

# OUR PLACE *News*

The monthly magazine dedicated to help everyone over 50 get the best out of life!

JULY 2022

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How to stop yourself getting injured while gardening - from essential exercises to the perfect posture

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What's on • Health & Beauty • Money & Work • Leisure & Travel  
Food & Drink • Arts, Crafts & Hobbies • Home & Garden

## Letter from the Editor

Welcome to Our Place - The monthly magazine dedicated to help everyone over 50 get the best out of life!

Every month, we bring you news and features on; Health & Beauty, Money & Work, Leisure & Travel, Food & Drink, Arts, Crafts & Hobbies, Home & Garden, plus... our Charity of the Month!

Our Place was founded with a mission to connect the mature online community to a world of news, features, offers and life changing products they may have missed out on. Bring them all into one place, Our Place.

What makes us special is that we are a vibrant team of all ages, from 21 to 65 who are all passionate about living life to the fullest irrespective of age. We have built strong relationships with some of the best UK age related businesses with the aim of brokering discounted rates for our Over-50s community.

Become a Friend of Our Place and receive our exclusive newsletters. They are a great way of keeping updated with the latest news and promotions. We aim to bring a smile to your face every time you open your inbox by selecting exclusive vouchers and discounts just for you.

We welcome you and hope you enjoy Our Place.

The Editor - Our Place

*PS. Do you have an interesting story or article? If so, send us an email by visiting: [www.ourplace.co](http://www.ourplace.co)*

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## NEVER leave your dog in a hot car!

**Every year, dogs suffer and die when their guardians make the mistake of leaving them in a parked car, even for "just a minute" while they run an errand.**

Parked cars are deathtraps for dogs: On a 78-degree day, the temperature inside a parked car can soar to between 100 and 120 degrees in just minutes, and on a 90-degree day, the interior temperature can reach as high as 160 degrees in less than 10 minutes.

Animals can sustain brain damage or even die from heatstroke in just 15 minutes. Beating the heat is extra tough for dogs because they can only cool themselves by panting and by sweating through their paw pads.

If you see a dog left alone in a hot car, take down the car's colour, model, make, and license plate number. Have the owner paged in the nearest buildings, or call local humane authorities or police. Have someone keep an eye on the dog.

**Don't leave the scene until the situation has been resolved.**

If the authorities are unresponsive or too slow and the dog's life appears to be in imminent danger, find a witness (or several) who will back up your assessment, take steps to remove the suffering animal from the car, and then wait for authorities to arrive.

Watch for heatstroke symptoms such as restlessness, excessive thirst, thick saliva, heavy panting, lethargy, lack of appetite, dark tongue, rapid heartbeat, fever, vomiting, bloody diarrhoea, and lack of coordination. If a dog shows any of these symptoms, get him or her out of the heat, preferably into an air-conditioned vehicle, and then to a veterinarian immediately. If you are unable to transport the dog yourself, take him or her into an air-conditioned building if possible and call animal control: Tell them it is an emergency.

Provide water to drink, and if possible spray the dog with a garden hose or immerse him or her in a tub of cool (but not iced) water for up to two minutes in order to lower the body temperature gradually. You can also place the dog in front of an electric fan. Applying cool, wet towels to the groin area, stomach, chest, and paws can also help. Be careful not to use ice or cold water, and don't overcool the animal.

When walking your dog, keep in mind that if it feels hot enough to fry an egg outside, it probably is. When the air temperature is 86 degrees, the asphalt can reach a sizzling 135 degrees - more than hot enough to cook an egg in five minutes. And it can do the same to our canine companions' sensitive foot pads.

On an 87-degree day, asphalt temperatures can reach 140 degrees, hot enough to cause burns, permanent damage and scarring after just one minute of contact. Rapid burns and blistering can occur at 150 degrees. Hot sidewalks, pavement and parking lots can not only burn paws, they also reflect heat onto dogs' bodies, increasing their risk of deadly heatstroke.

If you wouldn't put your dog in a frying pan, please don't make him or her walk on a hot pavement. Always test the pavement with your hand before setting out (too hot to touch is too hot for your dog), walk early in the morning or late at night when it's cooler, carry water and take frequent breaks in shady spots and never make dogs wear muzzles that restrict their breathing.

### Summer tips for your dog

**1. Exercise your dog early in the morning or late at night.** Since these are the cooler parts of the day, this will make the walk more comfortable for both you and your dog. I'm a believer in vigorous exercise for healthy dogs, but this is the time of year to back off on exercise intensity.

**2. Use doggie boots.** You can find these at your local pet supply store. If you can't walk your dog during the early and later hours of the day, this is a good way of protecting him. Heat rises from the ground, especially on surfaces like cement and asphalt, and dogs absorb and release heat through their feet. Just like boots prevent the dog from absorbing the cold in the winter, they also isolate heat.

**3. Keep your dog hydrated!** Different dogs have different needs when battling the heat. Keep in mind that darker coats absorb more heat than lighter coats. Also, overweight dogs are at higher risk for dehydration. Carry a bottle of water when going on a walk with your dog. Better yet have your dog carry it for you in a backpack or a vest! The water in the bottles will keep the dog cooler and also give the dog a sense of purpose.

**4. Keep your dog in the shade** Don't have air conditioning? No problem! Find a spot in the shade and set up a kiddie pool. Lay down a wet towel for your dog to lie on. Or simply set up a fan in front of a pan of ice.



# Growing pains? How to stop yourself getting injured while gardening - from essential exercises to the perfect posture

**Bending to dig, twisting to prune and carrying heavy loads can all mean gardeners end up with unnecessary aches. Here are some expert tips to keep you healthy as your garden blooms.**

One of the reasons gardening is such good exercise is that the sheer joy of it disguises how hard you're working, so you end up exerting yourself more than you would at the gym.

