

OUR PLACE *News*

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

APRIL 2023

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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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The Grand National 2023

Saturday April 15th, 2023 at 5.15pm
Aintree Racecourse, near Liverpool.

The greatest steeplechase in the world.

No other race arouses so much interest worldwide. At least 600 million people are said to watch on TV. And in England, people who never bet on anything have "a flutter" on the Grand National. Plan ahead and you could be one of almost 200,000 who attend the three-day race meet. Friday is Ladies Day, a great social event with smart attire and big hats.

The Grand National itself is run on Saturday and, after the build-up, the four and a half mile race, over 30 fences, is finished in minutes. Seventy thousand are there on the day and the atmosphere is electric.

London Marathon

Sunday 23rd April 2023

London



The Virgin Money London Marathon is a phenomenal event to be a part of, as a participant and a spectator. It's not just a monumental physical challenge, but also the world's largest fundraising event - and one of the six top marathons that make up the World Marathon Majors.

Cheltenham Jazz Festival

26th April - 1st May 2023

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Every year, Cheltenham Jazz Festival represents the start of the summer in Cheltenham, bringing together world-renowned performers and jazz enthusiasts from across the globe.

Spirit of Speyside Distilled

Food & Drink Festival

26th April - 1st May 2023

Speyside, Scotland

Spirited, inspiring, Scottish - this festival puts on a series of four delicious events inspired by Scottish whisky, gin and local produce. Discover the passion behind the region's finest food and drink.

Liverpool Sound City

28th - 30th April 2023

Liverpool, North-West England



Liverpool Sound City is an annual international music festival and industry conference taking place over the weekend. The event welcomes global stars, local artists and key industry figures. The festival has provided a platform for many future stars early on in their careers, including the likes of Ed Sheeran, Alt J and Calvin Harris.

TweedLove Bike Festival

29th - 30th April 2023

Tweed Valley, Scottish Borders, Scotland

Britain's fastest-growing cycling festival is held every year in the beautiful Tweed Valley. Past years have boasted three main races, with 2022 focusing on eMTB and British Championship races.



Why does spring make everything feel better? The joys of spring explained

Spring has sprung - but why does it make us feel so good? The joys of spring definitely feel like a real thing. Everything just seems more light and upbeat once the sunshine creeps in and we're out of the depths of winter.

But why do we feel so much better when spring rolls around? Is it all in our heads?

“Waking up to bird song, sunshine and warmth throughout spring can be hugely uplifting, evoking the happiness, optimism and positivity that many of us struggle with in winter,” says Dr Tom MacLaren, consultant psychiatrist at Re:Cognition Health.

“These months can bring lots of benefits to our psychological, physical and mental health.”



Reconnecting with nature

The natural world starts to bloom back to life at this time of year.

“Nature connectedness can help improve our mental health, with the fresh air, longer days and calmness of open spaces offering a retreat and distraction from our standard routines, being closer to greenery, gardens and parks that will provide a boost to your energy and sense of wellness,” says MacLaren. “The colourful, fragranced blossoms can also be uplifting and make us appreciate the beauty of nature.”

Getting out and about more

More daylight and warmer temperatures means we're more inclined to get moving outdoors, too.

“Finding the motivation to go out for a run in the cold, dark and miserable conditions of winter can be very difficult, but the longer, brighter days of spring afford no excuses, meaning we are more likely to be physically active,” adds MacLaren.

“Walking or cycling short distances, rather than driving, becomes a joy, and just by walking outdoors, the risk of heart disease, diabetes and even depression is reduced.”

Prepare to bloom



Spring can also be a fabulous time to try something new, or tap back into forgotten joys.

“In contrast to the inward, cocooning vibe of winter, spring carries a dynamic, outward-looking energy. This time of year is all about taking action, so go ahead and take a leap. Don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone - spring is prompting us to blossom, just like the trees around us,” says functional medicine health coach Suzy Glaskie, founder of Peppermint Wellness and host of the Midlife Illuminated podcast.

“Take up that hobby you've always wanted to try but never got around to. Begin that new project you've been procrastinating about. Start taking small steps towards thriving... Spring offers us a fresh slate to move forward and create the life we really want.

