

OUR PLACE *News*

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

DECEMBER 2021

Inside this issue...

Fungi

The earth's secret miracle worker that protects our climate

Going to ground

How to use coffee waste in the garden - and what to watch out for

The seven types of rest

I spent a week trying them all. Could they help end my exhaustion?

15 winter travel adventures

Stay on a frozen lake in Sweden or take an ice drive in Estonia

PLUS...

**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

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Winter Wonderland in Hyde Park
19th November 2021 - 3rd January 2022
 Hyde Park, London.

PRE-BOOKING ESSENTIAL

This family event features a host of festive fun and activities, including Winter Wonderland ice skating, circus shows, an observation wheel and a huge Christmas market.

Winter Wonderland activities include the chance to:

- Skate to live music on the Winter Wonderland ice rink, the UK's largest outdoor rink.
- Discover mythical creatures made from ice and snow in the Magical Ice Kingdom's Secret Forest.
- Watch the Imperial Ice Stars' world-class skaters perform a thrilling Peter Pan on Ice.
- Marvel at the acrobatic wonders at Zippos Christmas Circus or Cirque Berserk.
- Soar into the sky on the iconic Giant Observation Wheel and see the twinkling London lights below.
- Ride a traditional carousel or brave the giant loops of nine different rollercoasters at the fairground.
- Go on an immersive cinematic adventure with The Snowman™ Experience, presented by Backyard Cinema.
- Create your very own ice sculpture at the Ice Sculpting workshops.

Christmas at Kew
17th November 2021 - 9th January 2022
 Kew Gardens, Richmond-Upon-Thames.

Take an enchanting journey into a glittering wonderland with Christmas at Kew at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew.

The popular after-dark Christmas event returns with its mile-long trail through the famous botanic gardens, lit up with more than 1 million lights. Get together with family and friends and follow the illuminated path around the gardens, enjoy live performances, and be treated to immersive installations and spectacular displays.

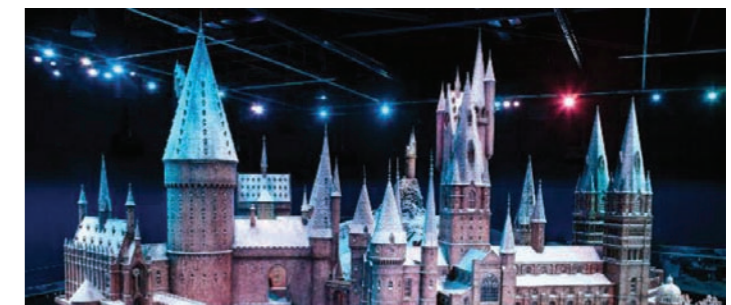
Highlights of Christmas at Kew:

- Encounter hundreds of moving lights with the Field of Light, as you head towards the Great Pagoda.
- Venture into the Laser Garden, where darting beams of light illuminate mature trees.
- Gaze at 300 sparkling origami boats floating on the lake.
- Discover a magical trail featuring firework trees lit up with bright colours, an Instagram-worthy walkway filled with ribbons of light, and the 100m-long (328m) Cathedral of Light tunnel.
- Be mesmerised by flickering flames from sculptures in the fire garden.
- Enjoy a drink beneath a dome made from tubular lights.
- Marvel at The Great Broad Walk Borders, which are surrounded by illuminated benches and 11m-high (36ft) flower sculptures.
- See a spectacular light, music and water display in front of the iconic Palm House.
- Take the little ones to catch a glimpse of Santa and his elves along the trail, and enjoy vintage fairground rides.
- Indulge in delicious Christmas treats and warming winter drinks at the end of the trail.

Hogwarts in the Snow - The Making of Harry Potter

Until 16th January 2022

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.



The seven types of rest: I spent a week trying them all. Could they help end my exhaustion?

When we feel fatigued most of us focus on sleep problems. But proper relaxation takes many forms. I spent a week exploring what really works.

“Are you the most tired you can ever remember being?” asks a friend. Well, yes. I have it easy - my caring responsibilities are limited and my work is physically undemanding and very low stakes - but I am wrecked. The brain fog, tearful confusion and deep lethargy I feel seems near universal. A viral tweet from February asked: “Just to confirm ... everyone feels tired ALL the time no matter how much sleep they get or caffeine they consume?” The 71,000-plus retweets seemed to confirm it’s the case.

But when we say we are exhausted, or Google “Why am I tired all the time?” (searches were reportedly at an all-time high between July and September this year), what do we mean? Yes, pandemic living is, objectively, exhausting.

Existing on high alert is physically and mentally depleting; our sleep has suffered and many of us have lost a sense of basic safety, affecting our capacity to relax. But the circumstances and stresses we face are individual, which means the remedy is probably also individual.

The need for a more granular, analytical approach to fatigue is partly what prompted Dr Saundra Dalton-Smith, a physician and the author of *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity*, to start researching and writing. “I wanted people to take a more diagnostic approach to their fatigue. When someone comes in and they say they’re hurt, I can’t treat that without having more details: what hurts, where does it hurt, when does it hurt?”

Sacred Rest dates from before the pandemic, when Dalton-Smith’s practice was already full of tired patients. “People would come in saying: ‘I’m tired all the time’, ‘I don’t have energy’ ... lots of non-specific complaints.

Nothing where you could give them a pill; things that needed lifestyle changes.” Simultaneously, Dalton-Smith was struggling to combine intense career pressure with parenting two toddlers. “I was experiencing some burnout-type symptoms,” she says. The book starts with an extremely relatable account of her lying on the floor, her kids snacking in front of the TV. “I never knew how hauntingly healing cold wooden planks could be,” she writes.

Her fatigue prescription is to incorporate seven types of rest into your life: physical, mental, emotional, social, sensory, creative and spiritual. I am dubious. *Sacred Rest* has a classic off-putting self-help book cover (a jetty shrouded in mist), talks about the “bread of self-disclosure and the wine of community”, and focuses heavily on God (there’s a clue in the title).

Then there is the fact that any attempt to take a break over the past 18 overloaded months has left me feeling miserable and unmoored. I confess this when I speak to Dalton-Smith over Zoom.

