost threatening, Consumer editor **Julia Heaton** tests four



FROST CAN devastate young or tender plants, and many may not recover. Wrapping them up in a horticultural fleece will help to keep frost at bay. It'll also keep cold winds, snow and rain off while still allowing air and a degree of moisture through.

Plant fleeces are measured in grammes per square metre, and they tend to range from 17 to 30gsm (the higher the number, the greater the protection given). Fleece sheets or rolls are available from garden centres and online, but we opted to try out ready made tubes and bags for slipping over tender plants.

Most manufacturers claim these provide protection in temperatures down to -5°C (23°F), but this is a difficult judgement to make as survival also depends on the amount of moisture in the soil, whether the plant is in the ground or a container, and the length of time the plant is exposed to low temperatures.

Where plants are growing in pots, you can cover the pot with fleece as well, but be careful as this may stop rain from getting to the root area, so you would need to make regular watering checks.

Julia

JULIA HEATON
Consumer editor



£7.49

AGRALAN PLANT COSIES
(x2 pack)

Canberra Supplies

☎ 0844 5533 993

🌐 canberrasupplies.co.uk

BUILD ★★★★★

Well-made 30gsm fleece cosies, which are stitched along the base and up one side. Bag diameter: 31½ in (80cm); height 39in (1m).

FEATURES ★★★★★

A bright, light turquoise-green, so will certainly stand out in the winter garden. The maker says that they will give plants winter protection down to -6°C (21°F). Ties are not included.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

Went on easily. Obviously built to last given the strong stitching and machine washable instructions that came with it.

VALUE ★★★

Garden centres frequently set their own prices for this product, and there are few places online where it is in stock. Not the cheapest, but reasonable value for money considering the cost of plants that could be lost.



£6.95

P&P £4.95

BOSMERE FROST FLEECE TUBE
16ft x 2ft (5m X 60cm)

Marshalls Seeds

☎ 0844 557 6700

🌐 marshalls-seeds.co.uk

BUILD ★★★★★

There are three fleece tube diameters in the Bosmere range, all at 16ft (5m) long, and made from the thicker 30gsm fleece. We opted for the 2ft (60cm) diameter version.

FEATURES ★★★★★

Arguably the least obtrusive colour shade for the garden of any of those tested. Ties not provided.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

After cutting the tube to size the plant was threaded through and the tube tied top and bottom to give the best weather protection. Being able to cut the sleeve to length for each plant meant no material was wasted.

VALUE ★★★

May seem expensive on the face of it but being able to customise the tube to your plant gives it that extra versatility and makes for less waste in the long run.

Fleeces

For plant protection bags and tubes



15/20

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TUBE FLEECE
32ft 9in x 2ft 4in (10m X 75cm)
Gardening Naturally
0845 680 0296
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BUILD ★★

Just 17gsm, almost half that of the others tested. The manufacturers claim that this is sufficient to protect plants down to -2 to -3°C (28.4-26.6°F), so it would probably be OK for use during one of our less severe winters.

FEATURES ★★★

Because of its lesser thickness this rather conspicuous white fleece becomes partly see-through when stretched over a plant.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

As with the Bosmere tube this one needs to be cut to length and the plant threaded through. Being a thinner fleece, tying the top and base together tightly with string may give it some extra protection, compared to loosely knotting the fabric.

VALUE ★★★★★

A good value product considering the length and width of fleece supplied.



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VERVE FLEECE JACKETS (x3)
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BUILD ★★★★★

Three sturdy, close-weave fleece jackets (or inverted bags) made from 30gsm garden fleece. Each jacket is 2ft 10½in (88cm) across x 3ft 9in (110cm) tall.

FEATURES ★★★★★

This mid-green fleece comes with its own black easy-to-locate and hold drawstring, used to pull up and close around the base of the plant, or pot.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

Although light and airy, the jacket offered enough rigidity to remain proud of the majority of branches and leaves.

VALUE ★★★★★

Could be used for several years with the potential to save plants from winter cold many times over. At under £2, per jacket, this represents very good value for money.



new product

Triple C flowering plant food

LONG VALUED by gardeners, **comfrey tea** is the ultimate natural liquid fertiliser. Rich in potassium, it promotes the growth of flowers, fruits and seeds. However making this stinky brew can be a messy and time-consuming business (always assuming you have plenty of comfrey leaves to hand, of course). For an easy quick-fix solution these hessian bags, filled with comfrey leaves, are ideal. You simply tie the string of the bag to the handle of your watering can, then fill with 8-10 litres of water, making sure the bag is fully immersed. Steeping overnight should be enough to give you a nutrient-rich liquid fertiliser – although we reckon it might take a couple of days. Reassuringly, the bag and all packaging, with the exception of the staples, are biodegradable and compostible and each bag can be used daily for up to 30 days.