“Don't worry if your new year's resolutions to get healthy fell by the wayside weeks ago. The 'New Year/New You' mantra doesn't align with our natural rhythm - the middle of winter is no time for us to suddenly bounce forth with an entirely new set of habits, and breaking our resolutions leaves us feeling frustrated and disheartened with ourselves. Spring is a far better time to focus on our wellbeing and start to cultivate new healthy habits that will boost our physical, emotional and mental health, and improve our self-esteem,” Glaskie adds.

Let there be light

The joys of spring owe a lot to the increase in daylight, which can have positive effects psychologically and physically.

“Watching the sunrise and changing light during the day is a great way to reset that body clock, if you have missed sleep,” adds MacLaren. “Watching the sunset is also a very beautiful and therapeutic experience, helping us unwind, relieving stress and providing us with inspiration - many authors, painters and poets have used the sunset as their muse.”

The spring and summer months are also when we're naturally able to make enough vitamin D though increased sunlight exposure (keeping sun safety in mind, of course).

“Those longer and sunnier days will be topping up your vitamin D, a great boost to your immune system, which also helps keep your bones healthy,” says MacLaren. “Vitamin D deficiency has also been linked to depression, so this sunshine vitamin is not only beneficial for our bones but also our mood and mental health.”

More get-up-and-go

All of this can add up to a renewed sense of motivation, which can in turn bring added rewards.

“It is a great time to get work done and be more productive. With the sun rising earlier, you will have more energy to meet friends, take time off, complete DIY projects and even travel. The longer day means you'll have time to gradually wind down in the evening and even enjoy eating outdoors, socialising with friends and fitting more into the day,” suggests MacLaren.

“All this activity provides a lot more cognitive stimulation than winter. Your mind and brain will be busier processing your increased activity levels, and this boosts your memory and helps protect against conditions like dementia.

“We also tend to be much more social in the warmer months, which is crucial to our mental health,” he adds. “Friendships help reduce stress and anxiety, improve self-confidence and help reduce the risk of many health conditions including obesity, blood pressure and even dementia.”

(Article source: Silver Surfers)

4 ways to meet new people in your 50s and beyond

As we age, it can become more difficult to meet new people and make friends.



Silver Surfers reports that loneliness and social isolation can have negative effects on both our mental and physical health, and the need to socialise and build relationships continues throughout our lives.

If you're in your 50s and beyond and looking to meet new people, here are some options to consider:

Join online classes

Goldster is an excellent platform offering a variety of classes for the over 50s, from fitness and yoga to creative writing and meditation. Not only are these classes beneficial for your well-being, but they're also a great way to meet like-minded individuals who share similar interests. Plus, the online format allows you to participate from the comfort of your own home.

Try online dating

While online dating may seem intimidating or unfamiliar, it's becoming more and more popular among older adults. There are many online dating sites and apps specifically designed for people over 50. Take your time and be cautious when chatting with potential matches, but don't be afraid to put yourself out there and see where it leads. Online dating can be an excellent way to make new friends, find companionship, and even develop meaningful relationships.

Attend community events, and gatherings

Look for local events and activities in your community, such as concerts, festivals, gardening, cooking, or reading. Attend with an open mind and strike up conversations with others who are there. You never know who you might meet or what connections you might make.

Volunteer in your community

Volunteering is another great way to meet new people while giving back to your community. Many organisations could use your help, such as food banks, animal shelters, or community centres. By volunteering your time, you'll meet people who share your values and interests, and you'll have the opportunity to make a positive impact on your community.

Meeting new people in your 50s and beyond may seem daunting, but it's never too late to make new connections. Whether you join classes on platforms like Goldster, try online dating, volunteer, or join a club or group, the key is to be open to new experiences and opportunities. By taking the initiative to meet new people, you'll have the chance to develop meaningful relationships.

(Story source: Silver Surfers)

What is Collagen, and what is it good for?

Collagen is a naturally occurring protein found in the human body that is responsible for providing structure and elasticity to our skin, bones, tendons, and ligaments.



Silver Surfers reports that as we age, the production of collagen in our bodies declines, resulting in wrinkles, sagging skin, joint pain, and other signs of aging.

What are the best food sources of collagen?

