

Amateur Gardening



Perennials Special

- Right way to lift and store
- How to divide geraniums
- Increase plant numbers
- Ways to use compost



Stop slugs eating spuds!



Grow fragrant muscari



Dividing day lilies



Revitalise your rockery



Plug gaps with colour

Plant some late perennials

Time to collect seeds and save pounds

Toby Buckland shows you the best ways

Hardwood cuttings

Take now to prosper next year

Dazzling Dahlias

Back in fashion and lots of variety

Anne reveals the secret to growing beautiful Peruvian lilies



16 SEPTEMBER 2017



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"Dahlias astound me. One species producing such stunning variety. How beautiful and what a force of nature they are. Val Bourne unravels the dahlia enigma on page 30."
Garry Coward-Williams, Group Editor

Your Gardening Week



with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

Pepping up your tired perennials

These herbaceous border heroes need looking after now, says **Ruth**, to help them survive winter's hardships

AS the mainstay of most summer gardens, a lot hangs on the health of your herbaceous perennials.

Ours have been fantastic this year, with special mention going to the catmint, penstemons, echinaceas, hardy geraniums and *Verbena bonariensis*.

As early autumn continues its course, this week is an ideal time to take stock of your perennials, tidy them up, plant new ones and divide those that have outgrown their space.



Protect roots with a layer of mulch

throughout the growing season to keep them in shape and encourage prolonged flowering. Now, one of the largest ones requires dividing to keep it healthy.

If left alone, the heart of perennials often become woody or weak, and flowering performance falls off after a few years. Splitting plants

increases your collection for free and keeps plants strong.

Always discard any material that looks weak or diseased, and make sure that all the divisions you keep have strong sections of root attached.

If you can't re-plant the divisions immediately, wrap them in damp plastic or paper and store them somewhere cool for up to 48 hours.

Autumn is also the best time for checking the health of your plants, cutting back old foliage where appropriate and deadheading.

After doing so, mulch the plants well with well-rotted compost or manure. This acts as a slow-release feed and provides an insulating blanket to cocoon the roots during the winter.



Wrap roots in damp paper or plastic if you can't re-plant immediately



Dividing perennials will give you a greater number of small, healthy plants

“Increase plant numbers by simple division”

Hardy geraniums feature largely in our garden because they love its free-draining chalky soil.

They need regular cutting back

Step by step

How to divide a hardy geranium



1 Water the plant well to minimise its shock, keep the rootball hydrated and make it easier to dig up.



2 Using a fork, loosen the soil all the way around the plant, then carefully lever it from the ground.



3 Split the plant either with a sharp knife or spade blade, or by teasing the roots apart with your fingers.

Leave them alone: Don't cut back penstemons until after the frosts next spring. The greenery helps protect the crown of the plant from winter's cold.



TopTip

If your soil is heavy clay, delay planting until the spring. Improve its structure over the winter by adding grit and well-rotted compost or manure and letting the elements break it down.

Don't forget these important tasks



1 Remove dead foliage and flowers to create a tidy look and lessen the chance of storm damage, which can leave plants vulnerable to pests and disease.



2 Soil is still warm after summer and regularly dampened by showers, making this a good time for planting. Roots will develop through the winter, though you may need to protect any top-growth with mulch or a cloche in the worst weather.



4 Discard divisions that are damaged or have poor root systems. Re-plant the rest at the same depth as their roots.



5 Water the divisions well and add a layer of nutritious mulch to keep the soil hydrated and suppress weeds.



6 Using sharp, clean secateurs, cut off dead or damaged foliage and flowers to keep plants healthy and looking good.

Your Gardening Week



with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

Top Tip

Although most alpinists thrive in exposed and sunny positions, they can do well in light shade as long as you water them well at planting and continue to do so while they get established.



Get the best from alpine plants by keeping your rockery free of weeds

Get ahead with alpinists

Ruth tidies her rockery and adds some spring colour

OUR 'rockery' – I use inverted commas because it is basically a hastily-thrown together, inherited mish-mash of stones plonked above the patio – is one of the most neglected areas of the garden.

Plans for its renovation have been in the pipeline for ages, but never seem to reach the top of the 'to do' list so it only gets an occasional tidying up.

Autumn is a key time for rockery maintenance. Most alpine plants do best in the summer when the weather is warm and dry and their long, questing roots can spread far and wide to access all the moisture and nutrients they need.

Alpinists are tough plants, perfectly suited to the poor, thin soils and punishing climates of high altitudes.

However, they are not so well suited to our wet and sunless winters and often need extra care to keep them alive.

Start in autumn by weeding your rockery well and removing any dead or

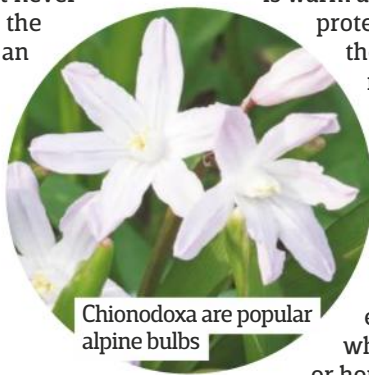
damaged plant material and flowers from your alpinists. Don't let fallen deciduous leaves smother them as they will collect moisture, cause rotting and harbour pests and disease.

Autumn is also a key time for adding to your collection of alpinists as the soil is warm and damp and if kept protected and pest-free there is time for their roots to develop before spring arrives.

Popular mat-forming alpinists include aubrietia, saxifrage, gentians and sedum. The herb creeping thyme is excellent ground cover, while sempervivum or houseleeks create

stunning cushions of rosettes and will tolerate almost everything the elements can throw at them.

Alternatively, plant alpine bulbs now. Crocus, snowdrops, Chionodoxa (or 'glory of the snow'), miniature daffs and tulips, *Iris reticulata*, muscari – you are spoilt for choice if you want to herald next spring with a fanfare of colour.



Chionodoxa are popular alpine bulbs

Two key jobs for healthy rockeries

Create a place for plants to thrive



1 Weeds are fierce competitors of low-growing alpinists, so dig them out before they get established.



2 A layer of gravel around plants raises them off the soil to reduce waterlogging and rotting, and also improves drainage.

The benefits of alpine bulbs

■ Alpine bulbs are sown in the same way as other bulbs – they should be planted at three times their own depth and a bulb's width apart.

■ Many of them are dwarf varieties and are also suited to being naturalised in lawn or planted under trees. Place them singly and watch them increase in number over time.

■ If your soil is heavy clay, improve its structure by digging in plenty of grit or well-rotted organic matter.

■ Bulbs planted in dense soil that is prone to holding on to water are at a greater risk of rotting and failing to thrive.



Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

Top Tip

You can take hardwood cuttings between now and spring. Those taken now usually do better as they have longer to develop strong roots.



The cuttings have strong root systems

Remove the cuttings after tapping gently around the pot. Try to keep the rootball intact

Using hard wood to make cuttings



Use healthy wood for cuttings

- For hardwood cuttings take a length of this year's healthy, hardened growth, approximately 12in (30cm) long.
- Cut it into sections around 4in (10cm) long. Make sure each piece has one end cut on a slant.
- Dip the end that was cut flat into hormone rooting powder and insert it into a pot of compost and perlite, or a trench of gritty soil.



Strike them in the ground or in pots

- Firm them in, water well, and keep them weed and pest free.

Potting-up your cuttings

Ruth moves her new soft fruit plants on to the next stage

LAST autumn I took several hardwood cuttings from a blackcurrant bush and now they are ready to move into larger pots.

I could plant them straight into the ground, but they should do better if they spend winter in pots of compost in a protected environment, such as the cold frame now and greenhouse later.

They will be planted out into their final positions next spring, when the frosts have passed.

Hardwood cuttings are taken in autumn, when plants are dormant and their wood has hardened off to withstand colder weather.

This is a relatively fail-safe way of increasing plant stocks, but you need to be patient – cuttings can take up to a year to take root. I struck mine in a 12in (30cm) pot of cuttings compost mixed with perlite, but you can also root cuttings in a trench in a sheltered area of the garden.

Step by step

Hardwood cuttings – the next stage



1 Water the cuttings so they slip easily from their pot, then carefully prise them apart, so you don't damage the roots.



2 Pop each cutting into a 5in (12cm) pot of multi-purpose or loamy compost (I am using John Innes No 2) and firm it in.



3 Water the cuttings well, making sure their compost is thoroughly dampened. Don't let it dry out over winter.



4 Place the cuttings in a cold frame, unheated greenhouse or in a sheltered corner of the garden. Plant them out next spring.

Your Gardening Week



with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

Top Tip

Stand plants in a bowl of water for a while before planting. This saturates the rootball and makes them easier to slide from their containers.

All Timepic

Perk up autumn borders with a mix of flowers

Fill bare expanses with late-flowering plants

Caring for plants in the ground

Remove dead and damaged plant material



■ Autumn-planted perennials need extra care and attention to keep them healthy and flowering for longer as the weather deteriorates.

■ Remove dead or damaged material when planting, so it can't provide an entry point for pests and disease.

■ Avoid placing plants too close together. They need space for airflow and proper growth to keep them robust and reduce the risk of fungal problems such as mildew.

■ Deadhead regularly, but at the end of the season it can be worth leaving some seedheads in place as they look attractive when covered in winter frost and provide food for garden birds and over-wintering insects.

Plug gaps with colour

Extend summer by filling holes in borders, says **Ruth**

LAST week I spent an afternoon deadheading and clearing weeds and spent bedding from a border in the back garden.

It looked immaculate afterwards – but also rather barren and empty in the areas between the shrubs and perennials planted for autumn interest.

So I popped down to our local weekly market and bought three late-flowering perennials on special offer (a sweet

William, a pink-and-white penstemon and a delicate pink gaura), plus a mixed tray of little hardy cyclamen.

As we live in the south and our garden is reasonably sheltered, these will hopefully flower for several weeks more.

The roots will develop through the winter so the plants put on a bigger and better display in future – and I won't need to worry about unsightly gaps when next summer's blaze of glory subsides.

Step by step

Keep deadheading spent flowers for longer blooming into the autumn



Create a splash in a mid-season hole

Finish by watering the plants well and adding a layer of well-rotted organic matter to hold in the moisture and feed the plants.



1 Place the larger plants on the soil in their pots until you get an arrangement you are happy with.



2 The holes need to be as deep as the plants' rootballs and slightly wider so the roots aren't cramped.



3 Remove the pots and tease out the roots. If any have matted under the containers, gently pull them apart.



4 When planting, make sure you in-fill around the plants properly and firm down the soil to give support.

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Your Gardening Week



with Peter Seabrook, AG's classic gardening expert

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Sweet pea 'Hi Scent'

Alamy

Colin Hambridge



Ballerina, and BBC TV *Strictly Come Dancing* judge, Darcey Bussell on the occasion of her sweet pea naming

More than a name...

Strictly speaking a name is just a starting point when deciding which sweet pea to grow says **Peter**

RUN your eye down the list of sweet pea varieties in seed catalogues and it is a veritable who's who, from 'Alan Titchmarsh' to the 'Tiller Girls', 'Princess Elizabeth' to 'Sue Pollard', 'Dusty Springfield', 'Geoff Hughes' and 'Darcey Bussell'.

Every year the gardening press gather at seed trial grounds to witness the naming ceremony for the latest sweet pea variety and recent personalities honoured at Mr Fothergill's naming's have included sweet peas 'Jimelda' (after Jim Carter and Imelda Staunton), 'Emilia Fox', 'Sir Henry Cecil' and this year 'Lady Salisbury'.

I have grown sweet peas as cordons for cut flowers for more years than I care to remember, the first requirement always being a strong fragrance. The variety 'Hi Scent' in white and tinged lavender is a must. Include this in a bunch and you will undoubtedly scent a room. I usually take a bunch in season into the *The Sun's* London office and recently a member of staff said: "I knew you were in today, I could smell your sweet peas in the lift!"

Next I like to see a good range of colours: 'Windsor' (nearly black); 'Charlie's Angel' (lavender); 'Mrs Bernard Jones' or 'Gwendoline' (both pink); 'Oxford Blue'; 'Princess Elizabeth' (salmon); 'Restormel' (red) and 'Royal Wedding' (white).

My aim is to have blooms to cut for Chelsea Flower Show in the third week of May and to this end seeds are sown direct in well-prepared soil the second

"I like to see a good range of colours"

week in October. Soil is trenched one spade's depth with well-rotted manure dug into the bottom of this trench (what is called the second spit), ideally by this week, if possible giving the soil a month to settle.

Now I have a polytunnel a second sowing is made under cover a little later and May picking is achieved more reliably.

Peter's top sweet pea tips



PIPS

1 Sweet peas are self-pollinating and come true from home saved seed. It is therefore worth collecting seed pods from good named cultivars at the end of their season.



TimeInc

2 Sweet pea seeds will hold germination over several years, but unlike most other seeds are better stored in paper packets rather than dry airtight tins or for longer periods in the deep freeze.



Alamy

3 Autumn sown sweet peas will produce seedlings that will withstand really hard frost. Cloche or cold frame cover is advisable however to protect from excessive wet and bruising winds.

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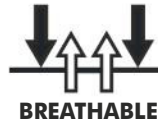
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Your Gardening Week



with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

Preparing houseplants for winter

Optimise light and minimise feeding to see houseplants through winter, says **Ruth**

AS the days shorten and light levels fall, most houseplants enter their winter dormancy.

This means you can stop feeding them and reduce their water levels. Wait until their compost is dry to the touch and their pot feels lighter when lifted before adding more water.

The exceptions are ferns and citruses that do best if their compost is kept slightly damp. Citruses also need feeding all year round.

Water from below and stand plants on damp gravel to raise levels of humidity. This is especially important in a room with central heating, which often creates a dry atmosphere.

I put a bottle cap filled with almond oil on top of the compost in each pot to eliminate fungus gnats. They breed in compost, but are attracted to the sweet almond oil and drown in it.

Move plants closer to windows but make sure they aren't in any draughts. Avoid placing them on windowsills, which will turn into frost pockets when you close the curtains on chilly nights.