Scientific studies demonstrate this - not that I need proof. When I manage to steal a moment to prune a tangle of triflids, I have trouble stopping. Before I know it, I've been waving a chainsaw aloft on a pole for four hours.

The only downside is that the endless yanking, pushing, lifting and bending can lead to, or exacerbate, aches and pains.

NHS Digital figures for 2020-21 (AKA the great lockdown gardening and DIY boom) record 12,355 admissions to hospital in England with injuries related to "overexertion and strenuous or repetitive movements". But it doesn't have to be this way.

Madeline Hooper, a retired PR executive who lives in the Hudson Valley north of New York, reached a point where she could no longer ignore her sore neck. "I love gardening," she says, "and it doesn't matter how long it takes to weed the bed - I'm weeding the whole bed."

But I had terrible neck and upper shoulder pain." Being a can-do type, she sought help from personal trainer Jeff Hughes, whose simple, commonsense approach worked. The pair have now teamed up on a US TV show called GardenFit, in which they travel around America, admiring gardens while helping to educate the world about how to garden painlessly.

The first thing to know is that posture is everything. "If your head is back and your chest is puffed out and your shoulders are back and down, you feel tall and powerful," says Hughes.

"Whatever you do, you will incorporate the correct muscle, whereas when you hunch, you are incorporating muscles that aren't designed to do that job. And that's what we do when we get tired."

Hooper's technique was a perfect example of this. "Your shoulder lifts your arm," says Hughes, "and your trapezius lifts your shoulder. If you're doing something all day and your shoulder gets tired of lifting your arm, your body's smart. It goes: what else can lift the arm? All of a sudden your trapezius is doing something it wasn't designed to do, and of course your neck is going to hurt." The solution is simple: "When your shoulder gets tired of lifting your arm, stop lifting your damn arm!"

"As soon as you start recognising that you can't hold your posture correctly any more, do something on the ground, or grab the shovel and dig. Now you're in going the opposite direction with your shoulders."

British garden designer and TV presenter Danny Clarke follows a similar philosophy. "Keep swapping jobs," he says. "I always say, 'Little and often.'" He has his own sequence. "I don't tear into the heavy lifting, or the digging. I'll warm the body up by mowing." Coming from a sports background, he says, "I'm quite aware of my body, and what it can and can't do." For some, a mental adjustment is required to let go of completing a task in one session. "Don't try to finish it, because the garden is never finished," says Clarke, serenely. "That's the beauty of it: it is infinite. Savour each moment. Enjoy it."

Sometimes strengthening exercises are required to correct pain-inducing posture - Hughes recalls a gardener called Bob, who appears in the TV show with lower-back pain. "He didn't stand up straight when he walked," says Hughes. "The lower back is holding up everything above it, so if you're hunched over, it's getting strained."

If this sounds like you, you might want to try this. "Relax your shoulders," says Hughes. "Imagine that you have on your favourite pair of blue jeans and I want you to very slowly take your shoulder blades and slide them down into your back pockets." This creates a pivot effect, where your chest puffs out, you breathe more easily and your spine is aligned. While holding this, he adds, "whatever muscle is starting to get tired right now, that's your weak muscle that you need to strengthen". The longer you hold this posture, he says, the more training those weak muscles will get, eventually enabling them to do their job automatically.

To wake these muscles up in Bob, Hughes gave him an elastic exercise band to hold out in front like handlebars, and then raise above his head. The effect was immediate, with Bob marvelling at his newfound ability to stand up straight. "Your whole perspective changes," says Hughes, "because now your peripheral vision is better." Hughes prescribed Bob four weeks of practising his new posture, and briefly repeating some moves with his exercise band every day.

While you are working in your garden, allotment or community plot, with your shoulder blades in your back pockets, the next move to master is what Hooper and Hughes call "armchair", which isn't as restful as it sounds but could save your back when you are bending or lifting. "If you spread your feet, you're automatically closer to the ground," says Hughes.

"Everything drops down, and when you bend, your knees and butt stick out and you come down into a good squat base." Then you rest your arms on your legs. "Now your lower back isn't holding your body up. If you apply that to the next eight hours, your back will be your best friend at the end of the day."



When you use one arm for weeding or sowing, you can keep the other supporting arm resting on its leg, but switching arms is crucial. Hughes says it is essential to train your nondominant hand to do its fair share of the work. Not only will this spread the load on your arms and shoulders, but "you're going to be balanced with your twisting; you're starting to balance out your torso". Similarly, if you're on a ladder, he says: "Turn it around, so now you're twisting the other way."

Balance reappears in the pair's final top tip, which they call the "seesaw" and involves, again, being more aware of your body while you are working. If you are reaching your arm out while holding heavy clippers, you need to counter that weight by holding the shoulder blade down, so that, says Hughes: "You can match the pressure here with the pressure there, like a little seesaw bounce effect."

Hooper says that within four weeks of integrating Hughes's fixes into her life, healthier habits had embedded themselves and she started to feel better. "After six weeks, I never had pain again from gardening. "I wish I had learned this when I first started to garden," says Hooper. In all the gardening courses and books she has completed, she says, "nobody teaches this".

(Article source: The Guardian)

# ‘I call it sauna head - your ego disappears’: how the UK got hooked on heat

From a hut by a Welsh river to a converted horsebox on the beach, saunas are appearing in unlikely spots all over the country.



*The Guardian* reports that It’s a chilly morning in Walpole Bay, Kent, and I’m waist deep in the sea. Unable to stand it any longer, I wade out and sprint across the sandy beach, where - joy! - a wooden sauna is perched on huge rusty wheels.

Modelled on a Victorian bathing machine (appropriately enough, as we’re in Margate, one of the UK’s original seaside resorts) this free community sauna is the baby of Dom Bridges, the founder of local skincare brand Haeckels. “I don’t see it as an elitist pastime,” he tells me. “It’s important to provide healthy spaces to congregate, to build community while also focusing on our mental and psychological health. It shouldn’t be something you have to pay for.”

