

OUR PLACE *News*

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

JANUARY 2023

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PLUS...

What's on • Health & Beauty • Money & Work • Leisure & Travel
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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

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RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch

27th - 29th January 2023

Nationwide

The RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch is the world's biggest bird survey and regularly attracts nearly half a million participants.

The records from people counting birds in their gardens provides a vital snapshot of the UK's birds each winter.

The RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch 2023 will take place over the weekend of the 27th and 29th January 2023.



To take part in the Big Garden Birdwatch simply spend an hour watching the birds in your garden or local park over the weekend.

Count the highest number of bird species you see at the same time. You can use pen and paper or the RSPB's online counting tool.

Don't count the total over the hour as you may get the same birds visiting more than once.

Submit the results to The RSPB via their website.



Hogwarts in the Snow - The Making of Harry Potter

Until 15th January 2023

Warner Bros Studio Tour, London.

Celebrate a very magical festive season with **Hogwarts in the Snow** at Warner Bros. Studio Tour London - The Making of Harry Potter.

Winter has arrived at Hogwarts. Glittering Christmas trees line the Great Hall and a replica festive feast including flaming Christmas puddings is laid out on the long tables; while the top section of the hall is transformed for the Yule Ball with snow, icicles and an orchestra of magical instruments. Around the rest of the studio, special-effect fires roar in the fireplaces, the Gryffindor common room is filled with Christmas treats and the detailed Hogwarts castle model is covered in a special blanket of snow. Get up close to props, costumes and models used in the Harry Potter films. Take a look around the studio's famous movie sets decorated as they were for the festive scenes. And find out how different types of artificial snow and ice were created and used in the films. You can also tuck into a 2-course meal in magical surroundings with the return of Dinner in the Great Hall this Christmas.

WINTER CAT WARNING

At this time of year please check under your car and wheel arches for cats trying to keep warm, before you set off on your journey!



During the cold winter months cats will often seek out any warm space they can find. One particularly irresistible lure seems to be the cosy confines of a warm car engine. Unfortunately, cats that seek shelter under the bonnets of cars can then be injured or killed when that car is started. Help keep your own and your neighbourhood cats safe this winter by tapping the bonnet of your car before you start the engine.



52 acts of kindness: How to spread joy in every week of 2023

Whether fostering kittens, donating blood or delivering boxes of biscuits to striking workers, there has never been a better time to help out. And it will improve your life too.

Navel-gazing is always a danger at this time of year - and not just to admire the results of a two-week assault on the fridge. Indoctrinated by “new year, new you” messaging, we fixate on self-optimisation: one hand dredging the Celebrations tub and the other searching online for “hot yoga near me” or “should I read Ulysses?”

But there is another way to be better: by doing something kind. This doesn't mean giving money (welcome though that always is), it's about giving your time, empathy, support and thought - finding ways to help the people around you.

To make this list of suggestions, I explored acts of kindness given and received, acutely needed and fondly remembered, with readers, charities, friends and family, marvelling at how much quietly industrious kindness goes on around us. I hope there is something for everyone: some require commitment; others need nothing more than the ability to boil a kettle.

But what all these acts have in common is that they will make you feel good: research shows that being kind make us happier. So you can help others and feel better yourself all at once. You won't get that kind of win-win from a gym membership.

Give blood

Each donation can save up to three lives and you get free biscuits. Everyone eligible is welcome, but “we urgently need more blood donors of black heritage”, says Rob Knowles of NHS Blood and Transplant (they are more likely to be able to help the increasing number of patients with sickle cell disease). Sign up at blood.co.uk, call 0800 1232323 or use the NHS Blood app. If you can't get an appointment immediately, don't worry: your donation will be vital whenever it's given. To donate quickly, the best appointment availability is at the 25 permanent donor centres across the UK.

Walk a dog

The Cinnamon Trust provides support for elderly and terminally ill people who need urgent help to walk their pets so they can keep them. Check the map at cinnamon.org.uk, register as a volunteer and you will be ready when help is needed in your area.