“I don’t like resting,” I tell her. “I get listless and sad and feel a failure.” She is not surprised. “For some people, rest is almost uncomfortable. It’s almost as if their psyche fights back against it because of the new sensation.” She would never, she says, recommend a three-day silent retreat to a completely frazzled patient. “For someone who is actively burned out, that’s almost traumatic.”

The book is not, in fact, about that kind of complete withdrawal; it is about incorporating enough moments of rest to stay functional. That may be a depressing indictment of end-stage capitalism:

Dalton-Smith is thoughtfully critical of society’s inability to take a preventive approach to its “burnout culture”, commoditising sleep (“It’s a billion-dollar industry, we have speciality pillows, weighted blankets, all of this stuff”) rather than focusing on the root problem. It is, however, refreshingly realistic. I gave the seven types of rest a whirl over a week, to see whether I would feel less tired - whatever that actually means - afterwards.

Physical

As a lazy, desk-based homeworker, I am rarely physically tired. I do, however, get stiff and achy, sit for far too long and pretzel my body into terrible shapes. Dalton-Smith advises incorporating “body fluidity” into my day with hourly small movements.

It’s easy and rewarding to set a phone reminder to roll my neck, clench and unclench my hands, or stand up and rock on my heels. Even better is the advice to “choose to be still on purpose for five minutes while lying down.” I do this on the sofa, under a blanket; the hardest part is getting up after five minutes.

I am a poor sleeper, so Dalton-Smith’s “bedroom routine” advice (the usual: dim lights, comfy clothes and no bedtime screens) is mainly stuff I do already. I follow her recommendation to add some stretches before bed; I sleep well the first night but after that I am back to my usual tossing and turning.



Mental

Mental fatigue - that befuddled, nervy, brain-fog feeling; forgetting what I was doing, and missing important things because my concentration is shot - is my constant companion. “Brain like damp Weetabix,” a friend calls it, which feels about right.

It is chastening how easy it is to improve my focus with a basic technique: time spent blocking out “low-yield activities”, such as email and social media, and periods of concentration. It dovetails well with the hourly movement breaks from physical rest, too. I am quickly conscious of how instinctively reactive I am to the most recent - not the most urgent, or the most important - demand; how the chime of a WhatsApp message chips 10 minutes off my concentration, leaving me foggier. I feel idiotic not to have realised this before. Usually when I try something for an article, however beneficial, I abandon it instantly once I finish, but the 25-minute focus, five-minute distraction timers on my phone have become a permanent fixture.

Emotional

Dalton-Smith has an online “rest quiz” to work out your rest deficits; by far my worst score is for emotional rest. It also turns out to be the area I find hardest to address. One suggestion is to identify people who “drain” you; as an introvert, I fear that’s everyone.

Another tip is to “risk vulnerability”, against which I have an almost physical reaction: my mask is there for a reason! The third is to “cease comparison”, but comparing myself unfavourably to others is my main hobby. None of these are exactly quick fixes. I probably need therapy, but failing that, I ask Dalton-Smith for help.

Continued on pages 6-7...



She suggests writing down what I am feeling, if confiding in others feels too exposed. I sit in a cafe and write down everything I can think of that makes me feel angry, scared, ashamed and sad. It takes a while and I really hate it: it feels as if I have forced all my worst thoughts to the surface without any plan for what to do with them. Maybe it doesn't have to feel good to do me good, and maybe if I sustain it for a while, I'll feel the benefit? I am reserving judgment.

Social

I assumed "social rest" would mean opting out of socialising for a while, but Dalton-Smith's social rest means spending time with people with whom you can be your unvarnished self.



Thankfully I am seeing my hairdresser this week (as a wig wearer, this is a very rare treat). We have known each other for 25 years and he sees me at my most vulnerable: bald and scared of what he's about to do with his scissors.

He is also wonderful company. Punctuated by the totally misused phrase "long story short, Em", he treats me to a two-hour monologue on a variety of feuds, scandals and gossip so entertaining I leave feeling more energised than if I had a transfusion of something unethical in a Swiss clinic.

After that, I have a leisurely lunch with my best friend, the woman who knows my worst qualities and nastiest thoughts. We eat like pigs, lapse frequently into silence, and discuss both really important stuff and the rising tide of water in the bottom of our fridges. It's deeply restorative. She's my emotional rest too, I realise.

Sensory

I know exactly what sensory input exhausts me: sound. Almost any noise - the battery bleep from a neighbour's fire alarm, a distant engine, the bathroom fan - can obliterate my focus (while writing that sentence, I told the dog off for licking himself too loudly). My husband has been a brilliant WFH pandemic colleague, but the man is loud: a volcanic sneezing, expansive yawning, loudspeaker telephoning one-man band. It has been challenging.

This is no surprise to Dalton-Smith. Analysing data from her quiz during the pandemic, she saw "a huge uptick in the number of people who were experiencing sensory rest deficits". People confined to the house with small children in particular, she says, were exposed to constant noise and even some adults "irritated each other to death. That non-stop hum of somebody talking in the background causes you to get agitated. That's what sensory overload does to us."

I am pretty much on top of my noise sensitivity: this article comes courtesy of a "peaceful piano" playlist that masks my least favourite noises without commanding my attention. But this week, I also try to ensure I appreciate the moments of silence when they happen, and to be conscious that when I feel depleted and stressed, noise is often the reason.

Creative

I haven't had a decent idea for at least two years, so I think it's fair to say I am creatively burnt out. I instantly love Dalton-Smith's advice to "build sabbaticals into your life". That's not a month-long writer's retreat; it can be as little as 30 minutes, doing something you choose, away from the grind.

I decide on lunch at my favourite cafe, then a gallery trip. After checking my email on the bus - a mistake - my lunch becomes a working one, as I do an urgent job. But after that the fun starts. I wander slowly around a ceramics exhibition, which is both transporting and inspiring.



Afterwards, I drink a hot chocolate as the late autumn light fades, looking at people and shop windows and even having a conversation with a man about his dog. I feel like a different person for a while, as if there is more space in my head. I still have no good ideas, but looking beyond my usual environment and doing something I have chosen feels wonderful.