Make sure your windows are clean, to optimise reduced light levels, and wipe dust and debris off the plants' leaves to aid photosynthesis.

If any of your indoor plants have enjoyed a summer vacation in the garden, they should really be back



Drown fungus gnats in almond oil



Move houseplants closer to the window so they get more light

TopTip

Pests such as aphids, glasshouse red spider mite and mealybugs love the warmth of a winter house so keep an eye out for them and deal with any signs immediately.

indoors by now. Check foliage and compost for pests and disease and treat them accordingly.

You should also acclimatise them to

warmer, drier conditions and lower light levels indoors by bringing them inside for slightly longer each day over the space of a week.

Winding down your greenhouse



Bring tender plants undercover for winter protection

THINGS are starting to ease off in the greenhouse after a busy few months.

The last tomatoes and cucumbers are ripening and the rest of the space is slowly filling up with tender perennials and cuttings, with room set aside for a lemon tree, tender banana and non-hardy standard fuchsia.

The key to keeping these healthy throughout the winter is maximum light, adequate heat and good hygiene.

Remove any shading to let in as much light as possible. Check your heater – if you use one – is in good order.

If you don't heat your greenhouse

stock up on fleece to wrap around plants and bubble wrap to attach to the greenhouse frame as added insulation.

At this time of year you should water plants in the morning to give moisture plenty of time to evaporate before the colder evenings.

If left too late in the day it will sit on the leaves and create ideal conditions for mildew and fungal problems.

It should still be warm enough to open vents, windows and doors and this will improve the airflow.

Remember to check plants for pests and deal with them accordingly.



Water in the morning for healthier plants

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Your Gardening Week

with Bob Flowerdew, AG's organic gardening expert



You may not want to go to the same lengths as Bob to store rainwater...

... but you can increase capacity by linking water butts

TimePic - unless credited

Bob's top tips for the week



1 Start a leaf-mould bin and keep adding to it – it's the best soil and compost improver you can get.



2 Take foot-long cuttings of blackcurrants, redcurrants, grapes and gooseberries, trim faded leaves and push into soil.



3 Stop regular watering of most tender plants in containers under cover (like this streptocarpus). From now on give just enough to stop them wilting.



4 Beware: as the nights begin to cool it's now that rodents move into sheds, greenhouses, cellars, garages and attics. Block obvious holes and set precautions.

Alamy

Water, water everywhere

Be inventive and store more valuable rainwater, says **Bob**

HERE'S how to make your plants happier – and maybe save some cash as well. We could all store a little more rainwater than we do now. Plastic butts are not expensive and by just standing another beside an existing one you've doubled up straightaway.

Two butts could also support a shelf

“Get those gutters, butts and barrels fitted now”

of plants between them and be doubly useful, then you could fit a third...

Of course the problem is you'll eventually run out of space. The answer is to connect the butt plumbed in to the downpipe to others hidden somewhere out of the way, and you can do this with a siphon: a hosepipe weighted and hung down to the bottom in each butt which, once filled with water, keeps the

level in both butts the same.

Then there are those odd roofs – from the bike shed to the dog kennel – which may have runoff going to waste. Fit gutters with water butts to each of these and you'll collect even more rain.

There are many cheaper alternatives to butts such as recycled juice containers and dead chest freezers. I've even seen a row of wheel-less wheelie bins all linked together.

The whole point is get those gutters, butts and barrels fitted now so they can start saving the coming winter rain till your garden needs it next year. Then your plants roots will much prefer rainwater from butts to that from a hose connected to a tap as it's free of chlorine and so much warmer.

So not only will your plants be happier, but if you're on a water meter you'll save a little cash, and maybe more than you think.

Remember you not only pay for the water you use but most households also pay a sewage and drainage rate – and that's usually based on your water usage. So use less from the hose and you save not once, but twice.

Your Gardening Week



with Lucy Chamberlain, AG's fruit and veg expert



I've been trying different varieties like 'Romance' this year to see how well they store



Carrot 'Autumn King'



Carrot 'Romance'

Step by step Store carrots for winter



1 Lift your carrots on a dry day. Slide the prongs of a garden fork alongside the row then gently lever it upwards to ease the roots out of the soil. The aim is to snap or damage as few as possible. Once lifted, leave them on the soil for an hour or so to dry the skins.



2 Now grade your carrots – use up any that are split, stabbed or showing signs of root fly damage – these won't store well. You'll be left with top-quality roots. Gently twist off the foliage, then lay the roots so they're not touching in a box of dry sand.



3 Build up layers of roots as you fill your box, packing them with more dry sand. Top the box with a final sand layer and place it in a cool shed or garage, well away from any potential rodent activity. Then just extract a few carrots as and when you need them.

Storing maincrop carrots

It's time to make sure your crop stays fresh, says **Lucy**

HEARTY casseroles, warming soups, tray-baked and buttery mash – there are loads of ways to use this essential root veg in the kitchen during winter – I'd be lost without carrots!

Sowings made way back in the spring will be yielding delicious, crunchy pullings now. While I've been munching my way through some as baby roots,

there are only so many carrots a person can eat in the summer. So now, as autumn is upon us, take time out to lift and store your very best roots.

I've been experimenting with different varieties, growing quick-maturing early varieties like 'Romance' alongside classic maincrops such as 'Autumn King'. I'll be interested to see which ones store the best. Here's what to do (see right).

Prune plums and cherries

I'D hate to turn into a nag, so this is just a gentle reminder that you should have pruned anything that we gardeners call a 'stone fruit' by now. I'm referring to cherries, peaches, nectarines, apricots, plums, damsons, gages, almonds and the like, all of which are prone to two serious diseases: bacterial canker and silver leaf.

Both can ultimately be fatal to a tree, and pruning during winter increases the likelihood of infection. On the other hand, summer pruning, where wounds dry up and callus over quickly, helps to minimise their occurrence. Ideally pruning would have been carried out immediately after you picked your crop, but I can empathise with you if you've not yet carried the job out – summer is incredibly busy for us gardeners!



My potted apricot tree needs a little trim to keep it in shape

Next week: order new fruit stock, cover perpetual strawberries with fleece, pick nuts, cut leaves off ripening squashes and ways to store chillies

Managing your compost heap

If your compost heap is anything like mine it will have trebled in size since the spring! I claim it's a testament to our enthusiasm on the plot, but a large pile of rotting vegetation can soon lose its appeal if it's not looked after properly.

Composting is a science, rather than a pile of rubbish. If you've read up on it you may well have come across 'greens' and 'browns' – which refers to the two main types of material that you add to your heap. Greens include soft, sappy items like vegetable peelings, rotten fruit, grass clippings and lush leaves; brown ingredients refer to woody materials like prunings, dried-up stems and animal bedding such as hay and straw.

Essentially you need a mixture of each for successful composting, plus they

should be blended together rather than added in layers. In an ideal world you'd pass all your compost items through a garden shredder before piling them on the heap – this increases their surface area hugely which encourages rapid rotting. A quick chop with shears is a good second best. Avoid composting weed seedheads and aggressive garden diseases like potato blight and onion white rot. For thorough decomposition, turn over your heap monthly so that all material gets time in the middle – the, hottest part of the pile, at some point.

The larger the heap, the quicker it rots down because it can build up surprisingly high temperatures. Dry materials won't rot so consider adding a liquid compost activator to keep the process going.



Picking eating apples and pears

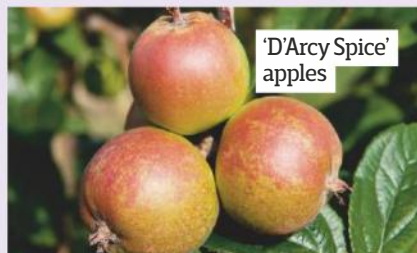
YOU'D think it would be a doddle – just walk up to your tree, pick the fruit and sink your teeth into it – yes? Well, yes! Some varieties of apple and pear are indeed that simple, but many aren't. If your apples or pears are dessert varieties that ripen in late-summer and early to mid-autumn (eg apple 'Discovery' in August, 'Ellison's Orange' in September and 'Pixie' in October) then it's just a case of establishing when they are ripe.

You'll find many hints in books and online for this point of perfection: "when the apple seeds turn brown, when there are windfalls, when the fruit parts easily from the spur," but the most reliable method is to take a bite out of one or two sample fruits.

You'll tell if that dessert variety is ready – if it's delicious, tuck in, if your face puckers up (apples) or it's as hard as a rock (pears), wait a bit longer! Many of us grow dessert varieties of apple and pear that ripen in storage ('D'Arcy Spice' apple or 'Olivier de Serres' pear).



With these, get them off trees in early October, before frosts are due, and they'll mellow in flavour and be ready for eating in coming weeks and months.



Shell beans from their pods

THIS task, known as 'shucking' is like yoga for the soul. Just grab a chair, a bowl, a handful of beans and start popping. Not just any beans, mind you – beans suitable are those that are dried like kidney, borlotti, butter and cannellini beans, or types that are shelled and used fresh, like soya beans and this flageolet bean I've grown called 'Flambeau'. Dried and fresh podded beans are excellent for casseroles, risottos, and soups.

While French and runners are grown for their pods and need regular picking, shucked beans can be harvested all in one go. Just wait for pods to dry out on the plants or, as is the case with these fresh flageolets, wait until the pods are large enough.

Your Gardening Week



with Val Bourne, AG's organic wildlife expert



The buff tailed bumblebee has a short tongue allowing it to bite through the base of longer flowers like penstemon to obtain nectar

This compact marjoram is the preferred plant of small copper butterflies at Spring Cottage

Keeping everyone sweet!

Val explains how plants and their flying visitors keep each other happy

I WAS at a jolly gathering a few weeks ago, enjoying a pub meal, and marvelled at the complexity of the drinks order. Gin was the favoured tippie of some young things. Others wanted wine, some wanted shandy and two lightweights, including me, went for fizzy water with lemon and ice.

It proved how different we all are and the insects that visit our gardens are equally picky when it comes to collecting nectar. Flowers come in different shapes, colours and sizes, that's obvious, and they all produce nectar, which is the sugary drink most flying insects need for energy. Pollination is almost a by-product, rather like my cat spreading goosegrass seeds through the garden when she hunts for voles. Thankfully I haven't got many of these cleavers.

Nectar, rather like our choice of tippie, differs enormously in strength because the sugar levels vary. Friedrich G. Barth writing in a book entitled *Insects and Flowers* points out two extremes. *Fritillaria* nectar has eight per cent sugar and marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*) contains 76% sugar. It's noticeable in my garden that flies seem to be attracted to my fritillarias, particularly my crown

imperials (*Fritillaria imperialis*). Flies also like green flowers and the flowers on my *Veratrum album* and a shrubby umbellifer called *Bupleurum fruticosum* are rarely without a visit from these excellent pollinators.

In August one pink-flowered plant, *Origanum laevigatum* 'Herrenhausen', is

“Flowers are equally cunning”

a magnet for small tortoiseshell butterflies presumably because the nectar's sugar-packed. Nearer the house there's a shorter similar oregano growing in the cracks in the paving, *Origanum vulgare* 'Compactum'. This is the preferred plant of the small copper butterfly, which we normally get a lot because its main food plants are sorrels and these grow in the field behind the house. At times the field seems to turn rhubarb-pink due to the seed heads.

Nectar's a variable three-way mixture of sucrose, glucose and fructose. Sucrose-

rich nectar is found mostly in flowers pollinated by insects with long mouth parts including long-tongued bees, moths and butterflies. Often these flowers have long trumpets, like the penstemon. However insects are cunning. Many a short-tongued bee bites into the back of the flower to get their energy drink.

Flowers are equally cunning and the borage family contains plants that are able to top up their nectar supplies within minutes so bees are constantly visiting. Pulmonarias, comfrey and that starry blue flower that turns pink in Pimms (*Borago officinalis*) are all borages.



TIP Nectar flows in far more in warmth so site your plants carefully. Give spring and autumn flowers afternoon sunshine if you can.

Val Bourne is the author of *The Living Jigsaw* (Kew Publishing)



with Martyn Cox in his city garden

Hemerocallis divisions do best when first potted into containers



All Times unless otherwise stated

Step by step

How to divide day lilies in pots



1 Decant the plant from the container and remove any weeds or moss from the surface of the compost. Cut off any old flower stems and damaged foliage.



2 Divide root balls into the required amount of sections. If you cannot tease the roots apart by hand, use an old bread knife to slice through them.



3 Pot sections into containers large enough to accommodate the root systems. Use a mixture of multi-purpose compost and John Innes compost.

Dividing hemerocallis

Martyn explains how you can get more from your day lilies by splitting up rootballs

ONE of the stars of my garden is the day lily – hemerocallis. I've got three different varieties that provide a non-stop display for about seven weeks in summer. The first yellow bloom opens in mid-June and plants are still going strong at the beginning of August.

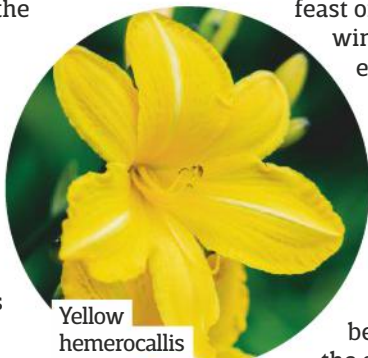
They really are good value and require very little care, apart from regular deadheading, to ensure they continue to pump out fresh blooms. So I've decided to find space for other varieties and, as luck would have it, I already have some in containers that I've been

nurturing for a few years. Having been potted up several times and given plenty to eat and drink during the growing season they've formed quite sizeable clumps, perfect for splitting

into several smaller pieces.

It's possible to plant the sections directly into the ground but I find plants pick up more readily if set in pots. Another good reason for starting divisions off in pots is that it's easier to control slugs and snails, who love to feast on young shoots in late winter. Once the plants are established they are less vulnerable to the pests, so can go into the ground in early spring with a few slug pellets to protect them.