Buy a Big Issue when you can - but also talk to your seller

Generally, having a chat with someone on the streets is a nice thing to do and often appreciated. It needn't be anything heavy: ask how their day is going and if there is anything they would like or need help with. Some people want to chat, some don't - just be respectful. If a homeless person tells you they are having difficulty accessing medical facilities or with other practical issues, the Big Issue suggests alerting StreetLink, which connects rough sleepers with services they need.

Target your support for food banks

On top of the obvious non-perishable foods, the Trussell Trust says donations of toiletries, laundry and washing-up stuff, baby supplies and sanitary towels and tampons are always welcome. The best way to support food banks, though, is to find out what they need from day to day. I follow my local, the Collective Sharehouse, on Instagram, where it posts requests for urgent help. Remember, you can donate time as well as goods: “Food banks are busier than ever and very grateful to anyone who can spare a few hours on a regular basis,” says Ellie Lambert of the Trussell Trust. Help can include picking up or unpacking corporate donations, delivering to most in-need clients and even assistance with social media.



Bee prepared

Learn to revive a tired or struggling bee. If it's wet, put it in the sun; otherwise deposit it on a high-nectar flower such as buddleia or sunflower, wait a while and if that hasn't helped, offer a little sugar water (two tablespoons of white granulated sugar to one tablespoon of water, left on a spoon or in an eggcup).

Go guerrilla gardening

Inspired by the Incredible Edibles movement, create a “propaganda bed” - an easily accessible pot or bed planted with herbs and vegetables for people to help themselves. Label it so passersby know what's what, and that it's all free.

Give a coat to Calais

During winter, Care4Calais needs coats for refugees in northern France, where 2,000-plus sleep rough. If you have a warm coat in reasonable condition, find a drop off point and pass it on to someone who needs it.

Repair something

Repair cafes are booming and, as the BBC One series The Repair Shop shows, they can be a great source of joy. If you are handy with a sewing needle, bikes, carpentry, electricals or computers, your local repair cafe would almost certainly be delighted to have your help. If there isn't one locally, why not start one?

Be a bin hero

Full? Take it out rather than leaving it for someone else in your home. Emptied? Take it in. It's scientifically impossible to be anything other than thrilled when someone else deals with the bins.

Help prisoners with reading

About 50% of people in UK prisons struggle with reading. The Shannon Trust helps them to help one another throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. “Our prison volunteers train and support prisoner mentors to work one-to-one with learners,” says Karen Ryan, director of prison delivery.

At the moment, the trust particularly needs volunteers in central and eastern England. There is training and support and you are accompanied on your first prison visits. “We know volunteering in a prison setting isn't for everyone,” Ryan says, “but we also have roles in the community to help people directly with learning or to help our area teams with administration and data collection.”

Garden

You might know someone who could do with a hand with the heavy stuff. Otherwise consider helping Groundwork's Green Aiders, which provides a one-off cleanup service for older, vulnerable and disabled people with overgrown gardens.

Take pictures

If you see someone in contortions, trying to take a selfie, offer to take a photo.

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Be a Sense virtual buddy

Sense, a charity for deafblind people and others with complex disabilities, organises volunteers to phone or video call disabled people to fight isolation and loneliness. Volunteers are supported for their first sessions and buddies find stuff to do they both enjoy - cooking, craft, watching a film, playing games...

Pay a compliment

"You're looking nice," is good. "You have great skin" or "I love your shoes" is better. Someone once told me I had "cute ears" and I treasured it for years.

Join a stem-cell donor registry

Only 30% of blood cancer patients find family donors, meaning more donors are needed, especially male and minority ethnic ones. Existing blood donors can ask to join the NHS register during their next donation. Blood cancer charities DKMS and Anthony Nolan also have their own registers. Check online if you are eligible to donate, order a free cheek swab kit, swab and return. You will be added to the register and contacted if there's a match.

Make a mixtape

Give someone a curated Spotify or YouTube playlist of stuff you think they would like.

Volunteer in a shelter

Francesca helps out at Hackney winter night shelter in east London. "Our role is to create a welcoming space for guests," she says. "We volunteer in three-hour shifts and it's mainly cooking breakfasts or meals, having a chat, keeping the place tidy etc. The support the guests get is brilliant, and the lively and lovely community of volunteers do a lot in terms of fundraising. It is really important to us that we are able to help out, and in our local community."