Locals agree. Volunteer Rosalind Nelson, who opens up every Sunday, says: “Everyone is always in a brilliant mood, because they’ve just swum, so they’re at their best mentally and physically, and they get to look at this wonderful view and warm up.” One user, Carol, tells me that she’s had breast cancer twice and says it’s helped her recovery; another local, Tindara, says: “It just clears your mind completely.”

Although we think of modern-day sauna culture as Scandinavian, it’s actually an ancient British practice, with the oldest archaeological evidence found near Stonehenge, as well as a bronze age sauna on Westray, Orkney. But in Britain, saunas have often been seen as naff add-ons to resorts or leisure centres.

Now that’s changing. In the last two years, “at least 50 ‘new wave’ UK saunas are either already up and running or being built, with many more in various stages of planning”, says the British Sauna Society founder Mika Meskanen. This summer’s festivals are setting up wellness areas with saunas, while author Caitlin Moran called the sauna “the new pub”.

“It’s a massive movement,” says Heartwood Saunas’ founder Olly Davey, whose construction studio is flat out with commissions. “There are not many beaches around the UK that haven’t got something planned.”

Whenever you start talking to enthusiasts, one sauna keeps coming up in conversation: Beach Box, Brighton. I travel there to meet Liz Watson, considered by some to be the “mother” of the new sauna movement. “It just makes us all so happy,” she says, beaming. “Everyone leaves with a smile on their face.” Watson co-founded Beach Box with Katie Bracher as a pop-up in 2018, part of the Brighton fringe’s Finnish season. “People loved it; we were fully booked.”

We’re sitting on high pine benches in her Finnish-style löyly (a Finnish word for the steam that rises from a stove) sauna, with its snug felt ceiling, and stove filled to the brim with volcanic rocks. All wood used is sourced locally from estates in Sussex and the whole enclave oozes DIY charm. Watson bought three horsebox trailers - 2 metres by 3 metres - on eBay, and local builders transformed them into saunas. “But you can use anything,” she says, “from old caravans to sheds and buses.”

The heat is gentle but intense. “As you stay in the sauna longer,” Watson says, “it’s a cardiovascular workout: the heat gets deep into tissues, the heat shock proteins get released, the endorphins. It reset my whole life, really.”

Aberdeen beach hosts the country’s first mobile sauna, called Haar (“sea fog”). “Scandinavia has always been a big part of our lives, influencing us in almost everything,” says owner Callum Scott. “My main job is a primary school teacher, and the sauna, a side project, helps me switch off.”

His sauna has also been converted from a former horsebox, with a larch cladding exterior. “It’s locally sourced, while the trailer roof is painted British racing green.” Deciding to keep costs as low as possible, Scott started the build in a nearby stable yard at evenings and weekends, working seven days a week for months with help from his family.

Inside lies an Estonian-made wood-fired stove; the space is kitted out with local Scots pine. Eucalyptus leaves are hung on the walls. Scott wanted to ensure it was portable. “It’s 2 metres by 5 metres, and less than 1.5 tons, so anyone can tow it. I wanted a sauna for the seaside, but also for touring the snowy mountains and coastal towns.”

In the six months it’s been open, it’s already travelled across Scotland. It’s now moved on from Aberdeen beach to the Cairngorms national park, where it will remain until November. “I especially love the social aspect,” he says. “It’s a safe space to meet friends in a relaxed atmosphere.”

I end my journey at Hackney Wick community sauna in London, a formerly derelict site behind a 1930s municipal bathing house. It is “authentic, affordable and inclusive”, says co-founder Victoria Maddox, as we sweat in a large 12-person sauna. It was “originally built by a German company for top-end showjumping horses”, she says, “but they didn’t like it.” All the wood and windows were reclaimed, and the sauna rebuilt on to the trailer.

They’re keen to reach out to Hackney’s diverse population. “We recently asked a community swim group to come down,” says co-founder and anaesthetist Oguguo Igwe. “I’ve never seen that many Black and Asian people in a sauna, and I was looking around and I was, like... this is amazing.”

A brand-new sauna has just arrived, and the team are keen for me to try it. A small space heated to a ferocious 90C, we’re dripping instantly. We wear hats, which “trap a layer of cool air between the head and the heat”, Maddox says, “so it helps to regulate your temperature better.” But still, this is heat on another level. “We call that ‘sauna head’,” she says, glowing. “It makes you go into a slightly meditative state and you lose your edges, your ego dissolves. Time disappears.” Afterwards, we plunge into converted whisky barrels filled with icy water.

What about planning permission? In Folkestone, tattooist Tim Smithen has been in talks with the council to install his Steampunk Sauna on Mermaid beach. “I’ve been proposing it since last July,” he admits when we chat the next day. “Everything takes time - but it will happen.”

With its unquestionable benefits, this is a movement with a life force of its own. “You come out feeling like you’ve been on holiday, with a sense of space in your mind,” Brighton Box’s Watson tells me.

“Sweating has its own release and calms the thoughts in my brain. It’s like sitting in a pub, it liberates you, and you end up having the loveliest chats.” The sauna feels like a level playing field: you meet people from different backgrounds whom you wouldn’t otherwise necessarily encounter. Or, as the society’s Mika Meskanen summed it up: “Communal sauna brings about social cohesion - and puts restless minds at ease.”

*(Story source: The Guardian)*

## Relationship charity releases vegetable-themed condoms for over-65s

A new campaign has brought the topic of sexual health among the over-65s to an unexpected environment... the garden centre.

*Silver Surfers* reports that according to research conducted by the relationship charity Relate, more than half of those over 65 consider themselves to be ‘sexually adventurous,’ but many feel awkward speaking about their sex life and many hardly ever use condoms - which is leading to an increase in STIs among this age group.

To raise awareness, the organisation has teamed up with Ogilvy to launch ‘The Rise of Horniculture.’