Now is also a good time for dividing large clumps that have become shy to flower in the ground. To rejuvenate lift with a fork and slice through the mass of congested roots with a spade. It helps to prepare the ground prior to planting so sections can be planted immediately, rather than allow roots to dry out.



Yellow hemerocallis

Alamy

Tip: Tighten tree ties that are loose or relax ties that are biting into stems. As a rule, stakes should only be needed to support a tree for 18 months before being removed.



Cutting back hops

GOLDEN hops (*Humulus lupulus* 'Aureus') are one of the most vigorous climbers you can grow. At the height of summer, my three plants created a magnificent spectacle against the black supports of our pergola, that was only really surpassed when the climber became draped in thousands of showy cones. Unfortunately, the plant will start to go downhill rapidly over the next few weeks as the leaves turn a murky shade of brown.

Alas, there's nothing left to do other than cut the entire thing back. I start by snipping away ties, then gradually

work my way from one end to the other, cutting shoots and unwinding them from supports. It requires having to work from a ladder and is a mucky job that results in plant debris going all over the place. Some seeds are bound to shed, so expect to pull out seedlings next spring.

Spiders, ladybirds and other beneficial insects take shelter in the climber. I save those I can and leave the debris on the ground overnight to give any remaining a chance to escape. The remains of the plant are bagged up and eventually go to the green waste bay at the local tip.



Work begins by snipping away ties

Leave debris on the ground so beneficial insects can escape



Cutting back geum

Tidying up perennials

A GROUP of Geum 'Mrs J. Bradshaw' have been fantastic this year, blooming constantly from about late May until the end of August. Now flowers have faded leaving long stems topped with fluffy seed heads and clumps that look a bit tired. After cutting the spent stems down to the ground, I find it helps to chop plants back hard to rejuvenate the foliage.

Rather than let the fading flower stems of *Astilbe* 'Professor van der Wielen' set seed, I've taken them back to the base. Over the next month or

so, the foliage will start to turn brown and crispy, and I'll prune the whole lot back by cutting 2in (5cm) above the ground, taking care to avoid any of the knuckle-like growths near the surface.

Don't get carried away and cut back everything; sedum, monarda, alliums, rudbeckia, Jerusalem sage, echinacea and other late flowering perennials, along with many ornamental grasses, are still looking good. Their seed heads will also provide food for birds and add sculptural interest over winter, so leave pruning until spring.

3 other perennials to trim now



1 *Foeniculum vulgare* 'Purpureum' – Cut back the flowering stems of bronze fennel to prevent self seeding and to encourage fresh foliage.



2 *Alchemilla mollis* – The seed heads of lady's mantle are not that attractive so cut old flowering stems to ground level.



3 *Hemerocallis* – Once flowering is over the foliage of day lilies can look tired. Cut back hard and new foliage will emerge.

Your Gardening Week



with Martyn Cox in his city garden

My plans for autumn

THERE are parts of my garden that I'm really pleased with and others that could do with a revamp. All summer long, I've been jotting down ideas for changes that I'd like to make to existing planting schemes, along with the introduction of some new features. It's been a little frustrating because I've wanted to crack on with the work but have had to wait for autumn and its perfect planting weather.

The first thing I want to do is move a Japanese hydrangea vine (*Schizophragma hydrangeoides*) that I planted against the fence at the top of my garden in spring. The position has proved too light for the self-clinging climber, resulting in the foliage scorching. I'll lift and replant it against the fence in a shady bed near the back of my house.

That will leave a gap for another climber and I've got the perfect plant waiting in the wings... *Campsis x tagliabuana* 'Indian Summer'. This trumpet vine is a self-clinging climber, which will easily cover a 6ft (1.8m) high by 6ft (1.8m) wide area. In late summer it boasts loads of gorgeous, bright



Campsis x tagliabuana 'Indian Summer' is waiting in the wings

orange flowers. Hopefully it will enjoy the sunny spot much more than the previous incumbent.

The biggest job is to completely change a bed that I planted out a couple of years ago. It was originally for winter

interest with grasses, hellebores and bergenia, but I don't think I can justify having such a speciality bed in a garden this size. A large *Euphorbia mellifera* I have in a pot will be perfect for this space and provide interest year round.



November pickings

Late spring onions

THE usual advice is to finish sowing spring onion seeds by early summer, but it's still possible to get some in.

Seeds sown now will take longer to germinate, but will still provide pickings by the start of November. If frost is forecast, cover them with a cloche or horticultural fleece.

Bring in houseplants

MY streptocarpus, succulents and other houseplants have been enjoying an airing outdoors over summer, but falling nighttime temperatures means its best to bring them indoors in early autumn to prevent damage to foliage.

Remember to give plants a thorough inspection and to look under pots for any pests that might be sheltering.



Check houseplants for pests before bringing indoors

Next week



Tamsin Westhorpe

AG's country garden expert

Get them in

Harvesting veg and tips on storing carrots for Christmas

Honey bush care

Tamsin looks at how to over-winter melianthus

Making the cut

How to take Viburnum bodnantense cuttings

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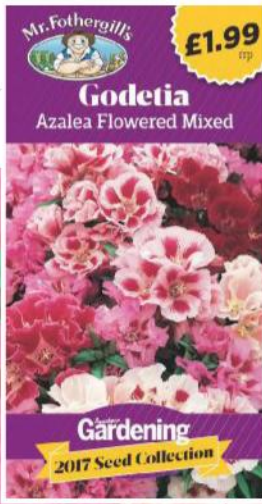
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Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



Godetias produce a mass of pretty, funnel-shaped blooms



All Timepic

Sow seeds of this glorious Godetia

Ruth falls in love with these frilly lovelies

It is so often the case that things of great beauty require a lot of care and cosseting. So what a relief it is to grow low-maintenance Mr Fothergill's Godetia 'Azalea Flowered Mix' in your garden!

Godetia (*Clarkia amoena*) are bright, free-flowering hardy annuals that originate in North America where they grow in the wild as well as in gardens.

Their showy funnel-shaped flowers bloom from early summer right through to early autumn and look delightful in borders. The plants also look striking when cut for indoor arrangements.

The variety we are giving away this week produces a profusion of double and semi-double blooms in shades of pink and red that will not only delight you, but also draw in the bees and butterflies too.

You can sow your godetia seeds where they are to flower next year, or save the seeds until spring, although those sown now will flower earlier and better than next year's.

Godetia are robust, fast-growing plants that grow to 18in (45cm). To get them at their best, sow either in full sun or light shade.

Pot up a rooted 'spiderlet'

■ A few weeks ago I noticed that one of the baby 'spiderlets' from our kitchen spider plant had been knocked off its runner.

■ I popped it into a jar of water and it soon started to take root – the easiest form of plant propagation there is!

■ The roots are now robust enough to take potting up in container compost. Simply place the plant in a clean pot and cover the roots with fresh houseplant compost.

■ Firm it in, water it and place your new plant on a light windowsill.



Step by step

How to sow Godetia

A sheltered sunny spot is ideal



1 Create a healthy seedbed by raking the soil to a fine tilth, removing weeds and debris and then watering the ground.



2 Sow the seeds as thinly as possible in curves and swathes to create an attractive, flowing, non-regimented look.



3 Rake a thin layer of soil over the seeds and water again. Protect the area from cats and birds with a layer of twigs.



4 When the seedlings are large enough to handle, thin them, out to approximately 8in (20cm) apart.



Perennials such as salvia, nepeta and helenium will provide a riot of summer colour – and planting now ensures they are well established by flowering time

Perennials to plant now

When space is limited, long-blooming perennials earn their place. **Hazel Silver** presents the floriferous stalwarts to plant now for a non-stop show next year

IF space is tight, a two-week flush of flowers simply won't cut it. In the small garden plants have to work hard to earn their place, blooming reliably for several weeks – even months. Of course, a continuous summer show is provided by bedding plants like lobelia and tender pot plants like pelargoniums, but there are plenty of herbaceous perennials that can also fulfil that function in the border.

Now is the time to get many of these in the ground. Planted in autumn, their roots will establish during the colder months, allowing them to bloom madly come summer. So when purchasing perennials over the next few weeks, opt for the ones that deliver the best value for money via impressive flower power.

Flowers for weeks

Starting in May, some aquilegia will bloom for weeks. At Great Dixter in East Sussex the beautiful *A. chrysantha* 'Yellow Queen' produces buttery yellow

flowers from May to July. Also getting an early start are bleeding hearts (*dicentra*) including 'King of Hearts', which can produce its lipstick-pink flowers from April to August. And some spurge have a long flowering stint that begins in late spring – *Euphorbia palustris* can be a

“Colour is covered
by the likes of
salvia and nepeta”

cloud of acid-lime from May to July.

Summer colour is easily covered by the likes of salvia, nepeta, gaura, knautia and verbena, which flower consistently during June, July and August – often longer. Consider also those border gems that will keep up the good work into early autumn: phlox,

rudbeckia and echinacea, for example, get going in mid-summer and bloom into September. *Phlox paniculata* 'Blue Paradise' and the white 'David' are particularly long flowering, as is *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm'. And deciduous sub-shrub *Perovskia* 'Blue Spire' will produce woolly lavender-like spires from July to October.

Carpets of colour

At the front of the border, lots of low growers earn their place with almighty flower power. The Mexican fleabane (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) produces pink and white daisies for months; the bellflower *Campanula poscharskyana* is a carpet of violet-blue from June to September; and dependable geums such as 'Mrs J. Bradshaw' cheer us with fiery flowers all summer long.

Combine these floriferous champions for a long-lived bloom of colour that will not die down until the frosts arrive.

9 long-flowering perennials to plant now



Geranium Rozanne ('Gerwat')

Spreading border essential that boasts lavender-blue blooms from May to October. Magenta pink *G. x riversleaianum* 'Russell Prichard' is also long-flowering. Sun or semi-shade. Height: 2ft (60cm).



Gaura lindheimeri

Has white blooms that float on willowy stems for months – sometimes from May through to November. Its airy, arching habit means it looks good spilling over a path, or among grasses. Full sun. H: 2½ft (80cm).



Coreopsis verticillata 'Zagreb'

Cheery sun-yellow daisies cover the fine foliage of this compact tickseed from July to September, and lure butterflies and bees into the garden. Can be grown in a container in sun or semi-shade. H: 1½ft (45cm).



Verbena hastata f. rosea

Forming a veil of bluish pink at the back of borders from June to October, this AGM winner is hardier than its floriferous cousin *V. bonariensis*, which lasts one to two years and will self seed. Full sun. H: 3½ft (1.1m).



Nepeta racemosa 'Walker's Low'

Blooms from May to September, forming a bushy aromatic carpet of violet-blue that hums with honeybees. Fellow AGM holder 'Six Hills Giant' is larger and will also flower for months. Sun or semi-shade. H: 2ft (60cm).



Salvia nemerosa 'Caradonna'

AGM holder with upright indigo tapers that look striking at the front of a border, and are produced freely from June to August. *S. x sylvestris* 'Blauhügel' is also long-flowering. Sun or semi-shade. H: 1½ft (50cm).



Helianthemum 'Sahin's Early Flowerer'

One of the longest-flowering helianthemums, with deadheading this good doer will produce copper-amber flowers from June to October. Plant in moist, well-drained soil in full sun. H: 3ft 3in (1m).



Astrantia 'Roma'

Garden designer Piet Oudolf's favourite astrantia, 'Roma' produces pink pin cushion blooms from May to September, while its airy form means it mixes well with other plants. Sun or semi-shade. AGM. H: 2ft 3in (70cm).



Penstemon 'White Bedder'

A semi-evergreen perennial with flushes of pretty white tubular flowers from pink buds, between June and October. Plant in well-drained soil, and keep snipping off spent blooms. Sun or semi-shade. H: 2ft (60cm).

Wait a while

For these floriferous tender plants you will need to be patient and plant once the weather warms next spring:

- *Pelargonium* 'Voodoo' AGM
- *Canna* 'Wyoming' AGM (right)
- *Verbena bonariensis* AGM
- *Cosmos atrosanguineus*

- *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Llandaff' AGM
- *Euphorbia hypericifolia* Diamond Frost ('Inneuphe')



5 planting ideas

Perennials to plant now



All photos GAP, unless credited

Alamy

Prairie partners

Create a relaxed feel with prairie-style plants that complement one another, such as *Astrantia major* 'Roma' and *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna'. Combine with grasses.



Colourful combos

Held on purple stems, the bold scarlet blooms of *Salvia* 'Royal Bumble' add a punch of colour that contrasts well with the blue/violet of *Nepeta* 'Walker's Low'.



Cool containers

Upgrade summer pots by teaming *Euphorbia hypericifolia* Diamond Frost and white *Gaura lindheimeri* 'Whirling Butterflies' with cool blue bedding like salvias and verbenas.



Front-of-border fabulous

Ensure interest all summer by planting *Geranium Rozanne* ('Gerwat') alongside grasses (try the evergreen *Carex comans* bronze-leaved) and foliage favourites such as *Stachys byzantina* 'Silver Carpet', with its mat of grey-white leaves.

Border layers

Tall, diaphanous plants will help create an airy, layered effect that looks stunning on a sunny day. Purple verbenas and the delicate white spires of *Lysimachia barystachys* (which flowers from July to September) are ideal.

Where to buy

Claire Austin ☎ 01686 670342 🌐 claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk Great Dixter ☎ 01797 254044 🌐 greatdixter.co.uk

Bluebell creeper

Bell-like blue flowers and evergreen leaves on this award-winning climber

THIS RHS Award of Garden Merit winning bluebell creeper is easy to grow, preferring a sheltered corner where, given a wall or trellis, it'll scramble up to 6ft 6in (2m) with simple evergreen leaves.

The stunning climber will produce a profusion of beautiful, bell-shaped flowers all summer, followed by purple berries later in the season.

Sollya heterophylla is ideal for planting into pots. Height: 6ft 6in (2m). Spread: 24in (60cm). Supplied as a 3in (7cm) potted plant.