Be the office secret Santa all year round

Leave a box of biscuits or a cake in the kitchen, or put bars of chocolate on your colleagues' desks anonymously, then secretly enjoy the happy buzz it creates.

Be an animal ambulance

RSPCA animal rescue volunteers collect sick, injured or orphaned birds and small mammals and take them to vets, rehabilitation or wildlife centres, and help out with other animal transport jobs. "It's a unique opportunity to help animals," says Lucy Bailey of the RSPCA. Volunteers need to have access to a vehicle and a smartphone - all other kit and training is provided. Find out more at rspca.org.uk.

Hit the apps

Apps and sites such as Next Door, Buy Nothing, Freecycle and Olio are easy ways to give away stuff you don't need but others in your area might. People also post requests for things they need, or for other assistance: lifts, gardening help, local recommendations.

Foster an animal

Paula fostered cats for several years. "We had to spend a lot of time building trust and gently playing," she says. "It could be tricky at times - blood was drawn! - but the breakthrough moments were lovely." It was sad when cats moved on, she says, but adds: "I still get photos of the cats in their new homes. I love to see them lounging, looked relaxed and in charge of the house."

To foster cats, dogs, or other animals for the RSPCA, you need to be 18 and own your home, or have permission from your landlord to have pets, and be able to transport your foster animal to vet appointments.

Feed pickets

Strikers need solidarity to keep feeling positive: show yours with a box of biscuits or a round of hot drinks.

Answer phones at ChildLine

Children have had an especially tough few years, and four hours a week answering calls can make a huge difference. The recruitment process is quite lengthy and careful: there is training and assessment, followed by two observed shifts and one mentored one before potential volunteers find out if they are a good fit. It's worth it.

"I was really nervous on my first shift, but also loved it, feeling good to be even a small part of being there for a young person wanting to talk," a recent recruit tells me. "There can be difficult and upsetting contacts, but volunteers are always supported by experienced supervisors. It's not all doom and gloom, and when a young person says: 'Thanks for listening and not judging,' or 'I hadn't thought of it like that', I feel such a high."

Help with reading in schools

Organisations such as Schoolreaders and Beanstalk match volunteers with schools to listen to children reading, usually focused in areas with high literacy needs. You need to be 18 or over with a good grasp of English. If travelling is tricky, you can provide reading support online by volunteering with Bookmark.

Give old tools a new home

The charity Tools With a Mission needs used tools, which it reconditions and sends to the developing world to help people develop skills and livelihoods. Check the list of what is needed at twam.uk.

Chat to an older person

Age UK's telephone befriending service will match you with an older person who would enjoy a 30-minute chat once a week.

Write a postcard

Find some postcards - you probably have a pile lying around somewhere - and write to people you haven't spoken to for a while. Tell them you are thinking of them, share a memory or thank them for something they did for you.



Become a mental-health first aider

Given the number of hours most of us spend at work, many mental health crises occur there. Knowing there is someone available who can offer confidential support can make all the difference, so ask your employer if you can train as a workplace mental health first aider.

Give as you shop

Sign up to easyfundraising.org.uk and whenever you shop online, many big companies (including major supermarkets, Amazon, eBay and Trainline) will donate a portion of your spend to charity. It doesn't cost you anything.

Clean up

Is a friend or acquaintance dealing with the pre- or post-move slog or just struggling to keep on top of things? Offer to help them declutter or clean while they get on with other tasks.

Be a professional mentor

Help out people new to your job, or wanting to get started. It doesn't have to be formal - a chat at the tea point and the offer of support can be huge - but there are also organisations that can match you up, such as Arts Emergency, aimed at young people who want to work in the arts, and Meet a Mentor in the tech sector.

Or mentor a child

Become a "Big" for Big Brother Big Sister and spend time with a seven- to 12-year-old who could do with a supportive figure in their life once a week. Or, if you are in London, Manchester or Liverpool, the charity Reach Out needs after-school mentors for primary and secondary school pupils.

Continued on pages 8-9...