The campaign features a series of fun, vegetable-themed condom packet designs that have been displayed among garden centre seed packets - because if there’s one thing Brits do love chatting about, it’s gardening.

“Sex and intimacy can be as adventurous and fulfilling in later life, as it can be at any age. It might be different - for physical or other reasons - but it’s brilliant that our research showed it’s still a significant part of life for those who want it to be. And we shouldn’t be afraid to talk about the importance of safe sex, regardless of age,” said Anjula Mutanda, relationship psychotherapist and president at Relate.

“By bringing the sexual health debate to an unexpected environment like a garden center, we’re once again trying to help break down taboos and get people up and down the country talking about the joy of later-life sex.”

The tongue-in-cheek illustrated condoms are available at the family-run independent garden center Finchley Nurseries. With a nod to some of the most popular cheeky emojis, the range features aubergines, plums, courgettes, onions and avocados - forming a vegan and fully sustainable condom collection that is also biodegradable.

“One of the best ways to tackle the taboo of talking about sex and intimacy is being upfront about the fact it sometimes gives us the giggles - and use humour to make people feel more comfortable chatting about johnnies,” added Farah Kabir and Dr Sarah Welsh, founders of Hanx.

“We’re pleased to have provided the condoms for Relate’s campaign and want to encourage everyone to cultivate a no-blushes attitude to safe sex. Let’s get it on!”

Last year, Relate and Rankin released a series of imagery that shone a light on the beauty of sex and intimacy in later life.

*(Story source: Silver Surfers)*



# Europe on a shoestring: 14 of the best budget city breaks

We've found the budget breaks across Europe that won't break the bank, from Balkan hotspots to Barcelona.

Various factors enable a great budget break in Europe. Flights - and not to an airport 50 miles away - shouldn't break the bank, and nor should a good-quality hotel.

You'll want to dine without stressing out about finances, and to dine well at that, ideally trying authentic regional cooking at its best; and transport should be affordable. Free attractions or walking tours help no end, as does a non-euro currency that's weak against the pound. Most crucially, you want genuine allure: beauty, culture, cool, even the odd beach. Combine all of that, and you'll be laughing all the way to the bureau de change.

## 1. Istanbul, Turkey (pictured above)

According to the Post Office's latest Holiday Money Report, a 37 per cent price fall has seen Turkey become one of the world's cheapest destinations. During a long weekend in its captivating capital, you can further economise via an Istanbulkart transit card.

These discount every tram, metro, Bosphorus-crossing ferry or funicular ride as you tick off tourist attractions: multi-domed mosque Hagia Sophia, opulent Topkapi Palace and the vaulted Grand Bazaar's pipe or pottery markets. Istanbul is also one of Europe's most affordable dinner options: a meal for two people costs just £15 on average.

**Where to stay:** Wholly normal for hopelessly hip Karakoy, Sub is an anonymous 1980s block turned sharp design hotel - and has modest rates to boot.

## 2. Tirana, Albania

Each year, the Post Office also directly compares the specific costs - drinks, evening meals for two with wine, three-star accommodation, sightseeing and transport - on city breaks in 40 destinations in Europe. Currently providing the best value is Albania's capital city.

A real hidden gem, mountain-framed Tirana has interesting museums on former communist bunkers, mural-dotted boulevards and a good clubbing scene, while the Dajti Ekspres cable car (£5.50 return) ascends one of those peaks for breathtaking country views. You can eat filling Balkan cuisine for a song - a pound usually buys two triangular, cheese or beef-filled bureks - and sip cups of coffee for about 60p.

**Where to stay:** Hotels are similarly economical, typified by the central, four-star Mondial and its rooftop swimming pool.

## 3. Krakow, Poland

In normal times, Poland's second city is perfect for a cheap city break filled with sightseeing. Among the many must-see spots are its Wawel Royal Castle, the world's first Unesco world heritage site, and St Mary's Basilica, where each hour is marked by a trumpet call. Try also to fit in time for people-watching on Market Square; even there, a plate of pierogi dumplings and pint of Pilsner should bring change for a tenner. Shuttle buses for sober day-trips to Auschwitz begin at €4 for a return; otherwise you could just wander past palaces and bars in the old, narrow-laned heart of Krakow.



**Where to stay:** Typifying Krakow's affordability, the classy Grand has 65 antique-filled rooms, a Viennese café and a piano restaurant.

## 4. Lisbon, Portugal

Occasionally, western Europe can be cheap too. In 2021 the Post Office surprisingly ranked sun-soaked Lisbon as its fourth-best value city, aided by the year-on-year fall in accommodation prices: a two-night stay will now typically set you back £73. Budget travellers can accomplish two things by eating petiscos (Portugal's take on tapas) in taverns: not just saving dosh, but fuelling themselves for walks up the city's seven hills to miradouros - azulejo-tiled viewpoints. Bouncing atop baroque cobbles, wooden trams are €3 per ride; 40-minute trains serve Cascais's sandy beaches and free-to-roam Parque Marechal Carmona, where peacocks strut about.

**Where to stay:** Allied with art exhibitions and regular live music, pistachio-green Brown's Central Hotel has 84 cool, contemporary rooms.



## 5. Bucharest, Romania

Considering both flights and accommodation, another recent study proclaimed Romania's capital Europe's cheapest city break. That's good news for clubbers, creatives or hipsters bound for the "new Berlin", as Bucharest is frequently tagged. Yes, it can sometimes be gritty and traffic-choked - but then comes a gorgeous green space, a vegan café serving perfect pizzas, a sky bar or a winsome old Orthodox church hiding in plain sight.

You'll also find the world's second largest administrative building, with only America's Pentagon outstripping the oh-so-communist Palace of the Parliament for unsubtle size. Dinners, routinely scoffed on garden or pavement terraces, are easily limited to £10 per person.

**Where to stay:** The blindingly coloured, "super" bedrooms at Vilacrosse Boutique Inn are available at reasonable rates.