- Buy 1 for £9.99
- Buy 2 get 1 FREE for £19.98



Sollya heterophylla, the bluebell creeper

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All orders will be acknowledged by letter or email, advising you of the expected despatch date. This offer is subject to availability. Offer enquiry line © 0844 573 2021. Order lines are open seven days a week, 9am to 6pm. All correspondence concerning this offer should be sent to: *Amateur Gardening* Bluebell Creeper Offer, Dept AG318Z, PO Box 162, Ipswich, IP8 3BX. Please note that we cannot deliver this product to the following postcode areas: GY, HS, IV41-56, KW15-17, PA34, PA41-48, PA60-78, PA80, PH40-44, TR21-24, ZE1-3. Your contract for supply of goods is with Thompson & Morgan (terms and conditions available on request). Offer closes 14th October 2017. Plants despatched from October 2017.

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thompson-morgan.com/amateurgardening

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Amateur Gardening, Bluebell Creeper Offer, Dept AGT31SZ, PO Box 162, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP8 3BX

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TCA10024A	Bluebell Creeper x 2 + 1 FREE	£19.98		
TCA56850P	Large Patio Pot & Saucer x 1	£9.99		
TCA56956P	Large Patio Pot & Saucer x 3	£24.99		
TCB47551	Incredibloom Fertiliser 1 x 100g Sachet	£4.99		
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			P&P	£4.95
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Dahlias offer a hit of exuberance to take you through to the first frosts

An in-depth look at **Dahlias**

They're bold, brash but never dull – **Val Bourne** shares her passion for this infinitely varied flower

MAKE no mistake: I'm potty about dahlias. No other flower I grow performs from the second half of summer right up until the first frosts. No other flower delivers the same rainbow of colour either, whether it's sultry deep reds to add an ornate touch to yellow daisies, pumpkin oranges that glow against purples, or feminine pinks and whites for a softer, romantic look.

Then there are the flower shapes. Here, too, there's a dahlia for everyone

– from simple singles to petal-packed waterlilies; spiky ones that explode like fireworks, tight balls for the vase or huge decoratives that just scream flower power. You can enjoy them in the garden or put them on your allotment; as far as I'm concerned, the dahlia has it all!

I first fell for these tantalising tubers around 60 years ago. Like many a small child given pocket money, I couldn't wait to spend it at the sweet shop. My weekly route took me past

the local allotments, where chain link fencing revealed tempting glimpses of huge dinner plate dahlias in a range of lollipop colours. In the 1950s, dahlia enthusiasts produced enormous blooms by disbudding them, and those giants – grown for the show bench – were the start of my life-long love affair.

Of course, the history of the dahlia goes back much further than that. There are lots of unfounded stories about the Aztecs using them for medicine and in religious rituals in the 15th and even 14th centuries. However the first illustration of a dahlia appeared in a work by the naturalist and court physician Francisco Hernandez, who was sent on expeditions to Mexico by King Philip of Spain between 1570 and 1577, in search of food and medicinal plants. He sent back dahlias but the tubers proved unpalatable to the Spanish – it is claimed that even Philip's cattle refused to eat them.

It would be another 200 years before the dahlia emerged from South America



Alamy

Pollinators are attracted to dahlias too – especially single or semi-double varieties



Alamy



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Varieties grown for cutting will certainly brighten up an allotment

again. In 1789, Vicente Cervantes, who later became the director of the Mexican Botanic Garden, sent seeds to Abbe Cavanille, the director of Madrid's Botanic Garden. It was the latter who gave dahlias their name, christening them in memory of Andreas Dahl, one of botanist Carl Linnaeus's students.

Status symbols

Their introduction to Britain is thought to have been courtesy of the British Ambassador's wife, Lady Bute, who brought home dahlia tubers from Spain

“You can enjoy them in the garden or put them on your allotment”

in 1798. By 1804, they were popular with the rich, including the founder of the RHS, John Wedgwood. They became a status symbol and in the 1850s a single tuber could fetch £100 – a fortune at a time when the average wage was £2 a week. James Bateman of Biddulph Grange in Staffordshire, now a National Trust property, was an avid collector (the garden still contains a Dahlia Walk), and some 50 years later Sir Reginald Cory staged huge dahlia trials for the RHS in the grounds of his mansion, Dyffryn House near Cardiff. Also now owned by the National Trust, this garden has planted hundreds of dahlias in the past three years or so.

Dahlias continued to be popular in the first half of the 20th century, but those dinner-plate blooms that so delighted me in my youth failed to impress the

Ideas to try

Growing in borders



Alamy

At Great Dixter dahlias bed down with the likes of *Verbena bonariensis*

DAHLIAS aren't very good at pushing up through herbaceous plants, so the easiest way to grow them is to give them their own bit of space. You could create a gap at the front of a border for shorter varieties, such as the orange whirligig 'Waltz Matilda'. However I prefer the system used at Great Dixter in East Sussex, a garden that has always used dahlias to great effect.

The late Christopher Lloyd championed these flamboyant flowers when everyone else damned them. And Fergus Garrett's team continue to do so by leaving substantial spaces in the border. These are filled, first, with spring flowers like tulips, wallflowers and forget-me-nots, which are lifted in early June, making room for cutting-raised dahlias. Teamed with summer favourites (the likes of amaranthus, *Verbena bonariensis* and, maybe, cannas) they never fail to impress.

While it may seem indulgent, there is still scope for a dedicated



Alamy

Be inspired by the borders at The Salutation in Kent

dahlia border. For inspiration, see The Salutation Gardens in Sandwich, Kent, where head gardener Steve Edney is a wizard at combining and blending colours. I grow mine in a dedicated bed on the allotment, simply because it's the only way I can successfully raise more than 50 different varieties – perfect for cutting to brighten up the house.



Think pink: Dahlia 'Preference' lights up a mixed border

TopTip

Dahlias are easily killed by frost, while cold nights also inhibit their growth. For foolproof results, do not plant outside until early June.



Lift or leave?

THIS depends on where you live. I have to lift mine – as you would expect in a place with a name like Cold Aston – and do so, following a frost, by mid-November (earlier if cold weather arrives). Stems are cut back to 3-5in (7-13cm) and the soil is gently shaken away but tubers are not cleaned off.

They're stored under the bench in the unheated frost-free greenhouse, in deep plastic crates with holes in the side. I cover my tubers in dry compost and leave them alone – though in severe winters I do fleece them.

In spring, tubers are divided before planting by gently pulling them apart. This is advisable as a mass of tubers won't flower well.

In warmer parts of the UK you can leave them in situ. However, you'll still need to lift and divide every four years or so to keep them flower-packed, and you could lose them in severe winters.

majority of gardeners. By the 1980s, they were largely out of favour, a situation that David Brown, the son of a dahlia nurseryman and a member of the RHS Dahlia panel for many years, was determined to change. He set about rescuing the varieties he'd known

“By the 1850s a single tuber could fetch £100”

as a child, and in doing so laid the foundation for the National Collection of Dahlias, now located near Penzance.

David joined forces with fellow enthusiast Mark Twynning, who raised dahlias from seed as a hobby. With a particular passion for single dahlias, especially ones with dark foliage, Mark named several after popular sweets – including 'Twynning's After Eight' (2004) and 'Twynning's Revel' (2009). These

smaller-flowered singles attracted wildlife and slotted into borders easily.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, New Zealand breeder Keith Hammett also raised some excellent singles. These included the bright yellow 'Knockout' (syn. 'Mystic Illusion'), pink-red 'Dovegrove' and 'Magenta Star'. An RHS trial of Open-Centred Dahlias, held at RHS Wisley in 2008, helped to cement their popularity.

Once these singles found their way into gardens it was only a matter of time before they were embraced by cut-flower enthusiasts. Influential writer Sarah Raven championed dramatic dark red dahlias, which are so good to cut, leading to every other colour being planted, too. And on the RHS dahlia trial, which I judged for many years, we noticed that giant decoratives were gaining in popularity with younger gardeners (visitors voted the huge red decorative 'Bryn Terfel' the best). In their many forms, dahlias are riding high once more; and I, for one, hope they remain so. ■

9 great garden dahlias



'Karma Choc' AGM
One of the Karma series, this floriferous dahlia has brownish foliage and slender stems topped by deep red flowers. Good with yellow rudbeckias. H: 4ft (120cm).



'Twynning's After Eight' AGM
A bee-friendly, elegant blush-white single with dark foliage and stems. The hint of pink in the flower means it mixes well with purple and pink asters. H: 4ft (120cm).



'Otto's Thrill' AGM
Giant decorative with rose pink flowers (up to 10in/25cm across) formed of slightly wavy petals. One of the few giants I grow, it holds its head well. H: 3-4ft (100-120cm).



'Waltzing Matilda' AGM
This coral pink and sunset whirligig has informally shaped, often non-symmetrical flowers, making it a fabulous choice for the front of a border. H: 2ft (60cm).



'Thomas A. Edison'
No AGM here, but this 1929 plum-to-purple dahlia has stood the test of time. Glorious with deep reds or next to golden oat grass (*Stipa gigantea*). H: 4ft (120cm).



'Pooh Swan Island' AGM
This tangerine red and sunshine yellow collerette is strong enough to survive in borders in mild areas. The slightly ragged middle adds something, too. H: 3ft (100cm).



'Totally Tangerine'
Too new for an award, this anemone-centred option has a neat dark-tangerine middle surrounded by petals that morph between pink and orange. H: 2ft (60cm).



'Happy Single Wink' AGM
The Dutch-bred Happy series make good container plants, and this pink single has a dark raspberry middle that flatters the dark foliage. H: 1ft (30cm).



'Pearl of Heemstede' AGM
A prolific, soft pink waterlily with masses of flowers on long stems. Great with purple asters, *Verbena bonariensis* or *Cotinus coggygia* 'Royal Purple'. H: 3ft (90cm).

Dahlia suppliers

Rose Cottage Plants
📍 rosecottageplants.co.uk
☎ 01992 573775

Peter Nyssen
📍 peternyssen.com
☎ 0161 747 4000

Crocus
📍 crocus.co.uk
☎ 01344 578111

■ Val Bourne served on the RHS Dahlia Panel for many years

Dazzling diversity

SO why do dahlias offer so much variety in colour and shape? This is simply a happy accident, the result of the fact that the 36 or so wild species of dahlia – mostly native to the sloping uplands of Mexico – have a tendency to be octoploid, rather than diploid or triploid like most plants.

In simple terms, this means they have eight copies of the same paired sets of chromosomes, rather than the two or three copies found in plants such as lilies and roses.

Consequently, there's plenty of genetic material to play with. So when species dahlias found themselves planted cheek by jowl in botanic gardens, the bees began to hybridise them. Over time, they produced doubles in a variety of shapes, and by the mid 1850s many of the forms we know today – like cactus, decorative, anemone-centred and collerette – were established.

Astonishing offspring

More incredible still, a single dahlia seed head can produce astounding differences in its offspring. In 1958 a seedling from the 1922 dark-leaved, peony-flowered red 'Bishop of Llandaff' spawned a khaki-leaved, soft-orange fully decorative dahlia named 'David Howard'. Both are classic garden varieties, but they look nothing like one another. Dahlias also sometimes produce 'sports' – shoots with different flowers and foliage from the main plant.

For breeders, the endless possibilities these versatile plants offer are hugely exciting – although the quest to produce a scented or blue variety continues. New forms arrive each year, and top of my wishlist for 2018 are the anemone-centred 'Totally Tangerine' and the blackcurrant and mauve 'Creme de Cassis' (both from Rose Cottage Plants).

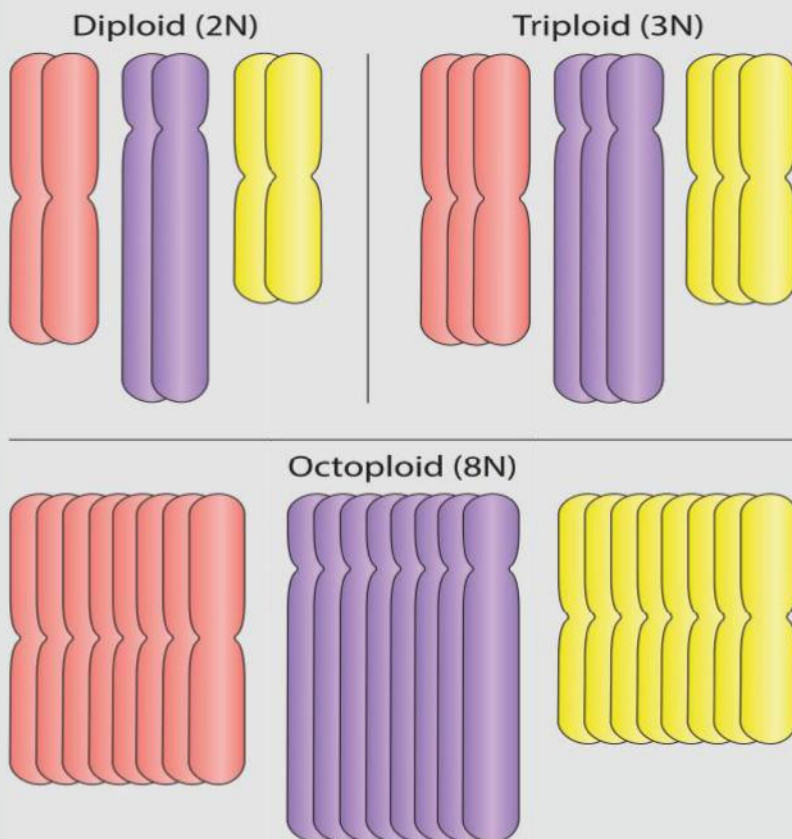


Thanks to genetics, dahlias can produce many permutations, including sports (above), where shoots differ from the main plant



No other flower offers such a massive range of different colours and flower types – from pompom to cactus

THE SCIENCE: While most plants are diploid or triploid (we humans are diploid), dahlias are octoploid. That means each cell has eight of each set of the chromosomes of that particular species, rather than just two or three (N = number of chromosomes in a set; see below). With more chromosomes in the mix, there's more scope for variation – whether this is engineered (by breeders) or accidental.