Be a gig buddy

As a gig buddy, you will accompany someone with autism or a learning disability to concerts or other fun events, making their experience smoother and less stressful than it might be otherwise. The project started in Brighton, but there are now lots of Gig Buddy projects around the UK.

Learn CPR

The British Heart Foundation estimates there are approximately 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests each year; knowing what to do if you encounter one can mean the difference between life and death. Take 15 minutes and do the BHF's free online training course.

Be a breastfeeding peer supporter

Just because it's natural doesn't mean breastfeeding is easy for all new mothers: encouragement and advice from someone who has been there can help. You can train to be a peer supporter with the Breastfeeding Network.

Try tutoring

Action Tutoring works to close the attainment gap for disadvantaged children. "I'd wholeheartedly recommend applying," says Laura, who volunteered. "My 10-year-old tutees were a delight - sparky and fun. I looked forward to seeing them every week, hearing their news and watching their skills and confidence grow.

Best of all, I got an email at the end of the programme to let me know how they had got on in their Sats -they had aced them." You will need a B grade at A-level in English or maths (or a relevant degree). Training and resources are provided and a helpful coordinator is just a text or phone call away.

Drive kindly

If you're sure it's safe, flash your lights or wave your hand at someone waiting to cross the road in front of you.

Use your language skills

Refugee charities often need volunteer interpreters. Medical Justice, which works to ensure detainees' health rights are respected, needs people with a range of languages from Albanian to Vietnamese at immigration removal centres across the UK.

Buy coffee for a stranger

Many cafes offer a "pay it forward" system, where you can buy an extra coffee for someone (an especially good way to support homeless people). Alternatively, just pay for the person behind you without them knowing, then disappear, fairy godmother style.

Give text help

Shout (giveusashout.org) is a confidential text messaging service supporting children and adults in distress - not everyone is comfortable with making a phone call. Volunteers are trained and receive coaching and support. You only need to commit to one shift, usually two to four hours, from home each week.

Give plasma or platelets

If you are near Birmingham, Reading or Twickenham, you can donate plasma - vital for people with weakened immune systems and other conditions. Unlike blood, you can donate once a fortnight: see blood.co.uk.

Also consider donating platelets. "The NHS relies on a very small group of platelet donors to keep this special healing agent in good supply," says Rob Knowles, of NHS Blood and Transplant. "Male blood donors with good veins who are happy to take a little longer when they donate typically graduate to platelet donations and our staff are always happy to talk to donors about making the switch." Existing type-A blood donors are particularly in demand for platelets at the moment.

Litter pick

There are organised litter picks everywhere - a nice way to meet people in your community who are also enraged by rubbish - but there is nothing stopping you from heading out with a binbag and gloves. The humorist David Sedaris has picked so much litter that he had a bin lorry named in his honour: that could be you.

Help asylum seekers to adapt

"We see people in our asylum system face incredible challenges in the face of hostile government policy. But we're always heartened by the public's seemingly limitless generosity and desire to help," says Tim Naor Hilton, Refugee Action's chief executive. "Volunteers are the lifeblood of Refugee Action. People can help our clients to access asylum support and accommodation to make sure they have food and a roof over their head, and mentor refugees to help them find work and support with English, among other opportunities." Roles are posted at refugee-action.org.uk or sign up for volunteer alerts.

Look after delivery drivers

Ask delivery people if they would like a drink, or to use your loo - and tip food riders if you can.

Use your car for good

Assuage your climate guilt by delivering meals on wheels, driving people to hospital appointments, picking up shoes for Sal's Shoes (which sends shoes to children who need them), or dropping off donations for the hygiene charity Beauty Banks. Or just text your neighbours when you are going to the dump in case they need to get rid of anything you could drop off.

Join a Dementia Adventure

Dementia Adventure organises supported holidays for people with dementia and their carers, giving them fun experiences and respite. Volunteers are essential to these events, to provide practical support and company.

Become a puppy socialiser

Support Dogs needs homes for future canine helpers for people with autism, epilepsy and other disabilities until the dogs start training at 14 months. Guide Dogs for the Blind and Hearing Dogs need puppy care, too.