Spiritual

Dalton-Smith is clear that you don't need to share her - or any - faith to incorporate "spiritual" rest into your life. "At the core of spiritual rest is that feeling that we all have of needing to be really seen, of feeling that we belong, that we're accepted, that our life has meaning." That might come through voluntary work, or other activities.

I have no faith, and finding what gives me those feelings seems a longer-term undertaking. Instead, I turn to the only spiritual thing I know well: a Quaker silent meeting.

I was educated by the Quakers, a faith group whose conception of God is simultaneously so expansive and so minimalist (they believe there is "that of God in everyone"), it's hard to feel uncomfortable about it.



Silent meeting - an hour of silence, interrupted occasionally by anyone who feels moved to speak - is the only kind of meditation I can manage. I turn up, get a warm, no-fuss welcome, sit down, and enjoy the silence.

Sometimes I examine my thoughts; sometimes I look at people's jumpers. I can see the blue sky out of a window; mainly I look at that. It's the deepest peace I feel all week.

Do I feel more rested? I am not miraculously restored and razor-sharp, but that's not a realistic goal, or even the aim of the book. It is another week of poor sleep, but I feel as if I have a bit more in the tank than usual, which is pleasant. I find it useful, too, to analyse what sort of tired I am, and to have a toolkit to address at least some kinds of fatigue.

Of course, there is an unavoidable flaw in this experiment: I am resting for work purposes. That gives me sort of "permission" to rest, while still, actually, working.

Could I embrace rest purely for myself? I should: this is basic maintenance, not self-indulgence. We can't function forever fuelled by adrenalin and caffeine, fogged brains scrabbling to function, nerves frayed like a cheap phone cable. Sure, we can sleep when we're dead, but a little rest before that would be nice.

(Article source: The Guardian)

Do you have an interesting story about health, lifestyle or the environment? If so, send us an email by visiting: www.ourplace.co

More single-use plastics to be banned: Tips for avoiding them - in and out the house

From rethinking your bathroom products to understanding where your Christmas decorations will end up, an environmental expert shares some advice.



Silver Surfers reports that single-use plastic items such as plates, cutlery and polystyrene cups look to be banned next as a public consultation is launched by the Government. There are also further calls to limit wet wipes that contain plastic, tobacco filters and sachets.

England uses an estimated 1.1 billion single-use plates (that's 20 plates per person) and 4.25 billion items of single-use cutlery - most of which are plastic - each year, and just 10% are recycled upon disposal. The UK uses 2.5 billion disposable coffee cups a year - and they are the fourth most littered item.

As part of the new proposals, additional charges could be placed on products which pollute the most; plastic within the items could be banned, and labelling telling consumers how to dispose of them could become mandatory. It follows the ban on microbeads in rinse-off personal care items in 2018.

Environment Minister Jo Churchill said the government is taking "decisive action" to ban problematic plastic items that are being dumped in landfill and bringing in laws to help us recycle better.

"Even the smallest piece of plastic, used just once and then casually tossed away, can remain in our environment as waste for hundreds of years - polluting our soil, tainting our oceans and harming our wildlife," she said.

"Everyone has a role to play in tackling plastic pollution and it has been great to see that sustainable changes have now become ingrained in many people's day-to-day routines, such as taking a reusable bag with them when they go shopping; carrying a reusable coffee cup and making purchases based on the amount - or lack of - plastic packaging."

Jessica Hickie, programme manager for the Environment Agency's plastics and sustainability team, adds: "Around 12 million tonnes of plastic enters the environment each year - that is a bin lorry load every minute.

"Small actions will add up, so I'd urge you to look for one simple change you can make that will reduce your reliance on avoidable plastic. If we are all kinder to our planet, we can help protect the environment from further harm caused by plastic pollution and leave it in a better place for future generations."

It may feel like an enormous issue to tackle, but we can all start small. Here, Hickie shares some ways to reduce your plastic use. Pick one, or a few, and go from there.

At home...

1. Baking your own bread can cut down on your use of soft plastics. Bread bags and other soft plastics such as crisp packets don't often get collected by local authorities - but some supermarkets are now starting to offer this service.

2. Wet wipes contribute to 93% of sewer blockages in the UK and end up polluting our beaches and riverbeds - switch to using a cotton flannel which can be hygienically washed and reused. Even if a wipe says it is flushable, it is better for our marine environment if you place it in the bin instead.

3. Swap the endless plastic bottles in your bathroom for shampoo and conditioner soap bars, which are eco-friendly and plastic free - or look at refill options at your local zero waste shop.

4. If you have a floor mop which uses single use wipes, switch to one with reusable cotton pads.

5. When it's time to replace your toothbrush, try switching to one made from bamboo (electric ones are available now too).

6. Ditch single use plastic razors for a reusable one. Some brands are offering a subscription (and recycling) service which can be delivered to your door.

And outside the home...

7. Keep a set of reusable cutlery in your bag or your work desk so you do not have to use disposable ones.

8. Chewing gum is made from plastic and Britain is the second biggest consumer of the product in the world - switch to plastic free chewing gum and always dispose in a waste bin.

9. Avoid using plastic condiment sachets - if you have room in your bag, consider bringing your own condiments in small, reusable, glass jars or plastic containers.

10. If you are eating in a work canteen, either opt for a plate or bring your own reusable food containers for canteen staff to place your food in. This can help eliminate the use of polystyrene takeaway boxes, which are not commonly recycled and are harmful to the environment.

This Christmas...

11. Give experience gifts rather than physical gifts.

12. If you want to bring some sparkle to your festivities, use energy efficient fairy lights, and reusable tealights in pretty jam jars, rather than glitter, which can be a harmful microplastic that ends up polluting our oceans.

13. Avoid using plastic balloons and balloon sticks - instead make your own decorations such as bunting and paper chains from recyclable materials, or buy durable ones you will be able to reuse and store them away carefully for next time.

And finally...

Start a conversation with a friend or family member about plastic pollution. Lend and borrow items amongst friends, neighbours, family and local community groups. Find out if your local area has a 'repairs café' so you can make do and mend items.