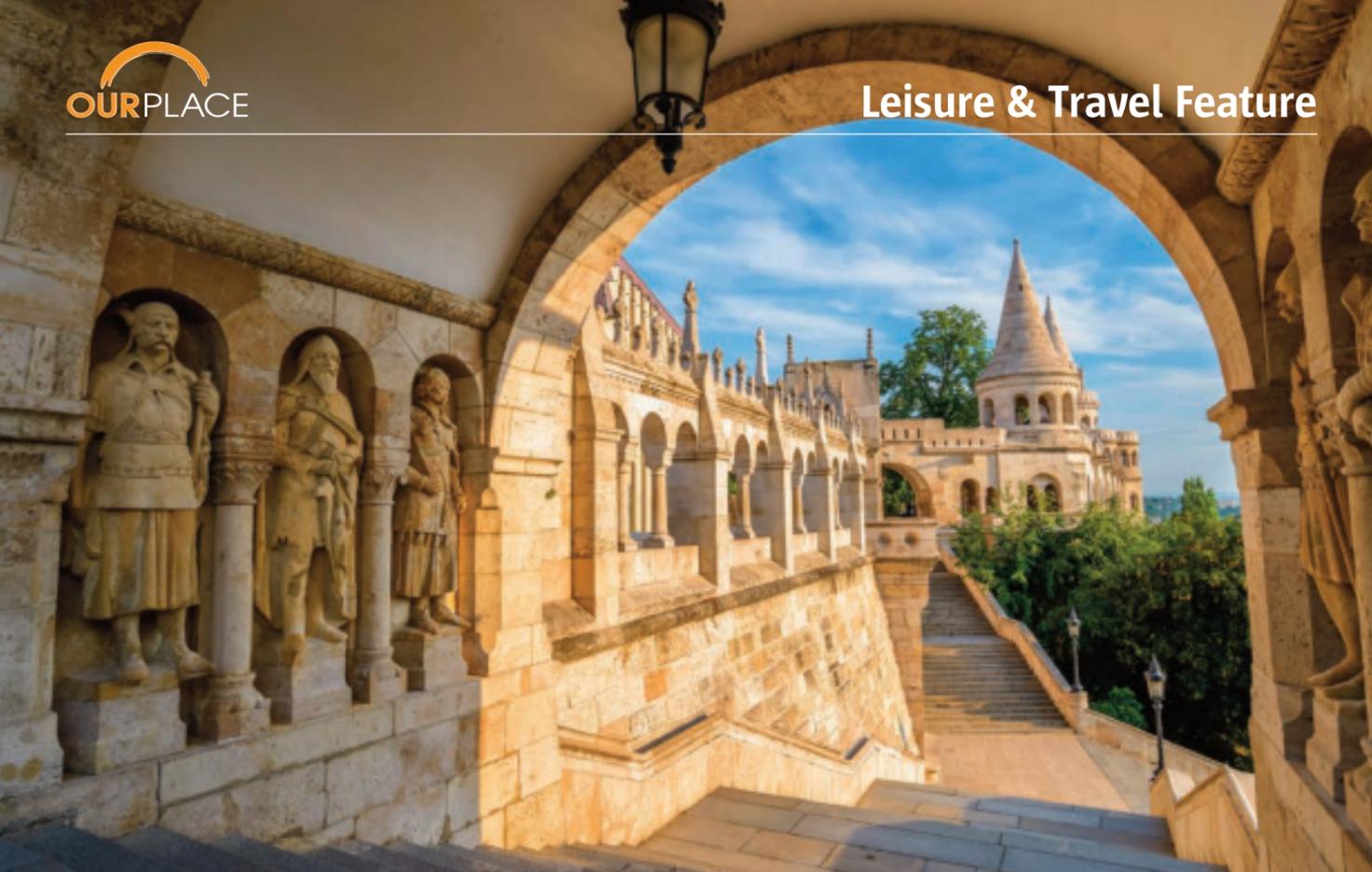
## 6. Vilnius, Lithuania

Low-cost flights from London almost seem an affront to Vilnius's grand, flamboyant architecture. You'll discover that in the walkable Old Town, which is on Unesco's lists, but just as snap-worthy and suited to a romantic getaway is Trakai Island Castle, a fairytale fort with red, witch's-hat turrets.

Cool - think coffee bars and a strong street-art scene - and cosmopolitan, Lithuania's capital is also a fascinating food destination as its Baltic cuisine combines fare typical of northeastern Europe with Nordic influences. Hence the tasting menus at funky fine-dining haunt Ertlio Namas, which should be far dearer. Eat there after wandering bohemian Uzupis, a self-declared "republic" in the city's east.

**Where to stay:** There are spacious, soft-hued rooms at the gorgeous 15th Avenue.

*Continued on pages 10-11...*



## 10. Budapest, Hungary (pictured left)

If its synthesis of classical architecture, great nightlife, glamorous cafés, glorious Danube bridges and thermal baths doesn't already add up to a perfect city break, then Budapest has another ace to play: it's easily done on a budget. Many sights in Hungary's capital are free to visit: Fisherman's Bastion and its river-facing terraces, the food-focused Great Market Hall or Heroes' Square. Others, such as the scenic rooftop of St Stephen's Basilica, cost a pittance. With hearty goulash lunches, forward-thinking dinners and late-night drinks making little additional dent on your finances, splashing out £14 to enter the Insta-famous Szechenyi Baths should be palatable.

**Where to stay:** Below the main fortress, as its name suggests, lovely Hotel Castle Garden has its own wellness centre.