Support your local library

Libraries are a lifeline all year, but in this winter of much bigger energy bills, they are doubling up as welcoming warm spaces. To keep doing this, they need help: ask what you can do at your library.



Be a digital coach

The relentless shift online has left many behind. Do you know someone who might need help with Google, setting up a smartphone or an email account, or making web-based payments?

Cook something

Message someone who might welcome a hot meal to say that you have made too much and could they take some off your hands - if you frame it as a favour to you, they may be more likely to say yes.

Take the public transport load off

It's old school, but giving a hand to carry a bag, find a trolley or lift a pushchair can instantly make someone's journey marginally less stressful. Offering to distract a toddler for a few seconds can feel more awkward, but when my kids were little that sometimes averted total meltdown (mine and theirs).

(Article source: *The Guardian*)



Worthy holidays: 10 of the best charity holiday stays in the UK

Book into one of these brilliantly located cottages, apartments, bothies and hotels and you'll be contributing to a worthy cause too.

Ten Hill Place, Edinburgh, Midlothian

The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh has fingers in pies with a surprisingly broad range of fillings. Not only does this esteemed 500-year-old institution own the city's Surgeon's Hall, an iconic William Playfair building completed in 1832 which houses the college's headquarters, as well as the grippingly gruesome Surgeon's Hall Museum. It also owns a four-star hotel just behind Surgeon's Hall, the profits from which help provide training for surgeons worldwide in need of financial assistance. No one could argue that the 129-bedroom hotel is as eye-catching as Playfair's classical-style design but a £1.8m overhaul a couple of years ago saw it become Edinburgh's largest independent four-star hotel and it's a comfortable choice for those looking to dip one toe into the city centre and another into climbing Arthur's Seat.

Doubles from £84, room-only, tenhillplace.com

Plas Glyn-Y-Weddw, Llanbedrog, Llyn peninsula

A gothic mansion in north Wales, within walking distance of hut-fringed Llanbedrog beach, Plas Glyn-Y-Weddw was built in the mid-19th century as a dower house for the widow of tongue-twistingly named Sir Love Jones-Parry. Elizabeth Jones-Parry never actually moved in but the building had been designed to showcase her art collection and, under new ownership in the 1890s, it became a public art gallery. Still run as a gallery today, now by a charitable trust, its gardens, woodlands and cafe are open to the public and the space also hosts workshops, concerts and community events. In one wing of the mansion, there's also a large rental apartment and the proceeds from this support the property's upkeep and the trust's cultural work.

From £954 a week, sleeps 12 (short breaks also available, and rates are reduced if fewer bedrooms are booked), dioni.co.uk

Kingham cottage, Bath, Somerset

Inglenook fireplace? Tick. Ceilings ribboned with beams? Yup. Stonework the colour of gently baked scones? You bet. Throw in a roll-top bath, green-fringed views across the valley below and one of the best places to eat in the city - Castle Farm - within walking distance, and Kingham Cottage, on the southern slopes of Bath, appears every inch your classic West Country holiday rental. There is one crucial difference, however. Paid bookings support the charity After Umbrage, which means for part of the year, the cottage is let, free of charge, to carers in need of a break.

From £473 a week, sleeps four, classic.co.uk

Codley Gate Cottage, Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland

This three-bedroom Northumbrian farm cottage offers the chance to holiday in the shadow of Hadrian's Wall. Owned by the Vindolanda Charitable Trust, which runs Roman Vindolanda (the excavated remains of nine successive Roman forts plus an interpretative museum) and the Roman Army Museum, it's brilliantly positioned for exploring the area's Roman sites. Larger groups might opt for the four-bedroom Codley Gate House. Guests get free entry to the nearby Roman Army Museum and Vindolanda, which is right on the doorstep, but Housesteads Fort is also just two miles away and Birdoswald Fort 11 miles, along with several well-preserved sections of Hadrian's Wall. There's even an intact Roman milestone just behind the cottage. Proceeds from bookings go to the Trust and support further archaeological research.