Collagen is a protein that is naturally found in various animal-based foods. Therefore, the best food sources of collagen are:

- **Bone Broth:** Bone broth is made by simmering animal bones and connective tissue, which are rich in collagen. Drinking bone broth regularly can help boost your collagen intake.
- **Chicken:** Chicken is a good source of collagen, especially in the form of its skin and cartilage.

- **Fish:** Fish, especially cold-water fish such as salmon and tuna, are excellent sources of collagen. Fish skin is a particularly good source of collagen.
- **Beef:** Beef, particularly cuts that are high in connective tissue, such as shanks and short ribs, are good sources of collagen.
- **Pork:** Pork, including its skin, is a good source of collagen.
- **Egg whites:** Egg whites contain a protein called proline, which is a key component of collagen.
- **Gelatin:** Gelatin is derived from collagen and can be found in various forms, including in desserts, gummies, and supplements.

Incorporating these collagen-rich foods into your diet can help boost your body's collagen production and support overall health and wellness.

Collagen supplements have become increasingly popular in recent years, with many people seeking to improve the appearance of their skin, reduce joint pain, and support overall health and wellness. But what exactly is collagen, and what is it good for?

In simple terms, collagen is a complex protein made up of amino acids, including glycine, proline, and hydroxyproline. It is the most abundant protein in the human body, comprising up to 30% of our total protein mass. Collagen is found in many parts of the body, including the skin, bones, cartilage, tendons, and ligaments.

Collagen supplements are typically derived from animal sources, such as cow or fish. They come in various forms, including powders, capsules, and drinks. Some collagen supplements also contain other ingredients, such as vitamins and minerals, to enhance their effectiveness.

"The key thing is there are different forms of collagen and it can come from different sources,"

says Goldster's resident nutritionist Claudia Le Feuvre. "All the hype about noticeably improved hair, skin and nails - what people are talking about is marine collagen, derived from marine peptides which comes from fish.

Don't confuse it with bovine collagen she says, which is amazing for gut repair but doesn't work for visible results in skin texture."

"There is always an issue around the bio-availability of collagen," Claudia continues. "The best way to assimilate collagen is to take it on an empty stomach 1 hour before eating."

Here are some of the potential benefits of taking collagen supplements:

- **Improves Skin Health:** Collagen supplements have been shown to improve skin health by increasing skin hydration, elasticity, and firmness. Studies have also found that collagen supplements may reduce the appearance of wrinkles and fine lines.

- **Reduces Joint Pain:** Collagen supplements may help reduce joint pain by improving joint mobility and reducing inflammation. Several studies have found that collagen supplements may be effective in reducing symptoms of osteoarthritis and other joint-related conditions.
- **Boosts Muscle Mass:** Collagen is a vital component of muscle tissue. Studies have found that collagen supplements may increase muscle mass and strength, especially in older adults who are at risk of losing muscle mass.
- **Supports Gut Health:** Collagen supplements may help improve gut health by promoting the growth of beneficial gut bacteria and healing the lining of the digestive tract.
- **Promotes Heart Health:** Collagen is a key component of the arteries, which are responsible for carrying blood to and from the heart. Some studies have found that collagen supplements may help improve artery health and reduce the risk of heart disease.



Some people taking the powder see results in as little as a week, for others it can take 3 weeks.

Claudia reports that participants in her online nutrition classes who are taking collagen have seen marked improvement in their hair, skin and nails. "People say 'my hair has never been better'"

Some members have also noticed improvements in joint pain and arthritis. "Quite a number of people taking collagen have noticed benefits," observes Claudia.

Overall, collagen is an important protein that plays a vital role in the health and function of our bodies. While more research is needed to fully understand the benefits of collagen supplements, they may offer a natural way to support skin health, joint health, and overall wellness.

Additionally, collagen supplements may not be suitable for everyone, especially those with allergies to collagen sources or certain medical conditions. It's always a good idea to consult with a healthcare professional before starting any new supplements.

(Story source: Silver Surfers)



Off the Mersey beat: A tour of Liverpool's unsung cultural treasures

A magical mystery tour of the city reveals brilliant art, architecture and stories - with only minimal Fab Four interludes.