Old Mucker Triple C flowering plant food, £4.99 from elsieandfleur.co.uk

Pests rule OK... not!

LIKE TIM the Ed, I'm also a victim of the European Parliament's rulings (curse them!)

Lately I've been plagued with huge chafer grubs munching through the roots of my container plants. But when I asked at my local garden centre for something to kill them off, I was told that the only thing that was effective was Provado Lawn Grub Killer, which has now been taken off the market.

So what are we supposed to do to stop

these beasties destroying our plants? At this rate the pests will take over the world!

There's no shortage of bees and butterflies in my garden but that's only because of my containers of plants.

H Ashworth, Ash, Surrey

JENNY SAYS: Sadly the only product available now is a nematode which, although relatively effective, is an expensive option.

...the damage is caused by leatherjackets – the larvae of crane flies that lay their eggs in lawns. They've been particularly active this year. The larvae eat the

Lawn grub killer, but that was recently withdrawn, following a ruling by the European Parliament, because it contains the neonicotinoid imidacloprid, which may be harmful to bees. "...and if you don't close your mouth soon you might be un- enough to catch one," I ad- "I'm just surpris- quick as a flash." "... caused by you spilling over the grass when y much at our party las Have a great garden week.

Star LETTER



Tim
TIM RUMBALL
EDITOR



My sweet-toothed shed squatters

IN JULY this year bumblebees took up residence somewhere in the back of my shed. When the door was opened they would fly around our heads, but not aggressively, and fly back in under the door when it was closed.

They frequented our hollyhocks, lavender and lemon balm, and loved to drink from a dish of sugar water. They were quite large as you can see - the dish in the picture is five inches across.

They left (or died) about a month ago. I don't know much about their life-cycle but hope that some queens remain somewhere to start again in the spring.

Dave Hobson, Thatcham, Berks

JENNY SAYS: New queens and males leave the colony once they reach maturity. Away from the colony, they live off nectar and pollen and spend the night on flowers or in holes. The queens are eventually mated, often several times, after which they search for a suitable spot to hibernate.



Pretty in pink

MY GARDEN, like a lot of people's, is predominantly red and yellow in autumn as the leaves change colour, there are plenty of Rudbeckia blooms and red berries appear on the bushes.

The colours definitely suit the season but the plant I really like is the bright pink *Colchicum* 'Waterlily'. It pops up every year to surprise me. I know it doesn't fit in colourwise but that makes it all the more different and exciting. Colchicums suggest to me that spring has arrived even though it's actually autumn!

Lorna Atkins, Exeter, Devon

Reach for the sky

I THOUGHT you might like to see the five-flowered variegated Yucca I have in my tiny front garden. I've only ever had two flowers before so to have five this year has been great.

Even better, they were huge flowering stems that grew to the height of the top of my lounge window.

Kay Robinson, Guildford, Surrey



Knot a problem



WE HAD a lot of trouble with knotweed in our garden which made it very frustrating trying to grow things. In the end I made up a series of planters from decking wood to solve the problem.

Now we have pretty flowers to look at which we can change with the seasons, and no more weeds!

Kevin Morgan,
Witney, Oxon



Merry berries

NOW THAT autumn is here and there aren't so many flowers in our gardens, it's nice to have the brightness of berries to add a splash of colour. One of my favourite trees is the Rowan.

As the berries are also welcomed by our feathered friends and are a good source of food for them, they're doubly useful.

Rosemary Bennett, Sway, Hants



Alcohol and hot chillies don't mix

FURTHER TO my previous letter (AG 12 October), I thought I'd send you this sequel. My obsession with chillies meant that I grew 17 different varieties this year, many of which I gave away to friends.

However, one night my son Matthew and a friend returned from a night out having had a few drinks with their sense of responsibility somewhat impaired. On arriving home they decided to taste some of the "pretty chillies"! Suffice to say that afterwards they emptied the fridge of all the milk in order to cool their dose of chilli burn.

Pat Pinnell, Stroud, Glos

AG on facebook

Snippets from this week's posts



THESE ARE my busy Lizzies flowering in a trough and almost muscling out their fuchsia neighbours.

Martin Toward

I'VE HAD so much pleasure from my baskets this year. They've performed brilliantly.

Jayne McBride



HOME-GROWN pumpkin – yay!