From £1,200 a week, sleeps six, vindolanda.com

Mangersta bothy, Uig, Isle of Lewis (top left)

Not only does this rustic stone shelter sit on the remote western shores of the Isle of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides, it's also, exhilaratingly, on a cliff edge. Owners John and Lorna Norgrove built the bothy almost 30 years ago and have remained true to their minimalist vision: amenities stretch no further than a fireplace and a wooden sleeping platform, though visitors are welcome to use an outside toilet 15 minutes' walk away. Stays can be booked through the Norgroves, with proceeds going to the Linda Norgrove Foundation, which supports women and children in Afghanistan.

By donation, sleeps 3, lindanorgrovefoundation.org

Orchard Cottage, Presteigne, Herefordshire

Roughly halfway between Hay-on-Wye and Ludlow, near the Welsh market town of Presteigne, the Rodd is a 100-hectare (250-acre) Herefordshire estate with a Jacobean manor at its heart. Once home to the celebrated Australian artist Sidney Nolan, it's now run by the Sidney Nolan Trust, a charity Nolan founded in 1985 to help support emerging and established artists and musicians through residencies, exhibitions and workshops.

One way it does this is with rental income generated by pretty, one-bedroom Orchard Cottage, once home to the estate's gardener.

Orchard Cottage from £395 for three nights, £615 for a week, sidneynolantrust.org

Delny Glamping, Invergordon, Ross and Cromarty, Highland

At this glampsite, 40 minutes' drive north of Inverness, guests can choose between simple but cosy timber bothies, whisky-themed barrel pods (pictured), a two-bedroom apartment in the main house and a self-catering cottage for two, hewn from what was previously a salmon-smoking house. They all enjoy fresh-air views of the Cromarty Firth as well as the chance to pet the owners' pygmy goats, angora rabbits and pot-bellied pig. Also uplifting is the knowledge that a percentage of the site's monthly turnover is donated to the Ben Saunders Foundation, a charitable trust providing free stays in a Cotswolds holiday home for children with cancer and their families.

From £80 a night for two (in whisky barrel pods), delnyglamping.co.uk

Foxes Hotel, Minehead, Somerset

The South West Coast Path passes in front of Foxes Hotel, en route to Exmoor, running between the hotel's long front garden and the beach. Behind it is leafy Blenheim Gardens, with a bandstand for summer concerts, and pavements leading up to the town's historic quayside. Inside are seven bright, modern, wheelchair-friendly bedrooms, plus a restaurant serving the likes of goat cheese bonbons with beetroot puree and toasted pine nuts (they've also recently set up a food van, selling loaded nachos and rice boxes at events as well as at the hotel). Although this smart Victorian hotel looks similar to others on this coast, there is one element that sets Foxes apart. It's the UK's only fully operating training hotel for young people with learning disabilities, and guest stays directly support the students' learning. From £90 a night for two, B&B, foxeshotel.co.uk

Wilder Me, Rame peninsula, Cornwall

A collection of six, bubble-like geodomes with access to shared showers, compost toilets and a lounge-like communal seventh dome, WilderMe is part of a creative community clustered around an old army barracks at Maker Heights, with a canteen run by former River Cottage chef Nick Platt. Perched among wildflower meadows, with salt-tinged views of the Cornish coast, the focus is on connecting with nature, whether that means watching skylarks or staring into a firepit's flames at the end of the day. Profits from glamping stays are used to subsidise a social enterprise that runs wellbeing and nature retreats during the week for adults with autism, and to support the Rame Conservation Trust, which works to repair and conserve this historic landscape. From £85 per night, sleeps two, canopyandstars.co.uk

(Article source: *The Guardian*)



Spud you like: A beginner's guide to growing potatoes

Potatoes are among the easiest veg to grow for newcomers - and the start of the year is the time to start thinking.

Even if you only have a small area, you can grow potatoes in a large container or even a dustbin, to give you delicious early croppers which taste far better than any shop-bought variety.

Where do you start?

Hardly anyone grows potatoes from seed these days. Most people buy seed potatoes (specially grown tubers) from garden centres in January and February. They look like little potatoes which during the colder months you'll need to start off indoors.

What type of potatoes should I grow?