At a Liverpool city council meeting in 1974, in response to an application for the installation of the first Beatles sculpture in Mathew Street, a councillor reportedly sniped: "What have the Beatles ever done for Liverpool?"

One current estimate suggests an annual £100m in tourism, for starters. But while the city remains best-known globally for the Fab Four, Aintree, its football clubs and the Albert Dock, it also boasts 2,500 listed buildings and a bounty of public artwork and sculptures.

Thanks in no small part to Tommy Calderbank - who some call "the spirit of Liverpool" - the city's residents have also fought hard to rescue some of their beloved buildings, including arts venue The Florrie and Toxteth town hall, and fund-raised for artworks such as the Bob Marley and Brian Epstein statues in the city centre.



Liverpool is both familiar and alien to me. I know it from pop culture, the Beatles, films and sitcoms, yet I've visited just a handful of times.

This is why I'm meeting up with Tommy for a lunchtime pint in Ye Hole in Ye Wall, the city's oldest pub (founded 1726), built on an old Quaker burial site.

Ye Hole in Ye Wall

Hidden down a sidestreet, this old boozier is wood-panelled, carpeted and decorated with stained glass; a gaudy fruit machine is the only jarring presence. Tommy has devised a pub walk bookended by Liverpool's oldest and most eccentric, and peppered with architecture and artwork overlooked by most visitors.

"This is definitely not another Beatles-themed walk around the city," he says, and hands me a hand-drawn map before heading off for his part-time job - as a Beatles tour guide.

Warmed with ale, I leave the pub on Hackins Hey, turn right on Dale Street and left down Castle Street, two of the seven medieval streets on which Liverpool was founded in 1207.



Traces of anything pre-medieval are almost nonexistent but these streets offer other rewards, particularly if we look up.

Some of the city's most grandiose buildings are here, reflecting a time when Liverpool handled 40% of all world trade.

Bombastic Victorian Architecture

The area remains dominated by the bombastic majesty of old Victorian banks, shipping offices and insurance companies in red and yellow sandstone, and decorated with Doric columns, statues, mosaics and onion domes.

The Queen Insurance buildings on Dale Street and Royal Insurance on North John Street are perhaps the grandest of all. Impressive and opulent they may be, but Liverpoolians do not shy away from the fact that all of this sandstone glory was built on colonialism: the International Slavery Museum on the dock teaches a history that others may prefer to ignore.



Flanagan's Apple

Halfway down Castle Street, I turn into Cook Street then North John Street and then the city's most visited locale: Mathew Street.

Eschewing Beatles-themed everything, I seek out instead a bust of the psychiatrist Carl Jung, in a wall cavity of Flanagan's Apple, below which are his words: "Liverpool is the Pool of Life".

Jung never visited Liverpool but famously wrote about a dream he once had in which he was walking through the city at night and found a magnolia tree on an island, surrounded by water and bathed in light.

In 1974 entrepreneur Peter O'Halligan bought a warehouse here and established the Liverpool School of Language, Music, Dream and Pun, believing the spot to be the location of the magnolia tree.



The area became the centre of Liverpool's counterculture in the 1970s; it is also where theatre director Ken Campbell first staged the now-legendary eight-hour adaptation of Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson's Illuminatus! trilogy, utilising the talents of a cast of young unknowns that included Bill Nighy, Jim Broadbent, Bill Drummond and Campbell's future wife, Prunella Gee.

Following Church Street, Ranelagh Street and Mount Pleasant to the top of Hope Street, I reconvene with Tommy outside the Catholic Metropolitan cathedral.

"If you only have a few hours you could do worse than actually start here and do the cathedral walk either way. It's such an important, culturally rich street," he tells me.

Continued on pages 10-11...



On the other side of the road we stop for a cheeky refreshment in what is arguably Liverpool's most elegant bar, the Philharmonic Dining Rooms. The interior is spacious and wood-panelled, with chandeliers, stained glass and snugs named after the composers Brahms and Liszt.

When asked in the 1960s what the worst thing was about being famous, John Lennon replied: "I can't get a quiet pint in the Phil." It even boasts the only Grade I-listed gents in the country, opulently decorated with marble, mosaics and exotic tiles. (Women are granted unofficial free tours.)