(Story source: Silver Surfers)

High-protein diet and exercise could 'reduce risk of heart disease and diabetes' in older adults

After 16 weeks, researchers saw 'significant' declines in so-called 'bad' cholesterol levels in older people given whey protein drinks alongside an exercise regime.

Inews reports that a higher-protein diet alongside exercise may contribute to reducing the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease in older adults, according to research.

Higher-protein diets, containing lean meat, chicken, fish and dairy products, have soared in popularity across the globe in the past decade and the researchers said their findings are particularly important for the world's ageing population.

Researchers from Liverpool Hope University and the University of Melbourne focused on a group of 100 older men and women from the UK with an average age of 68 years.

The research itself split the test subjects - 52 per cent of whom were women - into four groups.

Alongside a control, some were just asked to exercise; others tasked with exercise and consuming a popular, well-known whey protein drink three times per day; and the final group purely enjoyed the whey protein shake - concentrated form of milk protein favoured by bodybuilders - without exercising.



The amount of whey protein given to test subjects depended on their individual body weight.

The researchers suggest that whey protein enriched with leucine - an essential amino acid used in the biosynthesis of proteins which can also help control blood sugar through the hormone insulin - can lower levels of LDL cholesterol.

This is the so-called "bad" type of cholesterol which clings to arterial walls and makes you more likely to have heart problems or a stroke, according to the NHS.

Some test subjects even saw cardiovascular health benefits from protein supplementation alone, without necessarily needing to exercise.

The exercise and the exercise and protein groups performed one bout of circuit training exercises once a week, which included lunges, star jumps and a mini obstacle course.

After 16 weeks, researchers saw "significant" declines in LDL-cholesterol levels in both the exercise and protein, and the solely protein, groups.

There were also positive changes in insulin levels for both the exercise and protein, and the protein cohorts.

Hope's Associate Professor Farzad Amirabdollahian, who led the work, said: "There are several previous studies demonstrating the musculoskeletal health benefits of exercise and high-protein diet.

"But in the current study, we have examined the impact of a high-protein diet, with or without exercise, on a range of blood biomarkers associated with risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

And it is fascinating to see the impact of a high-protein diet and exercise on the reduction of risk of these diseases."

(Story source: Inews)

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15 winter travel adventures: Stay on a frozen lake in Sweden or take an ice drive in Estonia

Even if it's freezing outside, you can still enjoy family fun in the UK or further afield.

Coast and cocktails

Pembrokeshire

From the cosy confines of a lodge near Abermawr beach, guests warm up with hearty Welsh breakfasts and a woodland walk before taking the plunge on the Pembrokeshire coast. There's surfing, coastering and sea kayaking, depending on your cold water tolerance, and the option to explore St Davids or RSPB Ramsey Island. Board games and a log burner keep things toasty at the lodge.

Two nights £189 from 4 February (group bookings taken Dec-Jan), preseliventure.co.uk/events/adventure-weekends

Citizen science

Shropshire

The limestone escarpment at Wenlock Edge runs for around 15 miles between Ironbridge and Craven Arms and supports a diverse array of flora. A survey of endangered hazel dormice is under way as part of a project that started in 2015. Each autumn and winter, volunteers search for hazelnuts with teeth marks to establish the presence of these nocturnal, hard-to-find mammals.

Winter walkers and volunteers should register their interest with kate.price@nationaltrust.org.uk. The newly opened Old Hall B&B at Cressage has doubles from £130 B&B, oldhallcressage.co.uk

Camp cook-out (pictured left)

Aberdeenshire

A trio of voguish chefs is heading into the forest of the Glen Dye estate, south-west of Aberdeen. Over the next three weekends, the Americana-inspired woodland camp of cabins, Airstream trailer and cottages is hosting Whyte Rushen (who likes to top oysters with Monster Munch), Yotam Ottolenghi's co-author Ixta Belfrage and food photographer Joe Woodhouse for foraging (trout from the river, perhaps), fire-pit cooking and demos, as well as hiking, stargazing and wild swimming.

From £45, glendyecabinsandcottages.com/winter-chef-residencies

Winter mountaineering

Cairngorms

The Scottish Highlands are home to the UK's largest national park, a landscape of mountains, moorlands, rivers and forests, as well as red squirrels and raptors. An immersive, week-long mountaineering course will introduce visitors to much of this, while honing climbing skills under expert guidance. There are five days of hikes and climbs, with a rest day to soothe tired limbs (as well as sauna visits in the evenings).



One week from 16 January is £799pp including tuition and B&B, as well as transfers, no-boundaries.co.uk

Stargazing

Dumfries and Galloway

Galloway Forest Park is designated a gold-tier International Dark Sky Park for its exceptionally unpolluted skies; more than 7,000 stars and planets are visible to the naked eye. If you need guidance to explain what you are looking at, there are several ways to find it, including a downloadable map and guide (forestryandland.gov.scot). The cosy Selkirk Arms Hotel in Kirkcudbright is organising a three-day stargazing weekend in February to visit the town's new Dark Space Planetarium. There will be an astronomy lecture, dinners, talks and night walks.

25 February, £289pp half board, selkirkarmshotel.co.uk/stargazing-break



Winter wildlife

Norfolk

Grey seal pups - with their snow-white fur and big, black eyes - are starting to appear at Blakeney Point on the north Norfolk coast, which is home to the country's largest colony (£20, beansboatrips.co.uk). Whooper and Bewick swans are also arriving from Iceland and Siberia, settling in for the winter at Welney (www.org.uk/wetland-centres/welney), south of King's Lynn, while pink-footed geese cluster at Snettisham (rspb.org.uk) and snow buntings can be seen on the beach at Titchwell (visitnorfolk.co.uk/inspire/norfolks-winter-wildlife-safari.aspx).

The Gunton Arms near Cromer has elegant rooms, a lauded restaurant and views of red deer roaming around parkland outside. Doubles from £95, theguntonarms.co.uk

Soak up seaweed

Ireland

Vitamin-rich seaweed said to benefit circulation and soften skin has been harvested on Ireland's Atlantic coast for its health properties since the 12th century. There are still several no-frills bathhouses in counties Galway, Sligo, Clare and Mayo, where you can sink into a steaming, murky, porcelain tub filled with silky strands.