There are two categories - earlies or maincrops. Earlies, which we know as new potatoes, are ready for harvesting much sooner than maincrops - the fastest maturing varieties will be ready to lift by the end of June - and are a good bet if you are only going to be able to grow a few in a large pot or bin with drainage holes.

Second earlies are generally ready to harvest in July and August, while maincrops are in the ground a lot longer, harvesting from late August through to October, and produce larger spuds and often a greater harvest.

Chit the seed potatoes

Do this from late January onwards, by placing your seed potatoes on a tray or in open empty egg boxes on the windowsill, or another frost-free place with light, with the end with the most 'eyes' facing upwards to 'chit' them. Within a few of weeks, the eyes will begin to sprout, forming new shoots called 'chits'. Label each variety you chit.

The green shoots should be 2-4cm long by mid-March to April when the weather is warm enough to plant them, as they don't do well in cold, wet soil. If you're growing earlies, rub off the weakest shoots, leaving around four per tuber.

Prepare the ground

Ideally, the previous autumn or winter you want to add plenty of organic matter to the area where you are going to plant your potatoes.

Planting know-how

Plant your seed potatoes in a sunny spot. Dig a narrow trench around 12cm deep, spacing the tubers 30cm apart (with the sprouts facing upwards) for earlies and 37cm apart for maincrops, in rows 60cm apart for earlies and 75cm apart for maincrops. Remember potatoes won't tolerate frost, so don't plant them until mid to late March, when the spring sun is warming the soil.

If the soil is dry, water the planting hole beforehand, but you won't need to do this in wet weather. Once planted, leaves should emerge in around four weeks, which will need protection from any late frost.



Earthing up

While they are growing, plants will need 'earthing up', which means drawing soil up around the leaves to protect shoots from frost and ensure that the potatoes underneath the soil aren't exposed to light at all, which will turn them green and poisonous. You'll need to do this when the shoots are around 23cm tall.

Earth up with a rake up and around the stems, leaving just the tips of the plants showing. You'll need to do this a few times while the stems are growing, until the mound is around 30cm high. If there's danger of a harsh late frost, cover the rows with horticultural fleece.

If planting in large pots...

Add 10cm of peat-free compost to the pot and place three to five chitted potatoes a hand's width apart, covering them with 10cm of compost and water in well. As the plants grow, instead of earthing up, just add more compost to the pot to protect the shoots. You will need to do this a few times.



Watering

In dry weather, make sure the plants are well watered. Maincrop potatoes may also need a nitrogen-rich fertiliser when they are growing well. Potatoes - particularly those in pots - will need watering regularly, every two to three days, which will help the developing potatoes swell.

Harvesting

Hopefully, earlies should have produced flowers and will be ready to harvest at the end of June. When the foliage turns yellow on maincrops which you are going to store later on in the season, cut it back and then wait for 10 days before digging up the potatoes, letting them dry for several hours before storing in a cool, frost-free place.

Use your garden fork cautiously when you dig them up, to avoid spearing any tubers. If you've grown potatoes in pots you may prefer using a hand fork to dig them out, or just upend the pot to get your harvest.



Which varieties should I choose?

Reliable types often have an RHS AGM (Award of Garden Merit), so look for the label when you buy the seed potatoes. For first earlies you may go for 'Accent', 'Maris Bard' or 'Swift'; second earlies choices may include 'Jazzy', 'Nadine' and 'Charlotte'; and good maincrop varieties include 'Sarpo Mira' and 'Maris Piper'.

(Article source: Silver Surfers)



Going green is a goal you can achieve: Sustainable resolutions to make at home

Traditional new year's resolutions can be hard to stick to - so what about trying something different in 2023?

If you're used to setting yourself worthy goals such as exercising more or getting organised, but find they get forgotten by the end of January - you might want to try a green resolution instead.

New research by home builder Redrow reveals sustainably focused resolutions - like mindful spending and reducing energy consumption - are overtaking traditional self-improvement ambitions.

"Over the past 12 months we've seen more people than ever asking for ways to reduce their household energy consumption - and leave a smaller environmental footprint," says James Holmear, director at Redrow (redrow.co.uk).

As well as giving more scrutiny to energy efficiency ratings of appliances, he says customers are installing items like EV (electric vehicle) charging points, eco waste bins and solar panels to improve their energy efficiency.