Anglican Cathedral

At the bottom of Hope Street, we encounter the Gothic presence of Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral and descend into St James' Cemetery, far below street level. With the cathedral looming overhead we drink the healing waters from Bridie's Well.



Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral

Hope Street is bookended by the city's two cathedrals, years apart in age and design.

The Metropolitan, with a crown of thorns design and completed in 1967, is known locally as Paddy's Wigwam.



The interior is illuminated with dazzling colours from the stained glass. Around the cathedral's circular wall, artworks include wall hangings, landscapes, abstract modernist paintings and Sean Rice's Stations of the Cross sculptures, in metal. Another gold statue, Risen Christ, is by Liverpool artist Arthur Dooley, more on whom anon.



Philharmonic Hall (main picture above)

Down Hope Street we pass Liverpool's Everyman theatre and, further down, the Philharmonic Hall. Just inside the entrance, a bronze plaque honours musicians from the city who continued playing - to calm the nerves of the doomed passengers - while the Titanic sank into icy waters.

Black Christ has a similarly haunting quality, and typifies Dooley's rough and unfinished style. "I was scared of it for years," Tommy admits, "this spectral figure that looks like it was dragged out of a bog." Now, however, he has nothing but praise for Dooley's work, and was instrumental in refurbishing the statue.

We retrace our steps, continue to Parliament Street and head right into the Baltic Triangle and Jamaica Street. Halfway down, past the mural of Jürgen Klopp, our final destination is easy to miss - a bohemian underground bar known as the Hobo Kiosk, and a twisted, maximalist work of art in its own right.

Hobo Kiosk



It is the vision of owners Delia and Tristan, and offers a carnivalesque cornucopia of repurposed dolls' heads, milk ghosts (Halloween-style carved and decorated milk containers), 3D murals and old signs. "We are the bohemian version of Narnia," Delia declares.

I buy another round and thank Tommy for crafting a tour that demonstrates that - much as we both love them - the Beatles do not define Liverpool. Tommy laughs. "Like it or not, the thing about this city is that wherever you go, you'll find Beatles references in the most unlikely places."



"Even here?" I ask.

Ascending the stairs of the Hobo Kiosk, Tommy points to a small hole in the hand-sculpted wooden rail in which a tiny magnifying glass lens has been inserted. I peer through. On the wall behind is written a single word, the word that first brought John and Yoko together: Yes.

(Article source: The Guardian)



Hot cross buns: History, and why we eat them at Easter

Easter wouldn't be the same without hot cross buns. Their history can be traced back to the Hertfordshire countryside, where an old mill still bakes buns to an ancient recipe. Our guide looks at the history of the hot cross bun and why they are eaten at Easter.

Hot cross buns are traditionally eaten over the Easter religious Christian holiday to symbolise the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday on the cross.

If medieval monk Thomas Roccliffe were alive today, he might stop and say a prayer for forgiveness when he reached the hot-cross-bun aisle of a supermarket or high-street bakery.

Sold all year round, these sticky fruit buns now come in an assortment of flavours, from chocolate and caramel to orange and cranberry. There are 'luxury', 'very berry' and 'extra fruity' versions. There are even buns filled with fudge, a sickly notion that might have Brother Roccliffe fleeing back to the safety of St Albans Abbey.

What are hot cross buns?

Hot cross buns are a baked sweet, spiced bread which traditionally contain raisins. These are commonly eaten toasted with butter.

History of the hot cross bun

Who invented the hot cross bun?

Thomas Roccliffe, a 14th-century monk, is widely credited as making the very first hot cross bun - and given the simplicity of his medieval recipe, he may well have disapproved of later embellishments to his original creation.

Although the Ancient Greeks, Romans and Saxons all baked a type of bun to mark the changing seasons, it was Brother Roccliffe who made the Alban Bun in 1361.

A sweet, fruity bake bearing a cross on top, the buns were given to the local poor on Good Friday. This Easter treat so pleased the recipients that word soon spread, and efforts were made across the country to imitate these cakes. By the 19th century, hot cross buns were commonly eaten on Good Friday to mark the end of Lent.

What is the difference between a hot cross bun and an Alban bun?