Voya's elegant bathhouse in Strandhill, Co Sligo, elevates the tradition with spa treatments (€30, voyaseaweedbaths.com).

To see the source, Wild Irish Seaweeds in Co Clare will take you out to the shore to help with the harvest (€30, wildirishseaweeds.com).

Voya baths are offered at the Twelve Hotel in Galway, which has doubles from €150, thetwelvehotel.ie

Continued on pages 12-13...



Ice driving

Estonia

In addition to numerous motorways, Estonia has seven official ice roads, accessible only in January and February when conditions allow for safe passage across the Baltic Sea. Primarily linking the mainland and western islands, the roads vary in length - the longest ice road, Hiiumaa extends for 25km - transporting thousands of cars each year. As part of a winter city break exploring the capital, Tallinn, visitors can experience a drive on one of the ice roads to visit the city of Haapsalu, Keila-Joa waterfall and the Noarootsi peninsula, with its wooden churches and Swedish cultural legacy.

Regent Holidays offers a three-night break from £525pp with flights, B&B, transfers, a full day of ice driving and city pass. Lake ice skating, cross-country skiing and ice fishing are also possible, regent-holidays.co.uk

Ride the night train (pictured left)

Norway

The Nordland line traverses more than 450 miles from Trondheim to Bodo, as far north as you can travel by train in Norway, and crosses the Arctic Circle. The journey sets off from the magnificent fjords and wooden houses of Trondheim, then passes forests and the Saltfjellet mountains on its 10-hour overnight journey to the Arctic coast. In winter, passengers also have a chance of witnessing the Northern Lights.

Tickets cost from Nkr199 (£18), sj.no

Snowshoeing

Albania

You will often have the snow-covered alpine landscapes to yourself in northern Albania's Valbona National Park, close to the country's borders with Montenegro and Kosovo. A small-group snowshoeing trip showcases the park's quiet splendours, hiking in glacial valleys for two to five hours per day past waterfalls and coniferous forests, and staying in small, cosy guesthouses.

There is also a visit to over the border to riverside Prizren in Kosovo - with its mosques churches - and a night in Radomire, at the foot of Korab, Albania's highest peak.

Eight days from €520pp excluding flights, responsibletravel.com



Frozen lake sleepover (pictured left)

Finland

Lake Inari is the largest lake in Finland's Sápmi cultural region, and when it freezes over in winter it is possible to walk, skate or snowmobile to its numerous islands. A thrilling way to experience the Lapland landscape is by sleeping in an Esko's Cabin - a heated pod on skis with a bed and toilet, which can be transported across the ice by snowmobile. Sauna visits, ice fishing, husky sledging and sleigh rides can also be organised.

From £331 per night for two, canopyandstars.co.uk

Ice climbing and tobogganing

Switzerland

The frozen waterfalls in and around the glitzy Swiss resort of Verbier form a picturesque playground for climbers in winter. Mountain guides direct you to the best cascades in Val de Bagnes, armed with ice picks, ropes and crampons and offering tuition for novices or guidance to aide experienced climbers. Those with energy left to expend can have a go at the 7km-long La Tzoumaz toboggan run from the Savoleyres gondola summit station, which drops 711m via its thrilling hairpin bends.



Ice climbing from SFr180pp (£150), verbier4vallees.ch

Moonbikes and yetis

France

The French Alps will be swarming with skiers once again this winter, but there is plenty more to enjoy besides skiing and boarding. New for this winter in Val d'Isère are moonbikes: electric snow bikes that transport passengers along snowy trails and through the forest towards the hamlet of Le Laisinant. Children will love the new Mountain Yeti course, which teaches them to respect nature via snowshoeing in the Boisses forest, igloo-building and having a go at trapper activities, rounded off with marshmallow toasting.

Moonbiking €70pp for one hour, mountain yeti from €55pp, evolution2.com

Sleep in a wooden skyscraper

Sweden

Skelleftea in Swedish Lapland is known for its mining industry, but also for a 20-storey timber building which opened last month. Within it is the Sara Cultural Centre, which will host exhibitions and concerts, while across the full span of the building is the Wood Hotel, crowned with a rooftop spa.

Activities nearby include snowshoeing with huskies (Skr1,000/£85, openlappland.com) and skiing in Vitbergsbacken (visitskelleftea.se).



Doubles from Skr1,500 (£130) B&B, elite.se

Cross-border adventure

Lapland

Most visitors to the Arctic Circle in Scandinavia focus on one country, but it is possible to hop from Norway across to Finland on a short trip that packs in plenty of adventure. Starting in the Norwegian coastal city of Tromsø, it kicks off with husky sledging in search of the Northern Lights, then moves to Kilpisjärvi in Finland where a glass-roofed cabin provides spectacular accommodation.

A day trip on fat bikes takes guests to the border of Norway, Finland and Sweden before heading to another glass-roofed lodge at Rovaniemi and a reindeer encounter with Sami herders.

Five nights from £1,795pp excluding flights, offthemap.travel/stars-of-scandinavia/

(Article source: Inews)

Have you experienced one of these winter adventures? If so, tell us all about it! Send us an email by visiting: www.ourplace.co

UK tourists who haven't had third vaccine could be banned from Europe holiday hotspots

Holidaymakers travelling to the EU could be required to show proof of a booster as early as Easter next year.



Inews reports that British holidaymakers who have not had a booster jab may be banned from travelling to European tourist destinations under new rules.

The European Union is expected to unveil new Covid-19 travel guidelines based on vaccination status rather than country of origin, after its health agency recommended boosters for all.

The proposal will give guidance on how long vaccinations should remain valid, with some EU member states already setting an expiration date on vaccine certificates: users would need a booster for the pass to stay valid.

Tourists travelling to the EU could be required to show proof of their booster as early as Easter next year.

However, it does not mean a ban on unvaccinated travel, despite European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warning of a "pandemic of the unvaccinated". A valid negative test uploaded onto the Covid pass will offer a second pillar for travellers who had their second jab more than six months earlier, but they will need to be aware of the rules and potentially pay for testing.