Want to make sustainable resolutions around the home but don't know where to start? This is what Holmear recommends...

Reduce your energy consumption

"You can save around £40 a year simply by turning your appliances off at the mains, rather than just leaving them in standby mode," suggests Holmear. "Think televisions, computers and game consoles - especially large households with multiple devices."

Similarly, he says turning off lights when you leave a room and installing LED bulbs around the home can help you save even more.

"Everyday tasks such as washing your clothes and cooking meals can all be reassessed to lower your energy consumption," Holmear adds. "Look to wash your regular clothes on a 30-degree cycle, and keep the higher temperatures for household linen and soiled items."

"Only do this once you have a full load to avoid running a full cycle unnecessarily. When cooking, put lids on your pans to speed up cooking time, and ensure you only boil as much water in the kettle as you need."

Be more mindful of your spending

Being mindful of spending doesn't have to mean not spending at all, with Holmear saying it's more about having a purpose. As the January sales approach, looking at factors beyond price and appearance can help save money in the long-term.

Redrow's research shows energy efficiency and being a lower cost to run, alongside price and quality, is one of the biggest influences on white goods and electrical purchases in the coming January sales.

Reduce food waste

Storing your food properly can significantly reduce your food waste, says Holmear. "Keeping foods such as salads and herbs away from the back of the fridge in containers stops these delicate foods from freezer burn and going off quickly."

He recommends storing fresh dairy products on the middle shelf - as it's the coolest part - then moving them to the fridge door once opened.

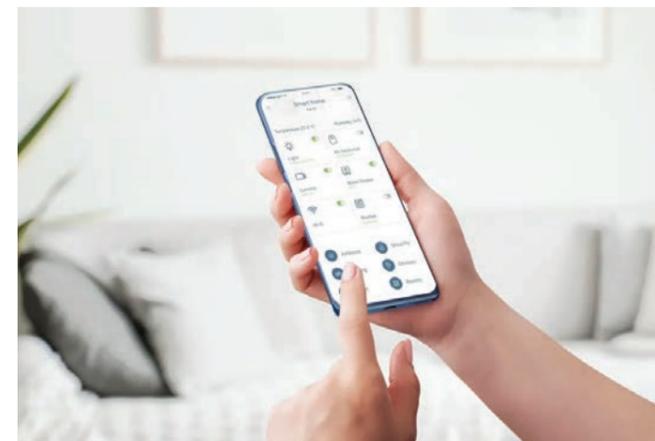
Keeping food that's close to its sell-by date and leftovers visible in your fridge is an easy way to make sure no food is wasted, stresses Holmear. "And make sure the fridge and cupboards are organised ahead of your next food shop to avoid overbuying."

Invest in energy efficient items

Smart power strips automatically turn off electricity to all the things you don't need. These can also be controlled remotely through an app, so you're able to switch them off even once you've left the house, explains Holmear.

It's not just electricity that can be managed. Elsewhere, app-based heating controls such as Hive mean you never have to heat your home when it's empty, says Holmear.

Research by Redrow found nearly two-fifths (37%) of UK adults have installed or are looking to install LED lighting around their home, alongside solar panels (13%) and smart tech (12%).



Recycle more

"It's important to understand what is recyclable and what isn't," Holmear encourages. "Get to know what the symbols on packaging mean, check with your local council's recycling offering - and where possible, choose products that are widely recyclable with a strong environmental stance."

If you can, investigate options like eco waste bins, which might help increase recycling habits. For bigger items, Holmear recommends upcycling them or passing them on via marketplace platforms like Nextdoor.

"Nextdoor has a feature on the app called 'For Sale and Free' - where members can sell their unwanted items, with 25% typically being listed as free," he says. "While you may have fallen out of love with something in your home, it could make a huge difference to someone else's."



As Holmear points out: "The average person throws away around 400kg of waste each year, and many are still unaware of the items eligible to be recycled."

(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



HEDGEHOG RESCUE
 REHABILITATION AND CARE CENTRE

Registered Charity No: 1126812 (England & Wales)
 Registered Charity No: SC047720 (Scotland)