2
ways to
grow

For ease: from tubers



After planting, leave in a frost-proof, light place

TimeInc

- Generally, tubers can be ordered after Christmas, to be stored in a cool, frost-free place until mid-March.
- Use clean plastic pots or trays and a good quality compost; cover the tubers with the compost, leaving the stem to stand proud.
- Label, then water them and keep in a frost-proof, light place – I use an unheated greenhouse fitted with a frost-breaking heater.
- To encourage bushier plants once in growth, pinch out the growing tip.
- Do not feed dahlias when they're growing: it produces leaf at the expense of flower.
- Plant outside in early June and stake straight away with a trio of three canes, complete with toppers.
- Water, if needed, in the early stages.
- Deadhead to keep the flowers coming.



Regular deadheading will produce more flowers

Alamy

For showing: from cuttings



Cut just above the base

TimeInc

- Fill 3½in (9cm) black plastic pots with a 50:50 blend of compost and perlite to create a warm, airy mixture.
- Look for new shoots about 3in (7.5cm) in length. Use a sharp knife to cut above the base where it joins the crown, so that the stub can reshoot.
- Trim the cutting just below the lowest pair of leaves and remove leaves carefully, leaving the tip intact.
- Dampen the end of the cutting, dip in hormone rooting powder and insert into the pot, making a hole with a dibber (one pot can house several cuttings from the same variety, placed around the edge). Firm and label.
- Place in a warm propagator, away from direct sunlight.
- Cuttings should root within 20 days – once new leaves appear, pot them up individually into John Innes No.2.
- Pinch out the growing tip of each plant once, to encourage bushier growth.



One pot can accommodate several cuttings

TimeInc

Where to see dahlias

National Collection 📍 nationaldahliacollection.co.uk

Dyffryn 📍 nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens

Dunster Castle 📍 nationaltrust.org.uk/dunster-castle

The Salutation 📍 the-salutation.com/gardens

Great Comp 📍 greatcomparden.co.uk

Hilltop Garden ☎ 01747 838512



Dahlias at Hilltop Garden

Alamy



The purple-blue flowers look stunning en masse, but not all muscari are space invaders

Fascinating fact

Muscari comes from the Greek word for musk, alluding to this flower's wonderful scent. Its common name, grape hyacinth, refers to the clusters of flowers, which look like tightly packed grapes.



Alamy

Plant muscari that won't take over your garden!

Muscari needn't be invasive, says **Tamsin Hope Thomson**. Now is the perfect time to plant for spectacular spring displays

MUSCARI once had a reputation for taking over gardens; however this can be blamed mostly on *M. armeniacum*, a vigorous grape hyacinth that is useful for filling problem spots under trees, but is far from ideal for a small garden. Luckily for those wanting a more well-behaved bulb, there are many non-invasive and less vigorous varieties available.

If you're limited on space it's worth looking for specific varieties, because grape hyacinths have much to recommend them. Winter hardy and easy to grow, they fill the garden with a strong, sweet smell in spring.

They are perfect for pots and gravel gardens or for edging borders, as well as naturalising in grass or under trees, and will come back year after year. They are also loved by bees – just avoid those with sterile flowers if you want to tempt pollinators into your garden.

Lovely fragrance

Several are sold as non-invasive, such as *M. azureum*; other cultivars are related to vigorous species but have a far less vigorous nature.

Blue varieties make a striking plant partner for narcissus and crocus at the front of borders. Or use as part of a layered 'lasagne' planting of spring



Try layering muscari in a pot with other spring bulbs

cap

bulbs in a container for an attractive long-flowering display.

Not all muscari are plain blue or white, however – interesting variations include pale powder-blue 'Valerie Finnis', which has a lovely fragrance. It will naturalise well but won't run riot.

Another hot pick is *M. latifolium*, prized for its two-tone flowerheads – ideal for a bold display in a pot or border. Or try *M. muscarimi*, whose flowers open creamy yellow and fade to grey, with a heavy musky fragrance.

Look beyond the commonly grown types and you'll find an exciting range of muscari. Order and plant now for a swathe of scented flowers in spring.

5 of the best muscari to grow



Alamy



Cap



Alamy

M. azureum AGM

Bees love this non-invasive variety, a Turkish grape hyacinth with bell-shaped flowers that are pale blue with just a hint of a dark stripe. Height: 4in (10cm).

M. armeniacum 'Saffier' AGM

'Saffier' has sterile, mid-blue flowers that last for weeks and make good cut flowers. Its leaves appear in autumn and it won't take over your garden. Height: 8in (20cm).

M. aucheri 'White Magic'

A good option for a small garden as it is less vigorous than many muscari. The white, rounded flowers appear in April and have a strong fragrance. Height: 5in (12cm).



Alamy



Alamy

M. latifolium

Two-tone blooms feature an almost black bottom with a tuft of bright blue at the top. These sterile flowers appear over a long period, from March to April. Height: 6in (15cm).

M. botryoides 'Album'

This white beauty isn't a fast grower like *M. armeniacum*. With neat flowers on tall, slender stems in April and May, it's a great choice for pots or borders in full sun. Height: 8in (20cm).



Cap

- Plant bulbs in early autumn, about 3-4in (8-10cm) deep.
- Use a loam-based compost in pots, with added grit for drainage (two parts compost to one part grit).
- In borders, choose a spot with well-draining soil, in full sun or partial shade.
- If overcrowded, lift and divide the clumps once the flowers have gone over.
- Don't plant in rich soil or overfeed or you will end up with more leaf than flower.



Ask Anne!

Anne Swithinbank's masterclass on potato problems



Closer inspection can reveal culprits

Slug damage may not be apparent immediately after lifting potatoes from soil

Anne's expert potato tips



Adding lots of well-rotted matter is usually a good plan to enrich soil and help retain moisture, yet this also favours slugs, so consider using a potato fertiliser instead. Rotate potatoes to different parts of the plot.



Potatoes grow well in containers of slug-free potting compost. These can be as basic as old compost bags rolled down with holes made in the bottom. This makes more watering but the large piece of ground freed up could be a great pumpkin patch.

How do I stop slugs eating spuds?

Q I lifted my maincrop potatoes only to find that the tubers were riddled with slug holes. How can I stop this happening next time?

Sid Hasslebury, Brentwood

A This is a complaint that's familiar to most potato growers. The fork goes in and there is the usual rush of excitement when pale (or rosy-skinned) spuds show against the dark soil. And at first, they look great.

Slug damage is often invisible until the tubers are washed prior to cooking but then small entry holes show up, which cut through, reveal the tunnelling activities of small slugs and often the culprits themselves.

These are subterranean long-keeled slugs, whose underground activities place them safely out of reach of slug pellets, even if you wanted to use them. Damage to tubers you wish to store is a problem because they begin to rot, and this spreads to the sound ones.

Nematodes (Nemaslug) made into a solution and watered into soil enters the slugs and releases a bacteria which kills them. While potentially an effective way of reducing the slug population, they are living organisms and require moist soil to operate.

During dry spells, potatoes draw most of the moisture from the soil and I find it almost impossible to keep potatoes sufficiently irrigated for the nematodes

to keep going.

Potato varieties are divided into early, second-early and maincrop according to when they mature. Slug damage is at its height from August into the autumn, so earlies and second-earlies planted in March and harvested from June onwards usually escape slug damage and blight.

Maincrop varieties mature in September and October and are more vulnerable. Sound second-earlies will store well, so there is an argument for growing more of these and harvesting them promptly before the slugs get going.

Should you suspect your potatoes have a slug problem, I recommend choosing a dry day to wash the tubers gently in a plastic wheelbarrow before drying them out on a soft lawn. Slug holes are then visible, making it possible to separate out the damaged ones.

Do slug-resistant potatoes exist?

MAINCROP varieties vary as to slug resistance and while 'Maris Piper' and 'Cara' have a bad reputation, 'Romano' and 'Sante' (pictured) are said to be less vulnerable. I think resistance varies from plot-to-plot and your best bet is to trial as many different varieties as possible over the next couple of years, to compare, contrast and find which ones crop, taste and store well.



'Sante' is less vulnerable to damage



Ask the AG experts!

Anna Toeman, Dr Jane Bingham, John Negus



Blight rapidly affects tomatoes and there is little you can do against it

Timedisc

How can we beat blight?

Q My neighbours on either side have lost all of their outdoors tomatoes to blight. They both removed most of the leaves from the plants. Another neighbour two doors along, has, so far, not had any blight. Our greenhouse tomatoes have shown signs of blight or something similar. Why is this?

Andy McIlvenna and neighbours

A It is very bad luck for your neighbours to have lost their tomatoes so quickly to blight.

Let me tell you a little about the disease and see if that helps you all to know what to do in the future.

The fungus that causes blight is encouraged by warm wet weather and its spores are spread by air currents and water splash.

A film of moisture covering the leaves is necessary for the spores to take hold and infect the plant, so anything that can be done to prevent moisture sitting on the foliage will help, such as watering the ground directly and keeping air moving around the plants.

For greenhouse plants keep doors and vents open as much as possible to encourage air movement to reduce condensation.

If you grow tomatoes in the greenhouse every year it is worth disinfecting the structure and glass during the winter to be sure of dealing with any spores. Jeyes Fluid is very effective.

Use fresh growbags or compost each year, or sterilise the soil if planted in

beds. Greenhouse tomatoes are less vulnerable to blight being in an enclosed environment, but they are not entirely safe from infection.

Unfortunately there is little you can do to prevent the fungal spores being released (they can travel quite some distance on air currents) so it is worthwhile considering doing some preventative spraying.

This should be done as soon as the first tomatoes have set, and then repeated according to the manufacturer's instructions.

A copper-based fungicide is ideal.

There is little you can do once the disease has appeared, but it might be possible to slow the spread by removing infected leaves as soon as they are spotted.

However, it is a fine balance and if too many leaves are removed the plant has no means of photosynthesising or drawing water up and therefore no means of providing nutrients or water to stems or developing fruits.

This will effectively mean the death of the plant anyway.



Greenhouse toms are less likely to be blighted



Truffles can cause allergies

FSpann

Don't trifle with a truffle!

Q Our dog sniffed this out in the woods. Is it a truffle and, if so, is it edible?

Jennifer Spann (via email)

A Without doubt, the fungus that your dog discovered is a truffle (*Tuber aestivum*). Rarely seen, they are usually found in chalky soil beneath broad-leaved trees.

As you know, truffles are a delicacy and have a pleasantly sweet and nutty flavour and can be eaten raw.

However, I urge you not to eat it as you may be allergic to it.



Weeping sedge is an invasive grass

V Lewis

Sedge battle

Q Are the green plants new Ophiopogon or something else that looks similar?

Valeria Lewis (via email)

A The green-leaved plants next to the black ribbon grass (*Ophiopogon*) are those of weeping sedge (*Carex pendula*).

A native of Europe, Asia and North Africa, it has become a weed in Britain. It can quickly monopolise a border, freely self-seeding and becoming a nuisance.

Unless you like it and are able to grow it where it won't encroach upon other, more valued plants, consign it to the compost heap.

Quick Questions & Answers



Congo cockatoo is a spectacular plant

Keep your cockatoo in check!

Q When is the best time to trim my Congo cockatoo plant? It is getting rather large.

Ian Mitchell (via email)

A I am delighted that your variegated Congo cockatoo has prospered. The best time to prune it is in spring when stumps quickly regenerate.

It makes a dashing summer bedding

plant. If you set it outdoors in late spring or early summer when frosts finish, feed it monthly with fish, blood and bone meal to trigger a wealth of lustrous foliage.

Root the prunings in water in a warm place and plant youngsters in 4in (10cm) pots of loam-based ericaceous compost.

Keep them warm and in good light over winter and enjoy them as house plants or summer bedding.



Divide rhubarb for strong plants and don't pick after July

Why is my rhubarb failing?

Q I have had two crowns of rhubarb for five years. They produced lots of fruit until this year when the stalks were thin. What can I do?

Brenda Beginagen (via email)

A This is a common problem with rhubarb once it has cropped heavily for about five years.

Clumps should be divided every five or six years when the plant is dormant in late winter/early spring to invigorate the plant. When replanting make sure each section/crown has a large bud.

It is best not to harvest the stalks at all in the first season after replanting to allow the newly planted crowns to build up reserves and to establish a strong, healthy root system.

Also, it is best not to harvest rhubarb after July as the leaves are needed to feed the crown buds for a good crop the following year.

Plant rhubarb in an open site, with moist but freely draining soil that has plenty of well-rotted organic matter added. Space rhubarb plants about 90cm (3ft) apart leaving the tops of the crowns exposed.

Q Please could you identify the tall tree in the background? I have tried for years to find out but to no avail. I see it in Ibiza.

Sue Bradshaw (via email)



A The tree is a Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*). A native of Norfolk Island, in the Pacific, it grows in temperate and sub-tropical regions and ascends to 80-150ft (25-45m).

Q Please could you identify this plant growing in a neighbour's garden? I would like to get one too.



James Thatcher, Billericay, Essex

A It is *Mirabilis jalapa*, commonly called the four o'clock plant because its flowers open in the late afternoon. A native of Peru, tropical North, Central and South America, it's a bushy perennial that blooms from early to late summer.

The best way to keep it is to lift the tubers in autumn and overwinter them in pots of dryish compost in a frost-free place. Propagate it by dividing tubers in late spring before planting them outdoors.

Q I grew this plant from seed but didn't keep the packet. What is it?

Sheila Smith (via email)



A I think it is a *Cosmos sulphureus* known as the Sulphur Cosmos or Yellow Cosmos. It is in the same plant family as the marigolds (*Asteraceae* or daisy family) but not that closely related.

Given that the plant is orange, I wonder if you have grown a cultivar such as 'Tango' or 'Sunset' - it isn't easy to be certain from a photograph but hopefully that might prompt a memory of the seeds you bought!