There is no consensus yet on how soon the Covid pass would expire after the second vaccine, with six, nine and 12-month periods all being suggested.

The EC could issue new guidelines as soon as Thursday to take account of booster vaccines, as it grapples with surging cases and hospitalisations across the bloc.

The move is aimed at smoothing out rules on free travel, as EU members adopt different approaches to managing booster jabs.

EU countries will have to adjust their quarantine policies to target those without a valid EU Digital Covid-19 Certificate - used to travel or to enter bars, restaurants, hotels and museums - or a recognised equivalent like the UK's NHS Covid pass.

The Commission's move to rewrite the guidelines comes after the EU's public health agency called on Wednesday for vaccine boosters to be considered for all adults.

"Countries should also consider a booster dose for all adults 18 years and older, with a priority for people above 40 years old," said Andrea Ammon, the director of the European Centre for Disease prevention and Control (ECDC). "There are still too many individuals at risk of severe COVID-19 infection whom we need to protect as soon as possible. We need to urgently focus on closing this immunity gap, offer booster doses to all adults, and reintroduce non-pharmaceutical measures."

The ECDC also called for tighter public health measures to achieve a "high contact reduction," including limiting year-end social events, more mask-wearing, and working from home.

Greece is pushing hard to make booster shots a condition for free travel for over-60s in the EU. "Such a policy initiative will help our health systems to... sustain control over the virus and pandemic without moving to new horizontal restrictions that would put in jeopardy the recovery of our economies," prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Wednesday said in a letter to Mrs Von der Leyen.

The European office of the World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned that Europe could see over two million pandemic deaths by March, up by 700,000 from the current death toll in the 53-country region. The director of WHO Europe, Robb Butler, on Wednesday suggested countries should start thinking about mandatory vaccines in the wake of Austria's plans to make it compulsory from February.

Only 67.7 per cent of the EU population is fully vaccinated, but rates vary widely between countries, with low levels in many eastern countries. Only 24.2 per cent of Bulgarians are fully vaccinated, compared with 86.7 per cent in Portugal.

(Story source: Inews)

Cornwall had one of its busiest summers, but St Ives is perfect for a winter break

With fewer visitors there's breathing space to enjoy the town's galleries, seafront restaurants and cosy pubs - and brave the water too.

Inews reports that a trip to the seaside may fix in the mind images of summer - sunny beaches, melting ice cream and long evenings - but there is plenty to enjoy on the edge of the country in the colder months of the year.



It is estimated that an extra 30,000 people visited Cornwall this summer compared to previous years, making it one of the most popular holiday locations in the country. But the county is quiet again, and in artsy St Ives, you can sense that the town has been regained by its residents. For those who do visit out of season, its rich arts heritage, coastal activities and magnificent natural landscape are no less appealing.

Staying in the town is one option, whether in a historic fisherman's cottage or one of the luxury hotels that hosted foreign dignitaries during June's G7 Summit. I stayed just outside at the Una St Ives resort, where there's space and the flexibility of self-catering. Just a short drive from St Ives and a 15-minute walk down to the sweeping sands of Carbis Bay - where the G7 took place - Una comprises lodges, many of which are pet-friendly, clustered around a luxury spa that offers fitness classes, a heated indoor infinity pool and sauna. By 2023, it is set to expand with a hotel.

Whiling away the hours in the winding, cobbled streets of St Ives is easy in all weathers. There are twisting streets lined with independent galleries, cafes and shops; on the harbourfront, restaurants and ice cream parlours overlook turquoise waters that would not be out of place in the Mediterranean, even on the dreariest December day.

The artistic light continues to inspire

It is a seascape that inspired many of the artists whose work now hangs in the St Ives branch of the Tate gallery, which stands braced against Porthmeor Beach. Though it has a varied programme of exhibitions throughout the year, its collection focuses on the St Ives School of local artists. Prominent among them is Alfred Wallis, a fisherman and rag-and-bone-man who used industrial paints and unexpected materials to create primitive but evocative scenes.

A short hop away is the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden, also managed by the Tate, which displays the artist's abstract paintings and geometric sculptures in what was once her own studio, home and gardens.

Another cultural highlight is the Leach Pottery, established by Bernard Leach in 1920. Heavily inspired by Japanese ceramics, the pottery kickstarted St Ives' arts movement in many ways, and was founded on creating pieces which have utility at their heart. Today, a team of seven potters creates "standardware" - made to Leach's original specifications - alongside their own work, currently on display at the Thrown Contemporary gallery in north London. The pottery offers tours led by local artists, quick "have-a-go" sessions and longer pot-throwing courses.

If you've been inspired to pick up pen or paints, there is a variety of art courses and experiences on offer throughout St Ives. Even in the winter months, an outdoor class in either watercolours or sketching offered by Barnoon Arts, led by Peter Giles, is a relaxed way to start training your hand to capture landmarks like the historic Smeaton's pier.

Though I haven't an artistic bone in my body, he taught me a solid grounding of techniques while getting me to see the shapes and lines that make up St Ives' profile. Feeling inspired, we took our materials and went further afield - a boat trip to Seal Island (starting at £20 pp) to see some marine mammals, then a long ramble along the dramatic coast past Cloddy Point to Zennor, stopping for the legendary ice cream at The Moomaid. My imagination was stirred under grey skies.

The water's still lovely (but bracing)

And if you're feeling brave - there's still the sea. Water temperatures are starting to take a turn, but for experienced cold-water swimmers, heading out into the Atlantic is a bracing experience, tempered by a wetsuit (check conditions via the Coastguard or a website like Surf-Forecast.com).

For a safer swim, the Jubilee Pool in nearby Penzance is a grand, recently restored Art Deco lido with a large seawater pool and a smaller, geothermally heated pool in which you can wallow as steam rises into the air, listening to the crashing Atlantic waves on the other side of the wall.

As well as art, St Ives is renowned for its surf breaks. From the sandy stretch of Porthmeor Beach the St Ives Surf School teaches novices like me, as well as the more experience. I found it a little daunting at first, but after a few mouthfuls of saltwater I was paddling out, then rising to my knees and eventually standing on a board - if only for a few seconds. The instructors are friendly and encouraging, and the thrill of successfully gliding into shore is exhilarating.