Roy Julian

Readers' QUICKTIPS

STORE SMALL garden tools in a bucket of sand over winter to prevent rusting when they're not in use.

Russell Griffin, Bristol

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Garden notes

OWNERS Allan and Eirwen Evans

LOCATION 41 Victoria Drive, Llandudno Junction, Conwy, North Wales LL31 9PF

VISITED August

ASPECT East-facing to the front and west-facing to the back

SOIL Heavy clay, improved with compost

GARDEN SIZE 1/8th of an acre

SPECIAL FEATURES Curved front garden with naturalistic planting under an acacia tree. The back garden houses prize-winning dahlias and sweet peas, pots of vegetables and bright annuals, plus tomatoes and chrysanthemums under glass.



Keen to transform their urban garden in North Wales, Allan and Eirwen Evans have created a colourful plot, filled with prize-winning dahlias and sweet peas

PEEKING OVER the wall of number 41 Victoria Drive in Llandudno Junction, passers-by are treated to views of a large, sweeping bed of colourful perennials, tall shrubs and delicate annuals. Pots of bright bedding light up the doorways and lead the eye through to the back garden, where Allan and Eirwen Evans have made a little oasis, home to prize-winning dahlias, sweet peas and chrysanthemums.

According to Allan, when the couple bought the property

back in 1985 the garden was “a total mess”, and he recalls: “There were only two apple trees.” There was, however, an awful lot of bindweed, and that, along with heavy clay soil, a high water table and strong coastal winds meant that they had a tough task ahead. The previous owners had also kept a pony in the garage, allowing it free

reign in the tiny back garden, compacting the soil with its hooves. “We’ve had to work hard by adding compost to improve the structure and raising up the level of the beds for drainage”, explains Allan. “It’s been

“We’ve added compost to improve the structure”

■ BALLS OF COLOUR

Dahlia ‘Jomanda’ is a particular favourite of Allan’s and a great one for showing. A ball type, it has flower heads of tightly rolled orange florets that open out from the yellow centre and sit on beautifully long, straight stems.



g garden



■ NATURAL PROTECTION

Dahlias often attract slugs, yet Allan rarely uses chemicals on them. "We've got a lot of allies in frogs and hedgehogs", he explains. "We also scatter log burner ash and grit, which helps to keep them off."

◀ challenging, but worth it."

His dahlia and sweet pea growing started 12 years ago, and before long he was showing the results at local flower shows. Now the plants fill every possible space in the beautifully tilled beds, and the garage walls are covered, top to bottom, with certificates and rosettes from competitions – most notably the Royal Welsh Show. This year he is growing around 170 dahlias, including the scarlet 'Bishop of Llandaff' and the exotic-looking 'Weston Spanish Dancer', with its rounded, spiky, cactus flowers.

"I start the sweet peas off in October and the dahlias from tubers in January," Allan says. "Then I take cuttings from the dahlias and grow them on in the greenhouse." His cuttings are rooted in sharp sand, heated gently from below with an electric mat. "Lots of people grow dahlias in greenhouses," he adds. "But I find the colour gets bleached under glass, so I then plant them outside".

Eirwen's domain is the front

garden, and here she has created beautiful displays of oriental poppies, sown throughout the borders. With their striking shape the seedheads make an arresting sight. "I love them," she enthuses. "All the different textures. It's natural, it's a moving garden."

Both she and Allan are passionate about preserving Welsh plant heritage, not just the rolling Welsh names of the flowers but

the history of the people who grow them.

Keen to play his part and pass on what he has learnt, Allan has recently started judging local competitions and

giving talks on dahlias. "I

won't keep any secrets," he promises. "I don't want those skills to be lost, I want to pass them on to the next generation." It's a philosophy that shines through in this garden: a space to be enjoyed by others, in which prize-winning plants are cultivated, and from which the knowledge needed to grow them is passed on. ■

COME AND VISIT

Allan and Eirwen opened their garden during last August, raising £515 for NGS charities. For details of similar gardens open to the public see *The Yellow Book 2013*

YELLOW BOOK

news

"The *Yellow Book* is the perfect Christmas gift for a friend or relative who is a keen garden visitor," writes Chris Morley of the National Gardens Scheme. "A perennial favourite it provides detailed descriptions of thousands of gardens that open in aid of NGS charities."

"Ordering is straightforward. Simply visit our website ngs.org.uk and provide the name and address details of the person you are giving the gift to. We will then send you a *Yellow*

Book token along with a stylish presentation card wallet. Then in February, when *The Yellow Book* is published, we will post a copy of it direct to the recipient. The price of £9.99 includes the gift token, a copy of *The Yellow Book* and postage."