## 11. Sarajevo, Bosnia



Sarajevo has emerged from its war-torn years looking remarkably good. That's particularly true of an atmospheric, charming original centre, which hosts coppersmith workhouses and homely teahouses. Those, along with a mixture of churches and mosques, underline how multicultural Bosnia's capital is - as does a local cuisine with Balkan, Turkish and Mediterranean elements. Engagingly small, the hilly city is constantly cobbled, making comfy shoes essential. The choicest hill is Vidikovac, a trudge up which should conclude in sunset-watching and dinner at the bargain namesake restaurant. Trams cost about a euro per ride and it's only twice that for on-the-go lunches involving a cevapi, or Bosnian kebab.

**Where to stay:** Inside a central, Austro-Hungarian-era building, the modern, minimal Hotel Colours Inn throws in free breakfasts.

## 12. Ljubljana, Slovenia

Summer's the best time for a thrifty short break to the capital of Slovenia. It's when a number of free festivals are held on open-air streets stages - events such as the Ana Desetnica street-theatre festival from June's end, a July jazz festival and Nights in Ljubljana Old Town in August. You'll also find cafés set up on leafy riverside terraces, and parties in old sugar factories.

Pretty, compact and car-free (save for electric taxis) - under its "Vision of Ljubljana 2025" project - the city is easy to stroll or cycle using free-to-hire bikes, though you'll probably want to fork out €4 for a return funicular ride up to its lofty medieval castle.

**Where to stay:** Behind its art deco exterior, Hotel Cubo serves great good next to the old town.

## 14. Berlin, Germany

Germany's capital has lots of cheap accommodation. Cool hostels proliferate, while NH operates a series of attractively priced mid-range hotels. Also affordable is eating, with ubiquitous currywurst sausages and doner kebabs - both of them invented in Berlin - costing nearer €5 than €10. Sightseers will further rejoice at how many free-to-visit wartime sights are in walking distance of one another, from Checkpoint Charlie and Brandenburger Tor to the Reichstag (book ahead) and the Holocaust Memorial. Gratis too is the East Side Gallery, a graffiti-strewn portion of the Berlin Wall, and large Tiergarten park. Pay just €3.50 to climb the latter's Victory Column for stupendous views.

**Where to stay:** Handily situated, the NH outpost on Potsdamer Platz offers free wi-fi and clean, modern rooms.

## 13. Athens, Greece

There's no charge to amble around dreamy Plaka, where flowering creeper plants garland pastel-shade buildings, nor to photograph the café-lined steps of Mnisikleous. Equally free are trips to see superlative street art, vintage window shopping on hip Protogenous or even local-led walking tours (although tipping is common). Factor in lots of cheap rental accommodation and many wallet-friendly eats - Ariston's feta-and-courgette or bacon-and-cheese pie slices cost just €2.50 each - and you should be able to afford the must-sees of Athens. The hilltop Acropolis citadel is a wonder of ancient temples and gateways. Multi-site tickets including six other archeological sites offer the best value at €30.



**Where to stay:** As its name suggests, the Acropolis View overlooks that main sight - and is only a short walk from the airport-connecting metro.

(Article source: The Times)

## 7. Barcelona, Spain

Yes, that Barcelona. Various factors render the avant-garde Catalan capital and its Gaudi confections unexpectedly conducive to a parsimonious weekend. Multiple airlines fly direct from Britain, driving down flight prices. Metro lines connect to the airport and everything is within walking distance if you don't mind a decent stride. Many museums open for free once a month. The sandy beach isn't subdivided into clubs with entry fees. Numerous purse-friendly restaurants, from Asian tapas to brilliant bistros, dot the city; so too does a stellar line-up of well-priced hotels, spanning the chic&basic chain, independent stays in well-to-do Eixample or bigger, rooftop-pool affairs.

**Where to stay:** In the latter category is Hotel Motel One, set beside Ciutadella park, not far from the Gothic Quarter.

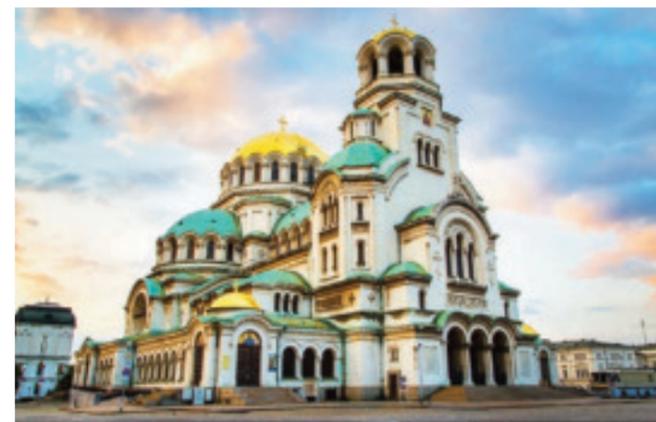
## 8. Bratislava, Slovakia

Common around the Slovak capital, zemiakove placky are fried, garlicky potato pancakes which are sold for just a euro or two. Goulash here is correspondingly reasonable, and a pound buys most pints of beer. Flights can be as cheap as £15; such stupendous value is wonderfully at odds with Bratislava's grandeur. Draped along the Danube like a sleeping cat, its winding, patisserie-peppered old town and cheerfully hued Blue Church (officially the Church of St Elizabeth) seduce visitors below a rectangular castle complex. An equally good look-out point is the riverbank's futuristic UFO Tower' to whose 95m-high observation deck you can travel by speedy lift for roughly £5.

**Where to stay:** Bratislava's many permanently moored "botels" are terrific value. The Dunajsky Pivovar throws in a pool and private brewery for good measure.

## 9. Sofia, Bulgaria

One of Europe's oldest cities, Sofia is built on top of now-excavated Roman ruins. Despite the rotundas and arched streets, Bulgaria's capital remains criminally underrated, even among eastern European city breaks. Those who do visit find a beguiling place where functional, sombre Soviet blocks overhang gilded golden churches, and where nodding your head means no while shaking it indicates yes. That's near-impossible to remember after glasses of rakia, a fiery fruit brandy, which traditionally follow dinners. Talking of which, expect to spend no more than £10 each on three courses with wine, even if eating steps from gold-domed Alexander Nevsky Cathedral - one of the world's biggest church buildings.