With my energy expended, the harbourside Porthminster Kitchen beckoned. The intimate, simple interior - and sea-view terrace - are reflected in a small but varied menu, built on a basis of fresh sea catches including local oysters and scallops. I devoured a decadent cod fillet with herb gnocchi and a lobster bisque, looking out from the balcony at the early sunset.

Later, the Rum and Crab Shack and the Sloop Inn - the latter one of Cornwall's oldest inns - were cosy retreats for drinks and dancing to local, live music. St Ives continues to keep spirits high long after the warm summer rays have receded.

Inside tip: Ben Warner, surf instructor

"After a day of swimming or surfing, I love to head down to the Sloop Inn. It's a beautiful, old, wooden pub that has an amazing atmosphere, especially when there is some live music on. And on a quiet day it feels like a mysterious smugglers' pub, which it probably was 500 years ago."

(Story source: Inews)



Fungi: The earth's secret miracle worker that protects our climate

Without fungi we don't have bread, chocolate, cheese, soy sauce, beer or wine. They are also crucial to protecting our climate.

Let's picture a dinner with family or friends that began by enjoying beer, wine, fruit juice or maybe a fizzy kombucha beverage. You're contemplating a glorious basket of bread, rapt in awe of its perfect crumb and fantasizing about the moment you slather it in butter or olive oil.

Then come the fresh vegetables sauteed with soy sauce, maybe tofu or free-range beef with potatoes or rice, followed by cheese, or a chocolate dessert - and to top it off, a lovely cup of coffee or tea with some chocolates or maybe some sake?

We need to stop for a moment and thank fungi for all of this. Honestly, none of it would be possible without them, and your dinner would certainly not be so tasty!

Fungi are responsible for almost all our food production, and most of our processed materials.

They are also to be thanked for many of the important medical breakthroughs in human history that treat both physical and mental ailments, for naturally sequestering and slowly releasing carbon, for optimizing industrial processes, and so much more.

When most people think about fungi, they tend to associate them with decay. Many people mistakenly believe fungi are plants. However, fungi are neither plants nor animals but rather organisms that form their own kingdom of life.

The way they feed themselves is different from other organisms: they do not photosynthesize like plants and neither do they ingest their food like animals. Fungi actually live inside their food and secrete enzymes to dissolve nutrients they then absorb.

Included in this kingdom are yeasts, moulds, mushrooms, wood-ears or conks, and several other different types of unicellular and multicellular organisms that live in marine, freshwater, desert and both young and old ecosystems on Earth.

Basically, a morel and a chanterelle are as closely related as a flea and an elephant. The latter are both animals, the former are fungi.

Interestingly, fungi are more closely related to us animals than to plants, sharing a common ancestor in the form of an opisthokont, which is a cell with a posterior flagellum - like human spermatozooids.

Now to the central question: what would happen in a world without fungi? Most plants can't live outside water and rely on fungi to survive. There would be no forests for you to hike in or any agriculture to feed you.

Herbivores such as cows can't break down grass without the fungi in their gut. Fermentation is possible only because of yeasts, which, going back to our dinner table, means that no fungi would mean no bread, no chocolate, no soy sauce, no beer or wine. Hence our gratitude for fungi at dinner.

Moreover, without moulds like koji many ancient civilizations could not have preserved food, other than using salt or smoking (imagine that for a second).

For decades we have extracted enzymes from fungi to clean clothes in cold water (yes, it's fungi that do that in your detergent), have bioengineered natural pesticides with entomopathogenic fungi that eliminate the toxic burden of synthetic pesticides, and have learned to use some species to maximize the amount of metal extracted from rocks in mining processes.



We have also discovered the cholesterol-lowering statins in fungi, life-saving antibiotics like penicillin, the medicines that allow for organ transplants to be successful, and we are now finally accepting and legalizing medicinal compounds made by fungi to treat urgent and life-threatening mental health ailments such as PTSD and depression.

As if that weren't impressive enough, our ancestral and traditional ways of ritually reaching the celestial from the terrestrial almost all include fungi - from the ritual beverage Soma in Vedic cultures to communion with bread and wine in Roman Catholic cultures. Fungi matter - a lot.

Nevertheless, the entire kingdom is ignored in most biodiversity, climate change and environmental legal frameworks. And by the general public too: for too long macroscopic diversity and species on earth have been referred to using the now obsolete term flora & fauna, or just plants and animals instead of fauna, flora & funga, or animals, fungi and plants.

The third "f", representing fungi, is acknowledged as the correct term to refer to the diversity of fungi of a given place. The IUCN species survival commission and the global NGO Re:Wild - among others - have adopted this terminology. It seems the time has finally come to leave mycological illiteracy behind.

Decomposition, or decay, is the very beginning of a fundamental natural process that enables life. There is no regeneration without degeneration of organic compounds, because energy is not lost, it is transformed - and it is the fungi that are heavily responsible for this vital transformation.

For example, if we look at a fallen tree in the forest and imagine it is composed of building blocks, we can understand how decomposition works: fungi weave their way through the blocks, loosening them until they are "free" and ready to "rebuild" in another form.

For too long this process has been considered distasteful, under the once-upon-a-time understanding that life is a linear process. It is shocking to think that we can attribute any negativity to rot when we understand the incredible nature-based solutions it holds.

We can use rot for a more sustainable future too. For instance, mycelium - a mostly invisible group of fungi, such as mushrooms and conks - is a tangible and safe alternative to animal leather as well as plastic packaging, and is starting to revolutionize the fashion industry.

Mycelium leathers and packaging are offering the opportunity to use fungi involved in decomposition as a source of clothing and durable, recyclable and natural materials that are more sustainable to produce.

Materials like Mylo Unleather and Made with Reishi, as well as incredible packaging materials made by Ecovative, are trailblazing for industry to move away from pollutant materials whose manufacturing process requires unsustainable amounts of water, toxins, and energy, and sometimes requires the end of an animal's life.

As legendary mycologist Paul Stamets said during Paris and London fashion weeks on the Stella McCartney runways: "In fashion, mushrooms are the future." He says this while he wears a hat made of amadou, a fungal felt or suede of ancient eastern European origin which demonstrates that fungi have a successful past in fashion too.