In looks, the Alban bun differs slightly from its successor, the hot cross bun, as the cross - representing, of course, the crucifixion - is cut into the top of the bun with a knife, rather than being piped on with flour paste. Although the original recipe of the Alban bun remains a closely guarded secret, the main ingredients are simply flour, eggs, yeast, currants and spices.

Today, Alban buns are made by local bakery Redbournbury Watermill, which sticks to Brother Roccliffe's original recipe. But they're limited edition: the mill only produces its Alban buns and hot cross buns during Lent and Holy Week.

"We feel it's important to respect these traditions," says master baker at Redbournbury Steven Mansbridge. "We still bake the Alban buns for the cathedral using their secret recipe. It retains a special link between the cathedral and the mill. The mill was once owned by the cathedral, so it's wonderful to have restored this relationship."

Hot cross buns at Redbournbury Mill

Redbournbury Mill is set in an idyllic spot surrounded by water meadows, two miles north of St Albans and close to the Roman road now called Watling Street.



With the River Ver gently flowing past, the area is a haven for wildlife, including kingfishers, egrets, water voles and trout. A mill on this site was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 when it belonged to St Albans Abbey; later, during the dissolution of the monasteries, it became part of the Crown Estate.

For nearly 150 years, the mill was operated by tenant millers the Hawkins family, the last of whom was Ivy Hawkins. Known as "the only lady miller in England", Ivy lived in the mill from the 1950s until 1985, when she left aged 89.

Bought in 1985 by its present owners the James family, the mill and house were devastated by fire two years later. It took 13 years of fundraising and a grant from English Heritage to restore it. The mill's original millstones were destroyed in the fire, and the waterwheel badly damaged by falling masonry. Luckily, the owners found a nearby mill that was being converted into offices and were able to use its 100-year-old millstones to replace them. Volunteers repaired the waterwheel 10 years ago and it now runs whenever there's sufficient water in the river.



Around 1890, the mill was fitted with a steam engine - necessary because pumping stations along the valley had been taking water for the growing population of villages upstream, and there was little left for the river. In 1915 during the First World War, the steam engine was requisitioned and melted down for munitions. When the James family took over, they found an old oil engine in pieces and volunteers spent 18 months restoring it. It now generates electricity to power the mill when river levels are low.

The mill produces 50 tonnes of flour a year in the traditional manner, grinding grain between horizontal millstones. Most of this is wheat flour, but rye and spelt are becoming increasingly popular. Much of the grain comes from neighbouring farm, Hammonds End in Harpenden, but 2019's harvest was poor, so this year the mill will have to source grain from further afield.

The mill is entirely run by volunteers who only mill flour at weekends. During the week, other volunteers hoist grain and flour to the top of the mill, screen wholemeal flour to make white flour, bag the flour and carry out vital maintenance.

Head miller Justin James says: "It's lovely for children in particular to be able to visit the mill, see the grain being ground and then watch it being baked in our bakery. It's a perfect example of 'from crop to crust'."

(Article source: Countryfile)



Doggy destinations: 7 dog-friendly gardens to visit this spring

For the garden lover who can't leave their pooch behind. If you want to visit some open gardens this spring and at Easter, but don't want to leave your dog behind, help is at hand.

The National Garden Scheme (NGS), which raises funds for health charities and other organisations supporting nurses, is giving people unique access to more than 3,500 gardens this year, some of which are dog-friendly. So, you can find horticultural inspiration while keeping your four-legged friend happy.

Many National Trust gardens will also welcome dogs with their owners, offering a paw-print grading: three paw prints shows the best places to visit with your dog, where you'll be able to take your pet to most areas, including indoors for a cup of tea and a treat. There will also be clearly signed dog zones and pooch-friendly experiences. Two paw prints indicates these places have water bowls, dog bins and some dog access; one paw print means dogs are allowed but facilities are limited.

Here are seven gardens to visit with your pooch this spring.

Ashley Court, Tiverton, Devon (open for NGS on April 8)

Set in 19 acres of woodland, gardens and pasture overlooking the Exe Valley, Ashley Court visitors and their dogs can enjoy a short circular woodland walk. They can also access the historic walled kitchen garden, which is likely to pre-date the 1805 small Regency country house situated in a deep valley.