**Where to stay:** Expect candles, exposed brick and imaginative lighting at the central R34 Boutique Hotel.



# Future food security: The surprising green innovations that could revolutionise food production... and help with rising costs

**You might not give much thought to the way your potatoes have been grown when you're doing the weekly shop. But with costs rising for farmers and shoppers alike, what goes on behind the scenes across farms and production lines can have a big impact not only on the cost of the food in our basket, but also on our future food security.**

As well as short term support to help UK producers manage the costs of essentials like feed, fuel and fertiliser, urgent investment is needed in innovations that can safeguard food security and sustainability in the long term.

'It's clear that the food system faces a lot of challenges, from the ongoing war in Ukraine to the effects of climate change.

As the UK's leading food retailer we know we have a significant role to play,' says Giles Bolton, Responsible Sourcing Director at Tesco.

The war in Ukraine has caused the cost of inputs like fertiliser to increase dramatically for farmers, while the impact of climate change on global temperatures and weather patterns is adding to the pressure on food supply chains.

The food industry globally is still responsible for one third of greenhouse gas emissions. Finding ways to produce the food we need more sustainably, will help to protect farmers and their businesses in the future.

'That makes it one of our biggest opportunities to make a difference. By finding ways to feed the nation sustainably and affordably, using fewer resources, we can improve the health of people and the planet,' says Giles.

To help find solutions to these challenges, Tesco and WWF have launched Innovation Connections, a new accelerator programme which pairs sustainability start-ups with Tesco suppliers to fast-track innovation in the food supply chain.

The aim is to use the supermarket's network of suppliers to rapidly scale up these green technologies so they can make a significant contribution to cutting the environmental impact of the average shopping basket and protecting the UK's food security.

'We have many of the biggest and best supplier partners in the country, so it's a powerful match,' says Giles.

Innovation Connections received more than 70 applications, which was whittled down to five winners that were each paired with Tesco suppliers and awarded funding to scale up their innovations in the supply chain.

One of the winners was CCm Technologies, a Swindon-based clean tech company which extracts useful compounds from waste, and combines these with CO2 from power generation, so they can be turned into fertiliser.

The company will be working alongside startups Andermatt, which also makes low carbon fertiliser, and Farm Carbon Toolkit, which will measure the results of the trial to provide data on the potential to scale up the solution.

Together, they've been partnered with Tesco's potato supplier, Branston, to help reduce the environmental impact of our favourite spuds.

'The technology uses captured carbon dioxide from industrial power generation and materials from agriculture and industrial processes that are normally considered wastes, such as ammonia and phosphates, to create new farming fertilisers,' says CCm chief executive Pawel Kisielewski.

'These fertiliser-from-waste pellets have significantly lower than normal carbon and resource footprints and offer businesses a way of sustainably handling their waste.'

Regular fertiliser production uses large amounts of raw materials and is one of the biggest sources of greenhouse gas emissions related to potato farming. And with fertiliser costs increasing rapidly for farmers, alternatives like CCm's could be part of the solution to helping keep prices down in the future.

CCm says that by using fertilisers generated through its own process instead, Tesco could cut the carbon footprint of the products on its shelves.

'Our process almost completely avoids using new materials, and instead manages to create fertilisers that generate only a fraction of the carbon dioxide emissions,' says Pawel.

'The result is a slow-release pellet that ticks all three principles of the circular economy - eliminating waste and pollution, keeping materials in use and helping to regenerate soils.'

To help scale up the technology, Tesco has now linked CCm with its potato supplier, Branston. 'We're delighted to be given a huge opportunity to reduce the impact of emissions from the food system without costing farmers more,' Pawel adds.

Reducing costs for inputs like fertiliser isn't the only way Innovation Connections is helping find future solutions. Protecting nature is also about ensuring that pollinators like bees and birds can thrive, and pollinate the crops that produce our food.

Another start-up that has received funding is AgriSound, which uses sensors to monitor the number of bees and other pollinators on farms so action can be taken in areas where there are not enough. It has partnered with Tesco fruit supplier AM Fresh.

Meanwhile, Future by Insects uses food waste to grow insects that can be used to feed fish. It has been paired with one of Tesco's fish and meat suppliers, Hilton.

Innovation Connections is part of a long-term partnership between Tesco and WWF which aims to halve the environmental impact of the average shopping basket.

Kate Norgrove, from WWF, says: 'The way we farm doesn't have to destroy nature or force us to choose between affordable food production and a stable climate.

'We can reduce carbon emissions, cut food loss and waste, and restore nature, while at the same time supporting farmers and producers in the UK and abroad to grow enough food for us all.

'The need for change is urgent and it has to start now.'

To increase the pace of change, Tesco is calling on the UK government not only to provide more support to British agriculture through current challenges, but to also remove the barriers holding back innovation in the food supply chain.

That includes asking the Government to set out timelines for updating outdated regulations that hinder the scaling up of late-stage innovations, including low-carbon fertilisers.

'If not confronted and managed, we know the challenges of today can create and feed the systemic issues of tomorrow, so we must continue to trial and scale transformative innovation in our supply chains to create a thriving, resilient food system that protects customers, farmers and the environment,' says Giles.

*(Article source: Daily Mail)*



# Rubbish gardens: How to create a sustainable garden out of old junk and rich planting

**Cement mixers, radiators and other throwaways can have a place in the garden. TV gardener Frances Tophill, a regular on BBC Gardeners' World, is well qualified to advise on how to reuse, reclaim and recycle.**

She's just won Best Show Garden at BBC Gardeners' World Live at the NEC, Birmingham - where her sustainable, post-industrial garden for a modern world featured lush planting alongside locally sourced, reclaimed and recycled materials, including an old cement mixer, a collection of old sinks and a radiator.