Gardening News

The latest stories from around the UK

Got a story? e-mail:
marc.rosenberg@timeinc.com



Main and circled: Alamy

The invasive weed is a serious threat to the value of property

Knotweed nightmares

Now you can see if invasive weeds grow close to your home

AS Triffid-like plants go, it is the stuff of nightmares – striking fear into the most experienced house-buyers and confident property investors.

But the nation now has a handy tool available to see if Japanese knotweed is growing anywhere near their home – or close to a property they intend to buy.

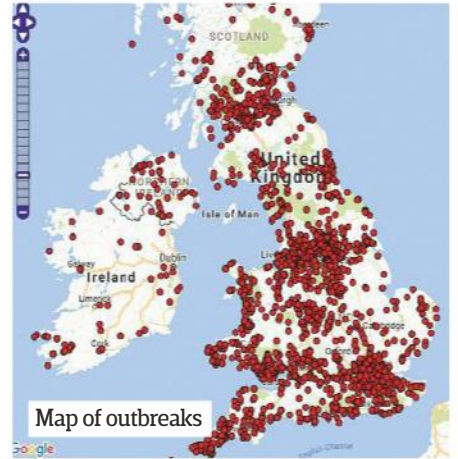
Five years ago the Environment Agency launched an app called Plant Tracker to map the spread of invasive weeds. And last month it hit a milestone, with more than 20,000 people having downloaded it, and 6,000

Japanese knotweed trouble-spots highlighted in the UK.

To date, high concentrations of knotweed have been reported in south Wales, London, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Birmingham and the southern tip of Cornwall.



Because people have been using their mobile phones to upload knotweed sightings, records are said to have good accuracy, as the app uses a phone's GPS to pinpoint



Map of outbreaks

the exact location.

Now, web-users can examine areas street-by-street, and see where knotweed has been reported in their neighbourhood.

Japanese knotweed can breach brick walls, come up through Tarmac, damage foundations and even get into homes.

It is such a threat that mortgage lenders can refuse to approve a loan on a property, and house-buyers will often pull-out if a survey detects the presence of knotweed, even if it's in a neighbouring property or nearby countryside.

Data about outbreaks was gathered by people using the PlantTracker app – the result of a collaboration between the Environment Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Natural Resources Wales.

Japanese knotweed was introduced to the UK by the Victorians as an ornamental plant. It was even used to stabilise embankments of canals and railways.

Go to planttracker.org.uk to view the Japanese knotweed map.

AGM seed range promises 'ultimate guarantee' of success



Timeinc

Mr Fothergill's new RHS range

A NEW seed range aims to boost gardeners' confidence by only offering varieties that hold a coveted Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit (AGM).

The new Award of Garden Merit seed range from Mr Fothergill's comprises 61 flowers and 57 vegetables – all of which have been tried, tested and recommended by experts at the RHS.

Flower varieties have, where possible, been selected from the RHS Perfect for Pollinators list. The launch follows the appointment of Suffolk-based Mr Fothergill's as the RHS's preferred

partner for licensed seed products.

The RHS's Cathy Snow said: "The AGM seal of approval tells gardeners that the plant performs reliably in gardens and is the ultimate guarantee of quality."

To carry the AGM logo, all plants in the range have been grown and tested in RHS gardens and judged by a forum of experts.

Plants only receive the award if they are proven to have excellent garden performance and are stable in form and colour. They also have to show "reasonable resistance" to pests and diseases during trials.

Go to mr-fothergills.co.uk for details.



Giant veg challenge
CANNA UK National Giant Vegetables Championship is at the Malvern Autumn Show on 23-24 September. Categories include heaviest chilli and longest chilli.



Wisley glasshouse milestone
RHS Garden Wisley's spectacular glasshouse celebrates its 10th birthday with a special exhibition on view during the Wisley Flower Show (5-10 September).

Garden centres give neonics the boot

FRIENDS of the Earth (FoE) claims that nine out of 10 leading garden retailers don't want to sell plants that have been treated with chemicals that are linked to bee decline.

The claims come as greens prepared to hand in a petition signed by over 33,000 people, urging the government to support a permanent ban on neonicotinoid (neonic) insecticides.

FoE said retailers including B&Q, Wyevale, Dobbies, Klondyke, Blue Diamond, Notcutts, Squires, Hillview and Hillier had all indicated their commitment to removing neonics from flowering plants.

Bee campaigner Nick Rau said: "Garden retailers are responding to public concern and mounting scientific evidence by saying no to plants grown with bee-harming chemicals."

The concern follows research earlier this year which claimed that 70 per cent



of the plants tested from a number of stores contained neonic pesticides – including three chemicals that are currently restricted across Europe, as they have been found to pose an acute risk to honey bees. Worryingly, some of the plants containing traces of neonics were labeled as pollinator-friendly.

Bee expert Professor Dave Goulson welcomed retailers' commitment to move away from neonics. He said: "Hopefully we can soon reach a point where bee-friendly plants are completely free of insecticides."

New 2018 veg from Johnsons Seeds



Pepper 'Biquino Red' (hot)

Lots of attractive fleshy fruit are produced on plants, which are said to be "extremely versatile with great flavour".

This type of fruit is sometimes known as 'little beak' peppers. Sow from February to April for harvesting between July and October.

Price: £2.29 for 10 seeds.



Kale 'Sympatic'

Claimed to be a very hardy variety, this new kale features tightly-curved leaves for tasty winter greens.

Vigorous roots are said to resist wind-rock. Its baby leaves can also be used raw in salads. Sow from March to September for harvesting from June until April.

Price: £1.79 for 250 seeds.



Pea 'Valido'

This new maincrop variety is reported to be high-yielding, producing masses of large, pointed pods that each contain nine to 11 medium-sized peas. Good powdery mildew resistance.

Can be picked late into the season. Sow from March to June; harvest May to September.

Price: £2.99 for 300 seeds.

What's On

16 – 22
September



17: The Invisible World of Plants, RHS Wisley, Wisley Lane, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. ☎ 0845 6121 253, 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley

18-19: Autumn garden lunch, Belmond le Manoir, Church Road, Great Milton, Oxford OX44 7PD. ☎ 01844 278881; 🌐 Belmond.com

19: Autumn and winter pots and containers (2pm): RHS Wisley, Wisley Lane, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. ☎ 0845 6121 253, 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley

19: Tuesday garden tours, RHS Harlow Carr, Crag Lane, Harrogate, North Yorks HG3 1QB. ☎ 0203 176 5830, 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/harlow-carr

20: Gardening for Wildlife, Middlethorpe Hall and Spa, Bishopthorpe Road, Middlethorpe, York YO23 2GB. ☎ 01904 661301, 🌐 j.betteridge@middlethorpe.com

22: Late Season Show-Stopping Perennials, RHS Garden Rosemoor, Great Torrington, Rosemoor, Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH. ☎ 0203 176 5830; 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/rosemoor

22: What Tree Can I Plant in my Garden? RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creepthorpe Lane, Rettendon, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 8ET. ☎ 0845 265 8071, 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/hydehall



Gardening for wildlife, 20 September

■ Please check that the event is still going ahead before leaving home. If you have an event that you would like us to consider please email details to: amateurgardening@timeinc.com

■ The new releases will be available at garden centres and at 🌐 johnsons-seeds.com

Tried & tested



We try before you buy

Tree ties

Consumer editor **Julia Heaton** looks at ways of securing newly planted trees

THERE are plenty of good reasons for planting a tree. It might be for the fiery colour of an acer in autumn or perhaps the brilliant white bark of a birch. There's the shade they offer from the hot summer sun and fruit to harvest from apple, pear and plum trees. If you're thinking of doing it then October through to March is the best time.

For all but the smallest of trees, staking is recommended in order to prevent wind rock and to provide the roots with stability as they establish in their new home. Single, angled or double staking with crossbar should be used depending on whether the tree is bare rooted, rootballed or container grown, but in all cases the stake should extend 2ft (60cm) into the soil and support the tree one third of the way up the trunk. A tree tie will then be needed to hold the tree to the stake.



Tips: insert the stake on the side of the prevailing wind, making sure the stake and tie do not rub against the trunk. Remember to check regularly and loosen ties as the girth expands over the next 18 months to three years.



Gardman Heavy-Duty Tree Tie **£2.29** rrp

Garden Centres and DIY stores
☎ 01406 372227
🌐 gardman.co.uk for stockists

Features ★★★★★

Made of rubber elastomer it incorporates similar features and characteristics to the Supersoft, but at 20in (50cm) long it is suitable for use on bigger trees.

Performance ★★★★★

This lovely soft tree tie performed like the SuperSoft in all ways except one – while most ribs form drainage channels, five of them are blocked by strengthening rubber so impeding the movement of rainwater away from the tree bark.

Value ★★★★★

Sold singularly, this one-piece tree tie is strong, easy to use and reusable. Other sizes are available: from 12in (30cm) to 24in (60cm).



Rainbow 40cm Buckle Tree Ties **£5.20** + £4.99 p&p

John Chambers Wildflower Seed
☎ 01423 332130
🌐 johnchamberswildflowers.co.uk

Features ★★★★★

Strong tie made of unbreakable polycarbonate, with plastic buckle and collar to fit between tree and stake. Length: 16in (40cm).

Performance ★★★★★

Very strong and should prove useful on windy sites. Being stiffer than other tree ties, it was slightly harder to fix but despite the smooth surface there was no slippage back through the buckle. Just enough give in the tie/collar that the tree shouldn't be strangled.

Value ★★★★★

A very competitive price, at just over £2 each. With a life-expectancy of up to 10 years, these tree ties could find themselves being re-used time and again. Comes in longer and shorter lengths.



Gardman Webbed Ties **£4.49** rrp

Garden Centres and DIY stores
☎ 01406 372227
🌐 gardman.co.uk for stockists

Features ★★★★★

Pack of two rot-proof heavy-duty webbed-construction ties with a strip of man-made fabric incorporated at one end. Each tree tie comes with plastic buckle fastening and a spacer. Length: 17in (43cm).

Performance ★★★★★

Webbing was easy to thread through spacer and buckle, giving a slip-free tie. Not sure what the slither of white fabric is for but it made a very handy label to note the tree details and date planted.

Value ★★★★★

Does the job, although there are stronger ties for a similar price (works out at £2.25 each). The same style but a smaller size is available for slender trees, standard roses and shrubs.

Next week: Time to get spring bulbs in, but which planter is the best? We take a look at six of them.

Supersoft Tree Tie **£5.80** + £4.99 p&p

John Chambers Wildflower Seed

☎ 01423 332130 🌐 johnchamberswildflowers.co.uk

Features ★★★★★

Made of weatherproof rubber elastomer, uv-stabilised and cold and pollution resistant. Five in a pack. Length: 16in (40cm).

Performance ★★★★★

Quickly gave the figure-of-eight shape needed for a cushion between tree and stake. With more stretch than most, it still supported the tree firmly while encouraging root establishment. Rubber ribbing on the inside meant rain water ran down though the channels rather than being trapped where it might encourage disease.



Amateur Gardening
Best buy
15/15

Value ★★★★★

Well priced, strong and more forgiving if you forget to inspect and regularly adjust – there's no spacer to lose either. Eight year life expectancy, so re-use is possible. A longer tie is also available.



Score
14/15



Score
13/15

Haxnicks Woody Soft Tie **£4.29** + £4.99 p&p

Haxnicks on-line or garden centres

☎ 0117 934 1799

🌐 haxnicks.co.uk for on-line shop

Features ★★★★★

Supplied in 16ft 6in (5m) rolls of cutting to required size, this multi-purpose, rot-proof plant, shrub and tree tie has a core of galvanised steel wire for strength and an outer coating of a rubber compound to cushion and protect the stem.

Performance ★★★★★

Struggle-free cutting with pliers produced the perfect sized tie and, being so flexible, it was easily bent around the tree and stake but better for standard roses and fuchsias rather than large trees.

Value ★★★★★

A good price given how many ties you get off the one length. Lots of other uses for it around the garden. Reusable.

Chainlock Ties (25m)

£9.10 + £5 p&p

John Chambers Wildflower Seed

☎ 01423 332130

🌐 johnchamberswildflowers.co.uk

Features ★★★★★

Another tying system on a roll but this one has a clever slot and lock mechanism. Made of plastic strapping and supplied in 82ft (25m) rolls. Width: (11.4mm). Thickness: 2.5mm.

Performance ★★★★★

Less soft and less kind to the tree than the other ties reviewed, but was simple to cut to size, wrap around the tree and secure by threading one end through a slot and turning to lock.

Value ★★★★★

So simple, gives 50 or more tree ties but has many more strapping uses than just tying plants. It works out at just over 56p per metre (including delivery) and, what's more, it's reusable. Other sizes are available.

Gothic revival

Give garden features a gothic twist

Metal arch

£37 ☎ 01376 573 302

🌐 thegardenfactory.co.uk

Frame a view or separate one garden area from another with an arch. Made from hardwearing tubular steel with a black coated polyester powder coating the Gardman arch is weather resistant and makes an immediate style statement. It's also perfect for adding height and interest with your favourite climber. H. 9ft 8in (295cm) x W. 4ft 7in (140cm) x D. 1ft 6in. (47cm) Home assembly required.



Ornate gothic mirror

£129.99 + £4.99 p&p

☎ 0118 903 5210

🌐 primrose.co.uk

An outdoor mirror can bounce light back into a shady garden and give the illusion of more space. Although made from reconstituted stone, glass fibre and resin the surround on this one looks and feels like traditional stone and will weather just like it too. Measures W. 1ft 8in (50.8cm) x H. 2ft 7in (78.7cm).