In spring, highlights include acres of wild garlic in the woodlands, daffodils, magnolia and camellia, plus fruit-tree blossom in the walled garden.

Dogs must be kept on a lead, as the garden is in an area with livestock, although when possible a paddock is provided for exercise. Speciality cakes are available, and dog biscuits are likely to be on offer too.

Castle Ward, County Down (open all year)

Take part in family activity trails over Easter and your dog can come too, provided it's on a lead. Trails wind their way through atmospheric woodland, parkland and gardens of this 820-acre mansion, which overlooks the tranquil waters of Strangford Lough in County Down.

The quirky 18th-century house comprises two completely different styles: gothic on one façade and Palladian on the other, while a farmyard that doubled up as Game Of Thrones' Winterfell adds to the charm of the grounds.

The Stableyard Tea Room is dog-friendly, and a dog exercise field is available, near the main car park and admission hut.

Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, North Yorkshire (open all year apart from selected days in November and December)



This three paw-print-rated World Heritage Site offers acres of land to explore through the water garden, abbey and deer park. Visitors are asked to use a short lead to prevent dog from disturbing ground-nesting birds and farm animals. You can take your pooch to most areas, including indoors for a cup of tea and a treat. There will be clearly signed dog zones and hounds are also allowed in the visitor centre restaurant.

The Old Vicarage, Washington, West Sussex (open for the NGS on Thursdays from March to October and on Easter Monday)

Spring bulbs are among the highlights of this beautiful three-and-a-half acre garden, run by owners Lord and Lady Walters who themselves have three dachshunds. In spring, visitors can admire thousands of tulips, as well as cyclamen, hyacinths and daffodils.

Other dazzling features include mature and specimen trees, a Japanese garden, an Italianate gazebo, water gardens, and creatively planted herbaceous borders. Dogs must be kept on leads. Throughout the garden, there are well-placed seating areas to take in the stunning West Sussex scenery.

Bryngwyn Manor, Gwent (open for the NGS Apr 1, pre-booking essential)

This relaxed, family-friendly garden set in three acres, is another good dog-friendly choice. After the winter snowdrops have come and gone, visitors can enjoy the daffodil walk, bee- and wildlife-friendly plantings, mature trees, walled parterre garden, mixed borders, lawns, ponds and shrubbery. Seating is dotted throughout the garden for visitors to admire the view, and there are plenty of areas for children to play and explore.

Home Farm, Huntley, Gloucestershire (open for the NGS Apr 2 and 30)

This unspoilt piece of English countryside with fantastic elevated views of the Cotswolds offers visitors the chance to enjoy primroses, wood anemones, lady's smock, violets and early purple orchids, followed at the beginning of May by swathes of bluebells, against a backdrop of sweet chestnut, larch, lime and cherry.

Visitors who want to brush up on their tree names can do so in 'Alphabet Wood', which features trees ranging from A to Z, using either Latin or common names. If you can't make the NGS dates, group visits are welcome by appointment.

Abbotsford, Melrose, Roxburghshire, Scottish Borders (open every day - check website for times)

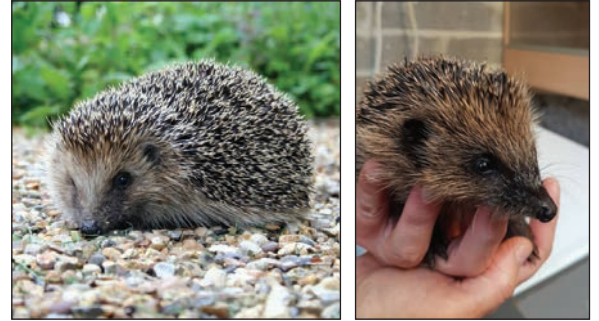


Set in a mammoth 1,400 acres, Abbotsford is the home of the great writer Sir Walter Scott, who designed the garden, taking advice from artists, architects and friends. It is a rare surviving example of a Regency garden layout and completely different from the English landscape garden style of Capability Brown. Scott's garden aims to bring harmony between the luxury of the interiors of the house and the wonders of nature in the wider estate, through a series of secluded, richly detailed and sheltered 'rooms'.

(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