Full details of NGS gardens can be found in *The Yellow Book* or online at ngs.org.uk

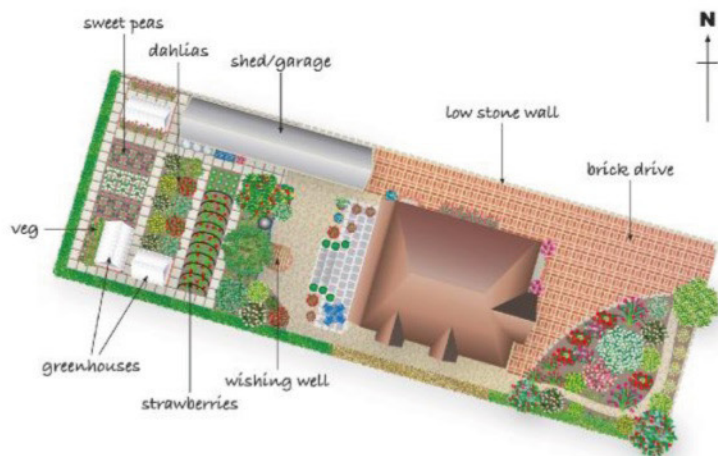


Illustration: Elizabeth Payne

■ HAND REARED

The back garden is home to several hundred dahlias, sweet peas and chrysanthemums, all reared by Allan from seed or cuttings. "I'm in the garden by 6am most days before work. But I enjoy it!"



IDEAS TO STEAL



1 PLANTED UP

Troughs are a lovely feature in any garden. Allan ensures a continuous splash of fresh colour on paths and paving by adding seasonal pots of different planting when blooms are at their best.



2 LONG-LASTING FLOWERS

Allan layers sweet peas when they reach the top of the canes, cutting down all the plants in the row, bar one at each end. These are then guided across the canes towards the opposite end, giving them new space to grow.



3 PICK OF THE CROP

Growing tomatoes under glass is a good way to get an early crop of fruits. Allan grows his in pots without bases, inserted into grow bags, and feeds twice a week with Tomorite for a good yield.

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Daylight robbery!

With dark evenings upon us, the race is on to get gardens tidied-up, says **Toby**

DAYLIGHT ROBBERY – that’s what it is when the clocks go back. Still, I suppose November has its compensations. Plants have slowed down and are going into dormancy, and I’m finally catching up and getting on top of keeping the borders tidy.

It’s in the greenhouse that my autumn-clearing is at its most methodical. I take as many plants outside as possible along with all the pots and half bags of compost. Once the benches are clear I brush and then hose them down along with the glass and greenhouse frame.

Just as we spend more time indoors when winter arrives so do garden pests, so a good clean-through not only rids the greenhouse of leaves ridden

with grey-mould but also drives out vine-weevil beetles and green-yellow cabbage-white butterfly pupae that like to cling to the undersides of greenhouse staging.

“Just as we spend more time indoors, so do garden pests”

Then I prune and preen the plants I want to over-winter before putting them back in the greenhouse.

The scented pelargoniums that spill from their pots get trimmed to stop them taking up too much space while



Scented pelargoniums have been trimmed to keep them compact while succulent echeveria have spent flowers and dry basal leaves removed

succulent echeveria have their spent flowers and dry basal leaves removed.

Tender fuchsias trowelled from the compost of summer hanging baskets and troughs are also worth keeping. I pot-up the roots into a snugly fitting container and give the tops a severe short-back-and-sides, removing all the foliage and snipping main stems back to short (4in) 10cm sprigs.

It’s drastic, but worth doing as when cut back hard and kept ticking over inside in just-moist compost they’ll come through the winter to give another summer of flowers.

If left un-pruned the foliage and flowers fall anyway when the weather really turns cold and not only rots but makes a mess of the freshly swept greenhouse.

Outdoors, I know many

gardeners put off autumn clearing for as long as possible but I’m one for getting stuck in and getting the job over and done with. I leave grasses and herbaceous plants that still stand tall and handsome.

But with everything else – sprawling cranesbills and the last knockings of summer bedding, I’m ruthless. I like to get tidying done early – partly because it means I can get the dry stuff on the bonfire planned for the weekend.

Also it creates somewhere to spread the ‘good-stuff’ harvested from the bottom of the compost bins before it gets buried beneath a mountain of spent leaves and stems.

Then with a chocolate-blanket of compost snuggling everything in for winter, you can stand back with a steaming mug in hand – and think: “Aah – a job well done”. ■



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