"I started off looking at the 1920s as part of the BBC's centenary, at Bauhaus architecture and that industrial heritage and wondered what would have happened if, over the last 100 years, rather than being technologically focused, we'd all been a little more green focused," she explains. "I tried to imagine a rewilded landscape with a lot of native plants."

The garden, whose plants were supplied by Hillier, featured an apple tree, hazels, birches, alder and aspen, all native trees for nesting birds and for maximising wildlife diversity - a core part of her aim.

"This whole garden is based on sustainability, and harnessing every little bit of eco system we can to provide for wildlife is part of that," Tophill notes.

The planting featured lots of edibles and medicinal native herbs which are generally underused, such as mugwort (an artemisia relaxant you can use in tea).

Tempted to take on some of Tophill's ideas in your own garden? Here's how...

## Old tins

"Pick them up from car-boot sales, or look in your shed or your parents' shed - we all have stuff lying around. Reclamation yards are a bit more pricey but if you are having a retro feature, it may be worth spending the money on it."

## Butler sinks

"You could put a load of old Butler sinks together to make a big pond, or you could just have one or two to make a little pond," she suggests.



## Old radiators

You can use old radiators as a framework for a bug hotel if you stuff twigs through the slats for habitat, adding tiles, bricks and pots (whole or broken), teasels and twigs on top. Just make sure it's secure by building a framework around it if you need to.



## Cement mixers

Instead of buying an expensive pot, pick up an old cement mixer from a reclamation yard or recycling centre. It can make a great alternative to a Greek urn, particularly in a dry garden, resting on gravel. Grow drought-tolerant plants such as rosemary in it and you won't go far wrong.



"The cement mixer in the show garden was my sister's that she gave to me," Tophill recalls. "We all have stuff lying around that we can reuse."

## Steps into shade

If you find old metal reclaimed steps you want to use as a feature, plant ferns underneath for a cool, shady feel along with earth nuts, which are shade-lovers and great habitat for ground beetles and ground-nesting solitary bees, she suggests.

## Architecture and surface

Reclaimed wood can be used to make raised beds, cold frames and other items for gardens. The gravel path in Tophill's garden was made from old smashed-up brick dust. "Even the honeycomb that goes underneath it to secure it and make it accessible is 100% recycled plastic." Reclaimed steps can be used as a feature to display plants, although Tophill's steps - which her builder had lying around in his yard - led to a corrugated shed. "We found other stuff on Freecycle and Facebook Marketplace. It's a mixture of stuff we all had lying around. It was a fun challenge to find out how we use reclaimed materials in a creative way."

## Going green

If you want a cool, lush area, Tophill prefers the colour green. "You can go for silvery greens and evergreen greens like myrtle and tea plants (Camellia sinensis). Then have accents of colour with plants which are edible, like calendula and perennial mountain tagetes, enhanced with Canary perennial foxgloves, which are pollinator-friendly. They aren't native but they are great for nectar."

## Peat-free progress

All the plants Tophill used were grown peat-free, and it's not as difficult to buy peat-free as it once was, she says. "Every plant is peat-free, which we thought would be more of a challenge than it was. It was reassuring that loads of nurseries, including Hillier, are pretty much 100% peat-free. On a trade level that is happening, which is great news."

(Article source: Silver Surfers)

# Please help us rescue and care for vulnerable hedgehogs - **Britain's favourite mammal**

A shocking study has revealed that hedgehogs are rapidly vanishing from our countryside, with numbers HALVED in the last 20 years.



I am delighted to tell you that Britain's hedgehog has won favourite mammal in a UK poll.

The UK's only spiny mammal won with 35.9% of the 5,000 votes, more than double that of the Red Fox, who came in second place with 15.4%. The Red Squirrel came third with 11.4%, out of a shortlist of 10 charismatic UK mammals.

Unfortunately, hedgehogs are rapidly vanishing from our countryside as numbers have HALVED in the last 20 years, a shocking study has revealed.

Henry Johnson, hedgehog officer, People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) said:

"We Brits seem to love hedgehogs for a whole range of reasons, including their cute appearance, their role as slug controllers and the way they have colonised our gardens with such aplomb. This is why it is so sad to see them decline, with one in three lost since the millennium."

Threats to hedgehogs come mostly from us. In rural areas, our farmland increasingly lacks the diversity of habitats hedgehogs need and the invertebrates they feed on. In towns and cities green spaces are lost to development, paved over or increasingly fragmented. Hedgehogs are also very prone to road traffic accidents.

This is why we have launched this special Annual Appeal to protect Britain's favourite mammal.

At Hedgehog Rescue Rehabilitation and Care Centre we respond immediately to rescue injured hedgehogs. A vet is called in straight away and the hedgehogs are monitored and cared for. Once fit and well they are released back into the wild.

Hedgehog Rescue is now conducting its Annual Appeal. Only by continuing our huge effort and long-life commitment can we give these wonderful animals a safe, happy and contented life.

We care for many hedgehogs here at our rehabilitation centre. Hedgehogs just like these:

## 'Julie'



'Julie' (pictured left) came in last Autumn, quite small, out in daylight and had ticks. She stayed a few weeks, put on enough weight, and made a full recovery. She was released back to her own territory by the finder.

## Baby Hedgehogs

These 2 hedgehogs came in as very small babies and had stayed with us a few weeks, gaining weight and giving us a chance to sort out their health issues. They had several ticks and needed worming. When they were 100% ready, we released them close to where they were found.



These hedgehogs are some of the lucky ones. Others are less fortunate.

As a friend who knows what a wonder animals can be, I hope you will support our Annual Appeal. Your kind gift will help us rescue and care for many more vulnerable hedgehogs - Britain's favourite mammal.

**To donate to Hedgehog Rescue, go to:**  
<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/hedgehogrescue>  
**or write to: Raisemore, Unit 1, Alton Road Industrial Estate, Ross-on-Wye HR9 5NB**