Stone Wall fountain

£119 ☎ 0121 355 7701

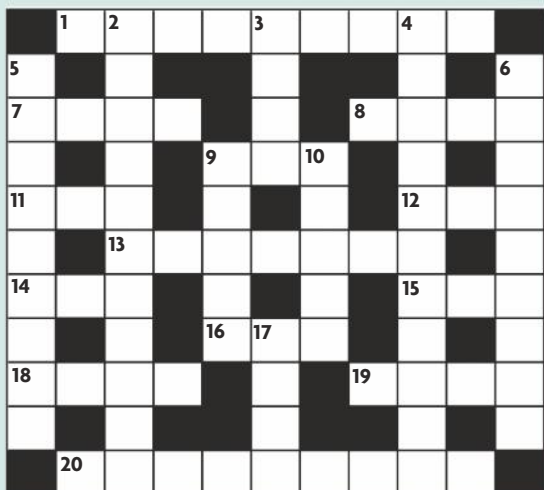
🌐 gardensite.co.uk

Give gothic a comic edge and help your garden pond stay oxygenated at the same time. Made of cast limestone with a surface texture similar to Portland stone Haddonstone's wall mask comes in three colour choices – Bath, terracotta or Portland. Dimensions are H. 10in (26cm) x W. 9in (23cm). Pump sold separately.



All prices correct at time of going to press and may vary at garden centres

Gardener's Tea break



Crossword ...just for fun!

ACROSS

- 1 Several yarrows! (9)
- 7 *Avena sativa* – the cereal grass crop (4)
- 8 Famous public school near Windsor, as in betony (4)
- 9 A chopped up piece of tree is mainly chocolate at Christmas! (3)
- 11 Craggy outcrop of rock on the summit of a hill, as in the hosta variety 'Devon ___' (3)
- 12 An argument... of carrots perhaps! (3)
- 13 Genus name for the poppy (7)
- 14 A garland of flowers in Hawaii (3)
- 15 Found in an anther, and in every herb: the form of 'she' used after a preposition or as the object of a verb! (3)
- 16 A Christian religious woman who lives by certain vows, as in the shrub rose 'The ___', and *Camellia japonica* 'White ___' (3)
- 18 Shout for four-fifths of the bog arum genus! (4)
- 19 Cut a branch or stem with shears or clippers, typically with small, quick strokes (4)
- 20 Several wake robins or wood lilies (9)

DOWN

- 1 The larva of a butterfly or moth – many types of which are a pest in the garden (11)
- 3 Found in the lid of an outdoor swimming pool! (4)
- 4 Genus name for the snapdragon (11)
- 5 Tropical trailing plant genus, grown for its showy summer flowers, known variously by the common names sun plant, rose moss and moss roses (9)
- 6 Several *galanthus*! (9)
- 9 Plant of the pea family with deeply divided leaves and tall colourful tapering spikes of flowers (5)
- 10 TV gardener and garden designer Diarmuid _____ (5)
- 17 This obscure rapeseed cultivar is also a mountain range is in the West Russian Federation, extending north and south from the Arctic Ocean (4)

CROSSWORD ANSWERS
 ACROSS 1 Achilles 7 Oats 8 Eton 9 Log 11 Tor 12 Row 13 Papaver 14 Lei 15 Her 16 Nun 18 Call 19 Smp 20 Thillium
 DOWN 2 Carepillar 3 Lid 4 Anthrithnum 5 Portulaca 6 Snowdrops 9 Lupin 10 Gavin 17 Ural

KEYWORD TO WORDSEARCH 377 (AG, 12 AUGUST)
 SWALLOW
 AND THE WINNER IS: MRS KE ROBERTSON,
 WHITSTABLE, KENT

Prize Draw

Resolva Weedkiller 24H Liquid Shots gives visible results within 24 hours. Containing diquat and glyphosate it kills both the weed and root. Liquid Shots tubes make it easy to mix for sprayer and watering can applications. We have five packs to give away, each worth £6.99 and containing three Liquid Shots tubes to treat up to 132sq m of ground. See below for details of how to enter the prize draw.



How to enter

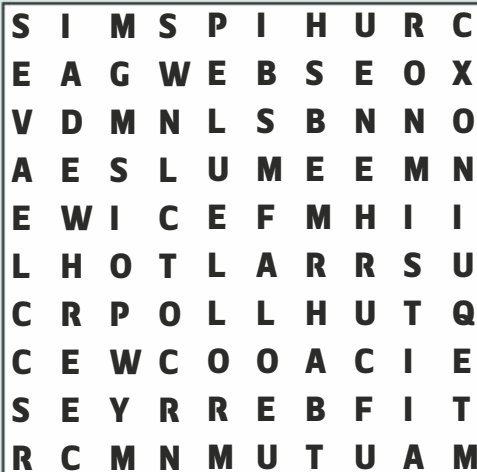
Send your name and address on the back of a postcard to Resolva Weedkiller 24H Liquid Shots Draw, *Amateur Gardening*, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG. Or you can email your details to ag_giveaway@timeinc.com, heading the email Resolva Weedkiller 24H Liquid Shots Draw. The closing date is 19 September 2017.

Win
 £30!

Wordsearch

No. 382

Next week is the official start of autumn, so this word search contains gardening-related and topical words connected with this season. These words are listed below; in the grid they may be read across, backwards, up, down or diagonally. Letters may be shared between words. Erroneous or duplicate words may appear in the grid, but there is only one correct solution. After the listed words are found there are eight letters remaining; arrange these to make this week's KEY WORD.



- AUTUMN
- BERRY
- CHILL
- CONEFLOWER
- CROCUS
- CYCLAMEN
- DEW
- EQUINOX
- FALL
- FRUIT
- FUNGI
- HIPS
- LEAVES
- MICHAELMAS
- MIST
- SEPTEMBER
- WEBS

HOW TO ENTER: Enter this week's keyword on the entry form, and send it to AG Word Search No 382, *Amateur Gardening*, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG, to arrive by Wednesday 27 September 2017. The first correct entry chosen at random will win our £30 cash prize.

This week's Keyword is

Name.....

Address.....

Postcode.....

Email.....

Tel no.....

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

PERFECT IN POTS

The world's first UK hardy DWARF TREE FERN



- Distinct bronze fronds unfurl with breathtaking effect
- Perfect in pots for a unique patio or conservatory feature

Blechnum brasiliense 'Volcano'
 1 Plant ~~WAS £14.99~~
NOW ONLY £9.99
 HURRY OFFER MUST END SEPTEMBER 30th

Blechnum brasiliense 'Volcano'
 Tall young fronds unfurl revealing 28" (70cm) of a striking volcanic bronze hue transforming to shiny green as they open. While traditional Dicksonia tree ferns create an exciting exotic element, they are often too large for home gardens, dominating and over-powering their surroundings. This breathtaking, new dwarf variety is ideal to introduce an outlandish feature to your garden. Despite its tropical origins, Blechnum brasiliense 'Volcano' is a hardy variety tolerating low light and conditions as low as -5°C, superb for British gardens. Supplied as 9cm potted plants throughout October, the perfect time to plant these striking ferns. When you use our exclusive incredibloom® fertiliser you can enjoy stronger and healthier growth! Plant in one of our metallic effect pots with lattice pattern for an outstanding patio or conservatory feature.



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- ✓ View order tracking 24/7

Product Code	Item Description	Price	Qty	Total
TJ62540	Blechnum 'Volcano' - 1 plant Was £14.99	£9.99		
TJ62541	Blechnum 'Volcano' - 2 plants Was £29.98	£14.99		
TJ47551	incredibloom® - 100g Starter Pack	£4.99		
TJ47552A	incredibloom® - 750g Pack	£12.99		
TJ56850PA	Patio Pot (39cm)	£9.99		
TJ59095PA	Patio Pot (39cm), 2 Pack SAVE* £5	£14.98		
				P&P £4.95
				Grand Total

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Cardholder's name _____ Expiry Date ____/____/____

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The dark foliage and fiery blooms of *Alstroemeria* 'Indian Summer' are instantly eye-catching and at 2ft (60cm) tall are neat, sturdy and ideal for a late 'hot' border

Top Tip

Plant alstroemerias from April to October, setting plants 18in (45cm) apart into good, well-drained soil. Water them during dry spells as they establish for the first year, and give them a thick duvet of bark mulch to help protect them over winter.

How to grow...

alstroemerias

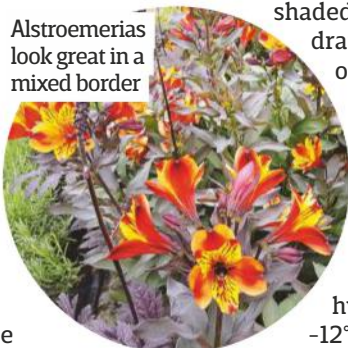
Peruvian lilies will thrive if you give them a home from home, says **Anne Swithinbank**

I WONDER how many gardeners have been tempted by a beautiful Peruvian lily, planted it out and either watched their plant dwindle after successive winters, or die away altogether?

Treated well, alstroemerias can add spectacular colour to gardens from summer through to autumn, but they generally need a little more attention than average to make sure they take successfully.

Make the effort to nurse them past their first couple of winters and they'll settle down to bloom year after year and spread into impressive colonies.

Alstroemerias look great in a mixed border



TimeInc

The secret of success is to understand the origins of these plants that are bred from species growing in grassland and mountain scree in South America.

Enjoying a sunny, or at most lightly shaded, position in well-drained soil, after a couple of years the fleshy, rhizome-like tubers anchor themselves deeply in the ground enabling plants to withstand extremes of cold, wind and drought. Some of the showy hybrids are hardy to -12°C (10°F) but others are somewhat more tender and their ability to survive cold depends to a large extent on soil type. They will stand more chance of coming through

winter in well-drained soils than heavy, wet clays.

To improve both extremes of soil, add lots of well-rotted garden compost or other soil conditioner and, if there is the least suspicion of poor drainage, plant into slightly mounded beds to raise roots above the general lie of the land. Some growers dig deep holes, line them with corks and refill with some grit added for good measure.

Most important of all, especially in cold regions, is a deep mulch of chipped tree bark spread over the plants for winter. Let growth die back naturally first, cut down the old stems and then spread mulch 8in (20cm) deep over the top. By spring, weather and birds will have thinned it enough for new growth to push through, otherwise excess can be gathered up.

Your letters

with Wendy Humphries



Write to: Wendy Humphries, Amateur Gardening, Westover House, West Quay Rd, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG or email: amateurgardening@timeinc.com

Wasteland to wonderland

Star Letter

I WANTED to share the work and passion put into transforming some abandoned land and turning it into a wonderfully productive vegetable patch in the East End of London.

Last year the owners of Phoenix gym asked if anyone was interested in turning the abandoned steps around the gym into a garden as the owners were considering concreting them over. This piece of land is terraced between a series of steps going upwards like an amphitheatre. The steps are made of breeze blocks filled with earth and there are 50 across and 30 deep at the highest and longest point.

I jumped at the idea and did a little pilot study last year on a few of the breeze blocks. The experience and result was so good that this year I have taken over the entire area. Strips of land are planted with larger items such as potatoes, tomatoes, beans, cauliflowers, peas and pumpkins

with the breeze blocks being filled with soil and used for onions, lettuce, peppers, beetroot and herbs.

Harvesting is in full swing now, under the watchful eye of the many aeroplanes from the City Airport that fly past the garden a few hundred yards away.

It just goes to show that any old piece of deserted inner-city land can be taken on and turned into a beautiful community garden with a little planning, hard work and love for gardening. Our herb garden on the bottom row is easily accessible for gym members who also contribute to the project. And proceeds are split between the local hospice in Beckton and funds for new seeds and equipment.

Michael Ellis, London

Wendy says: What an ambitious project, Michael, and it looks like all your hard work has paid off.



Michael and his fantastic vegetable plot in the East End

Michael Ellis



24 flowers and counting

Desmond Tubby

Flowering tops

I WAS interested in the recent item on orchids. The photograph I'm sending shows one of my moth orchids - now two years in my possession - and there are 24 flowers on this specimen! This is one from my collection kept in the conservatory. If one has an orchid in a clear plastic pot, just check that the roots are green, which confirms healthy growth.

Desmond Tubby, Minehead

Squeezing a quart into a pint pot

I WANTED to share with other readers that it is possible to grow so many different plants in a small space. Here's the view from my bedroom window of my little but busy front garden. I wanted to have something low maintenance, which of course now it is not! At the last count, I had over 70 different plants including 13 different dahlia varieties.

The *Phlomis russeliana* does seem to grow very large and take up valuable room but the blooms are certainly worth it in early summer. *Verbena bonariensis* is one of my favourites together with salvias and *Cephalaria gigantea* and the bees love them.

My interest started in my 30s and heightened after losing my dad so I guess the nurturing and creating was therapeutic for me. My 3-year-old grandson helps me find and dispose of



"I find it addictive and therapeutic planting and creating a mass of colour," says Jane

Making the most of limited space

Both Jane Shredder

the endless earwigs in my dahlias as well as slugs and snails. They are very well trained!

Jane Shredder, Bedfordshire

Readers Quick Tips

I USE Copperslip grease around the top of my pots to deter slugs. It seems to be working so far.

Colin, Sunderland



Share your stories, tips and pictures with us and if your letter is published you will receive a new book. When you write, please indicate your special area of interest!

Cracked pot

I READ and enjoyed Tamsin Westhorpe's article on succulents (AG, 15 July), and thought your readers might like to see my own effort. My of house leeks are mostly in terracotta pots with increasingly smaller pots inside each other, or fragments of pot. One has a miniature watering can, also planted up! On the bottom shelf is a galvanised trough which has holes drilled and is raised for drainage.

Phillip Mills, Derby



Phillip Mills

Photo of the week



Doreen's eucomis loves its spot by the house wall

Doreen Waenock

Our monster pineapple lily

I WAS interested in the recent piece by Martin Cox on pineapple lilies. Ours is known as the monster plant and certainly lives up to the name. It has survived quite severe winter weather with minimal protection but it's positioned close to the house wall. It is now so big, I think it may be time to split the group!

Doreen Waenock, Solihull, West Midlands

A plant love-hate story

WHEN I was feeling a bit down recently, my son Craig bought me this red dahlia to cheer me up. However, what he didn't know is that I have never liked dahlias. As a child I remember all the fuss and bother they caused my mother in overwintering them; and then there were the earwigs which loved to hide in the petals!

Now, this lovely red dahlia lifts my spirits every time I open the door to the conservatory and see it in front of me. Thanks Craig for bringing dahlias back into my life.

Peter Hodson, Wolverhampton

Wendy says: I was never keen on gladioli Peter, but the stems have reached 5ft tall and are a stunning sight!



Heather Morgan

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Get the look

Ideas for gorgeous gardens



Sliding doors opening onto the Coelhos' decking enable indoors and out to merge seamlessly. Stepping stones in the small rectangular pond beyond lead to a second decking area

Words by Sue Breatley. Photography by Derek St Romaine

Small wonder

Susan Coelho's modern wildlife-friendly garden is small in size but big on character

SIZE isn't everything, and it certainly hasn't stopped Susan and Richard Coelho from adding a lively extra dimension to their home in urban Teddington. The space behind the 1960's house may be small, but it's a haven for wildlife, with newts and frogs taking up residence in the pond, birds making the most of trees and shrubs and numerous insects going about their business amongst a rich variety of plants. "Living here means we're surrounded by people, but our garden gives us a little oasis of our own," Susan explains.

All this can be seen in its glory through sliding glass doors that can be pushed back on sunny days to bring the outdoors in. And with hardly any flowers to speak of and several evergreens chosen for shape and texture, this sheltered space looks good all year round without the need for too much deadheading and leaf clearing.

Key to the garden's success is its sound structure, for which Sue and

"Our garden gives us a little oasis of our own"

husband Richard received more than a little help from a neighbour who had set up his own business after training with the influential designer and landscaper John Brookes. The helping hand came from Cleve West who would go on to win gold medals at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. "We've known Cleve since we moved here in 1981 and 20 years ago we asked him if he would do our garden," explains Susan. "He dug the pond himself and incorporated several of the garden's existing features within his design, including an old apple tree that was growing at an angle."

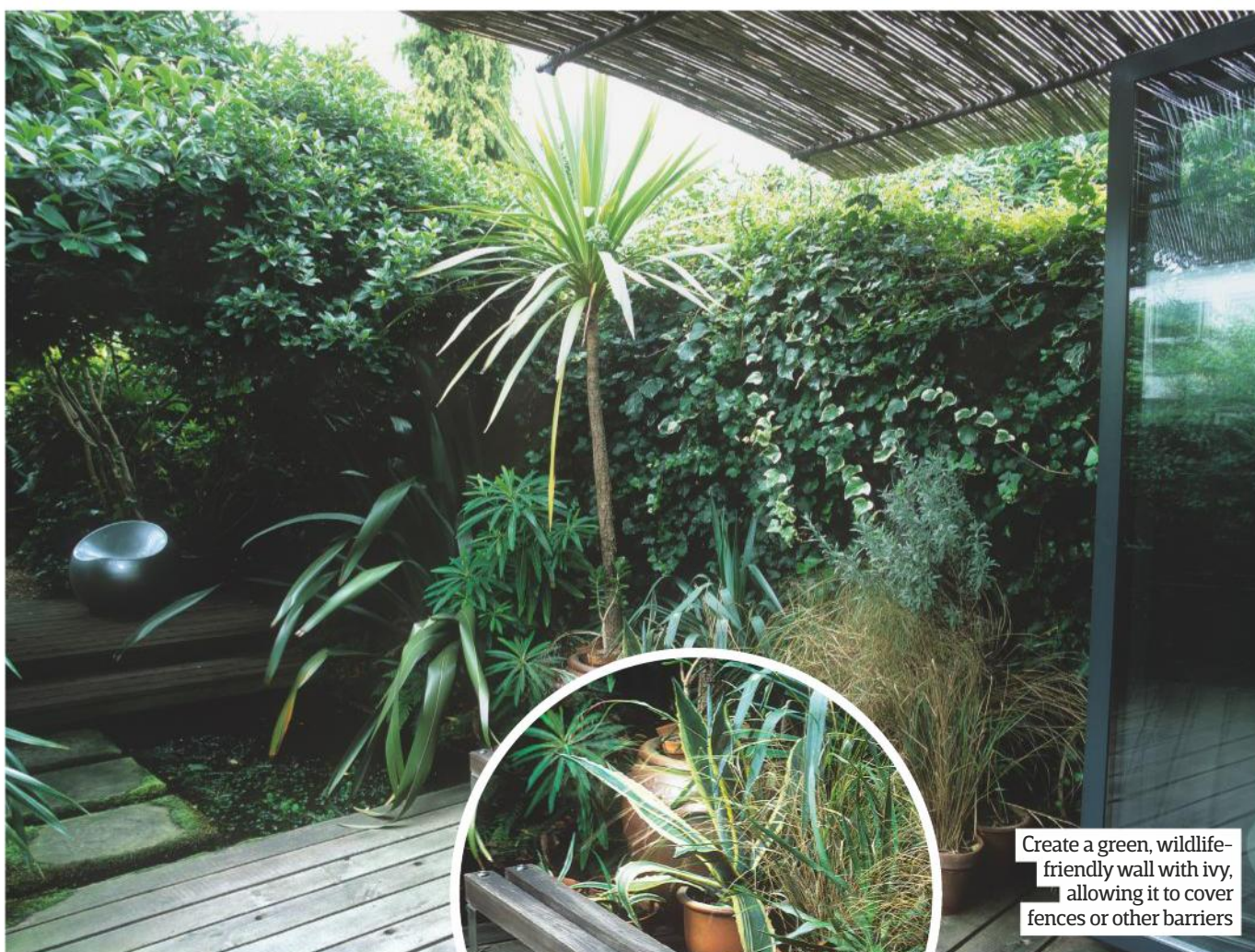
After positioning the pond close to the house Cleve built a series of brick

pillars topped with York stone pavers to provide access across to the back of the plot. "We love our pond: in an urban environment it's terribly important to encourage amphibians," says Susan.

Decking was installed immediately outside the sliding doors and on two further levels, the latter providing steps leading up to a discreet shed at the highest point. "The canopies of the trees and shrubs at the back of the garden create shade, which is a great spot for a hammock on really hot days, and we can enjoy the sunshine from the decking closest to the house," explains Susan.

Two decades on the garden has more than stood the test of time. "John Brookes talked about the idea of 'the outdoor room' back in the 1960s and Cleve was influenced by this concept when designing our garden, which is now an enormous part of our life," says Susan. "We can sit indoors and watch it changing as the sun comes around, or be outside and not feel as though there's lots to keep on top of."

Small wonder



Create a green, wildlife-friendly wall with ivy, allowing it to cover fences or other barriers

Reduce the need for watering by planting pots with drought-tolerant grasses and agaves



Embrace character: the Coelho's 'Discovery' apple tree had to be propped up after the storm of 1987, since when it's had a slight lean



Double up: a well-designed piece of furniture, like this glass fibre seat with a metallic finish, provides both a focal point and a comfortable place to sit

Encourage pond life: frogs, newts and insects, such as pond skaters and damselflies, flourish here providing hours of entertainment



Look for interesting foliage plants, like silver spear *Astelia chathamica*. It's happy in full sun or partial shade in a sheltered spot



Keep pond water smelling sweet by using oxygenating plants. The RHS recommends *Myriophyllum spicatum*, *Hottonia palustris* and *Fontinalis antipyretica* for smaller ponds



Make the most of shade: the canopies of an apple tree, a *Viburnum tinus*, *Fatsia japonica* and a laurel provide an enticing retreat from the sunshine



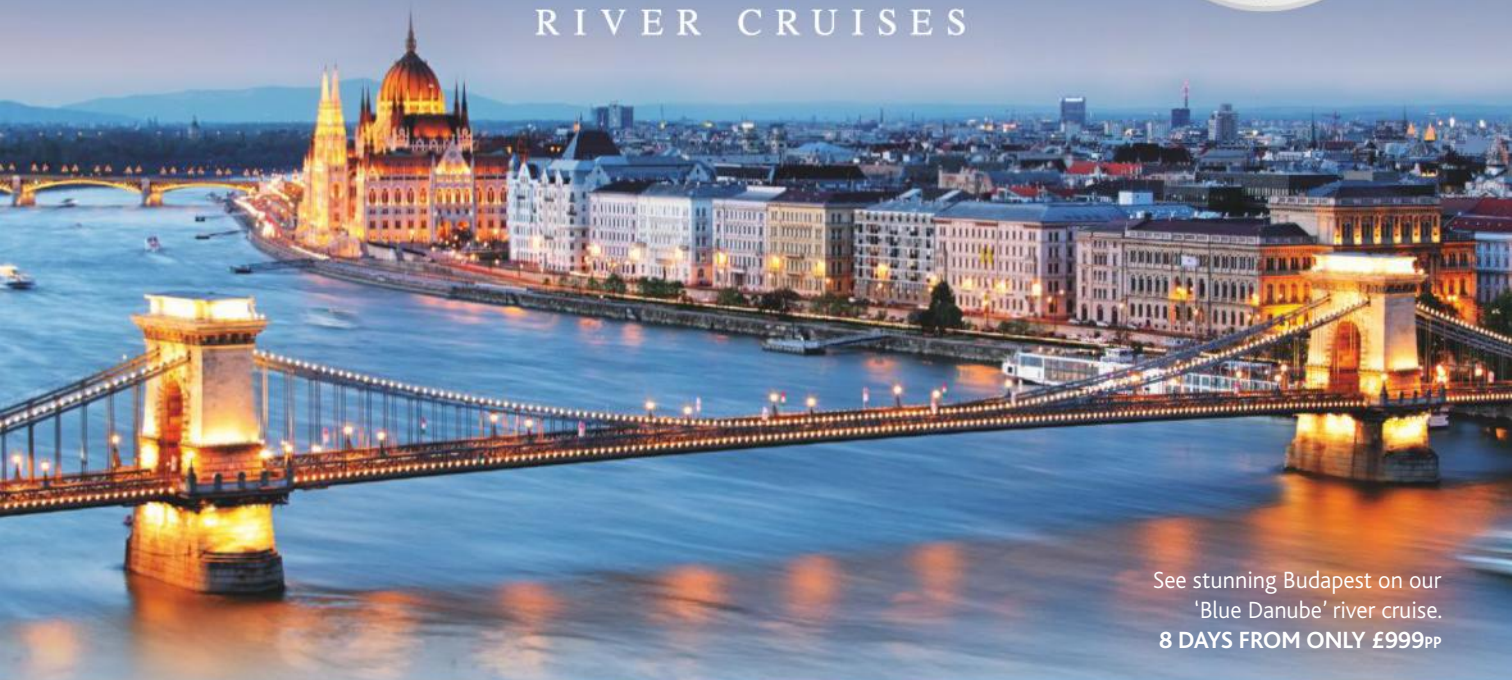
Meet the owner



Owner Susan Coelho
Address Blagdon Walk, Teddington, Middlesex
Garden size 44ft by 14ft (13.5m by 4.5m)
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Special features Wildlife-friendly pond with year-round foliage-rich planting and decking areas.



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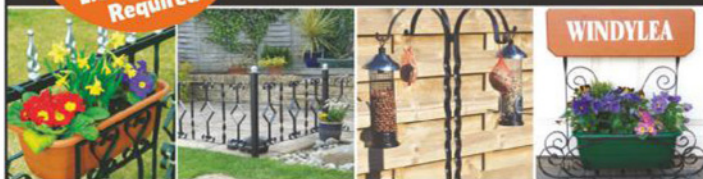
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Toby Buckland



Nurseryman and former Gardeners' World host



If you have a large garden, saving seed will prove to be a worthwhile investment

When clearing the garden this autumn, keep an eye open for ripe seed pods

Toby's top tips



■ Collect seeds in sunny weather, gathering whole flowers into large paper envelopes.



■ Keep the envelopes in the shed to thoroughly dry before winnowing (see panel, below).

I'm going to seed!

Collecting seed is fun and will save you money, says **Toby**

DESPITE the washout weather, flowers have a bumper crop of kernels that are ripe and ready for harvest and I've gathered more seed than at any time since I had a job collecting seed at a botanic garden!

For the veg plot I've been bagging-up the heads of companion and cut-flowers that I'll sow next year for colour along the ends of rows of vegetables. The fat plates of spent sunflowers, the wiry tops of larkspur and cosmos are all easy and worthwhile, as are French marigolds.

Saving seed saves money, especially where you need a lot of plants for large schemes, such as ornamental grasses for prairie meadows. I've been gathering the awns of purple moor grass, *Molinia caerulea*, for a shaggy lawn inspired by a visit to Scampston Hall in Yorkshire, where it's planted in alternating bands across the lawn.

Purple moor grass is a chameleon, turning through every shade of green as it grows, then turning purple and finally gold as the seed-heads dry in the sun. These stick around until late-winter when it's trimmed to do it all again.

Like all grass, it's simple to sow (you can do it now) in seed-trays where it'll happily grow cheek-by-jowl. Then, once

it's up, you can split it apart into ready-to-plant clumps.

The other plants well-worth collecting are those with capricious natures and weak constitutions that need regular replacement. Echinacea comes into this camp and seed gathered from its teasel-like tufts will flower this time next year, especially if it's sown by late-February.

Not bad, especially when a plant in bloom costs well over a fiver.

"Plants in bloom cost over a fiver!"

If you're after that naturalistic Provencal potager-look, marigolds among the rows of 'Cavolo Nero' kale are essential, as not only do they look good and provide petals for salads and rice, they attract aphid-eating hoverflies that then patrol your plot.

However, the seed of French marigold sold in the UK is invariably of the shorter dwarf strain, so more Margate than Monaco, but collect your own from these dumpy customers and the plants you get revert to the taller more glamorous form.



Get winnowing

WINNOWING is the fabulous process of separating the seeds from their casings and spent petals known as 'chaff'. Put the seed-heads in a bowl and scrunch-up between your fingers to pop the kernels from the cases. Then standing outside with the wind at your back, gently toss the contents into the air, gently blowing across the bowl at the same time.

Because seeds are heavier than the chaff, they fall back into the bowl while all the stems, petals and unwanted greenery blows away. Pour the seed back into a labelled envelope and keep in drawer for sowing in spring.



To separate seeds from their cases, try winnowing

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