Continued on pages 18-19...



There is consensus among mycologists that we know only 10% of species diversity within kingdom fungi, at most. It is urgent to further species knowledge before species are lost forever and with them their potential.

This goes beyond their use as materials or food: fungi sustain culturally important activities for rural communities all over the world. Thousands of families living in subsistence economies depend on the seasonal appearance of fungi as food and as a tradeable product to be consumed both locally, nationally and internationally.

Not only is this an activity that sustains livelihoods; it keeps cultures alive. In southern Chile, for instance, while the spring fungus *Cyttaria espinosae* “digüeñe” is being harvested by entire families, firewood is collected, songs are sung, oral history is transmitted, and you can hear the laughter and fun throughout the hills of the southern beech forests. *Cyttaria* - now that's a delicious addition to the dinner table!

We must not ignore or underestimate the fact that fungi create ecosystems. How so? Well, let's picture a cake: if we don't put that binding ingredient like egg or aquafaba into the mix, the sugar and flour do not stick together. In a forest, for example, plants and animals do not “stick” together without the fungi to create the ecosystem.

The science is clear: fungi are essential to maintaining a stable climate system (given their role in sequestering carbon in soil) and preserving ecosystemic health. Legislation, however, has not caught up. Across many environmental and conservation policies, fungi have been overlooked or undervalued.

This oversight has consequences: when fungi are put at risk - endangering the ecosystems that depend on them - we miss opportunities to advance solutions to serious environmental problems like climate change and land degradation.

That's why the Fungi Foundation is calling for the incorporation of fungi across law and policy at every level - national, regional and international. In the aftermath of COP26 I hope the UN puts fungi - which provide critical solutions to urgent environmental challenges like climate change - on their agenda.



Together with biologist and best-selling author Merlin Sheldrake and NYU Law professor César Rodríguez-Garavito, the Fungi Foundation prepared a manifesto and a roadmap for the legal recognition of fungi that has been endorsed by leading environmental experts and activists, including Jane Goodall, George Monbiot, Donna Haraway, Paul Stamets, Kristine Tompkins and Peter Gabriel to name a few, as well as more than a thousand other signatories from more than 70 countries.

International governance institutions - from the UN bodies to the Conference of the Parties (COP), which meets to advance the Convention on Biological Diversity - can use their political and legal clout to encourage the updating and creation of laws and policies that protect fungi and mainstream them into environmental, biodiversity, and conservation law and policy. National governments can follow the lead of Chile in adopting legislation that extends to fungi the legal protections that are recognized for plants and animals.

All mushrooms are magic. Take it from me, as someone who studies them. It's time to say their name by acknowledging them all around - from the dinner table to international conservation policies - and including them in our conception of ecosystems that need to be cherished and protected. Say it with me: the world is inhabited by fauna, flora and funga.

Without fungi, the world as we know it would not exist.

Why fungi matter

So what's the big deal about fungi & fungal mycelium?

It is estimated 90% of plants rely on fungi to live and that 93% of the world's fungal species are yet to be discovered. Fungi have the potential to unlock sustainable sources of food and material, as well as other solutions to problems faced by humanity.



When you see a mushroom, this is only part of the organism. Like a plant that bears fruit, the mushroom is the fruit body of the fungus.

The function of the mushroom is to produce spores (whereas the fruits of plants contain seeds), which travel away from the fungus and allow it to reproduce.

Fungi aren't plants and they aren't animals. In fact, fungi belong to their very own group called a kingdom. They range in size from microscopic yeasts, to the largest known living organism on our planet.

Fungi have been around for millions of years, even before the dinosaurs. Today you can find fungi everywhere - the Arctic, the tropics, the desert and in oceans and rivers too. They can even be found in space!

What is fungal mycelium?

The fine threads that make up the main body of the fungus are called mycelium. The mycelium stretches out beneath the mushroom in search of water and food.

Fungal mycelium often grows with the roots of plants, either covering the root or actually growing within it. The fungi provide water and nutrients that the plants can't get easily from the soil and the plants provide the fungi with sugars, which they make during photosynthesis.



Unlike a plant, a fungus can't make its own food by using energy from the sun. Instead, the fungus produces enzymes which are released by the mycelium and break down waste organic matter (usually dead plants and animals), to be absorbed through the mycelium and used by the fungus for growth.

What do fungi actually do?

Fungi are also one of the only groups of organisms that can efficiently break down wood, so in forest eco-systems they're absolutely essential to stop dead wood and leaves building up.

Fungi recycle nutrients back into the soil, which helps plants to grow and thrive. Without the recycling capability of fungi, human beings wouldn't be able to survive on this planet!

Some fungi are even used to make medicines, the most well-known being the antibiotic penicillin. Other fungi are used to produce medicines that lower cholesterol and to make 'anti-rejection' drugs, which enable people to have life-saving organ transplants.

You might be surprised how many foods are made using fungi too. Fizzy drinks, wine, beer, cheese, bread, Marmite, Quorn, coffee and chocolate all depend on fungi. Fungal mycelium is also being used to create environmentally-friendly leather, packaging and even building materials.

(Article source: Various)



Going to ground: How to use coffee waste in the garden - and what to watch out for

As an organic grower for restaurant royalty, Anna Greenland uses everything at her disposal to help her plants flourish, including used coffee grounds, as she explains here.

Chances are there's at least one coffee drinker in your household. In ours it's my husband and, as I'm an organic grower and gardener, I'm regularly eyeing up his spent coffee grounds.

No matter how small your space, if you're a plant obsessive like me, it's worth knowing that you can use this nitrogen-rich organic matter in several ways throughout the garden.

It's also preferable to sending spent grounds to landfill, too; globally, a third of food that's produced is lost or wasted, making it a big contributor to climate change, releasing 8-10% of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions as it rots. So, finding ways to cut down what ends up in your rubbish bin is a positive step.



You must observe a few caveats before you start flinging coffee grounds about your plot, but, used correctly, coffee waste can form part of your regime to boost soil and plant health...

Break it down

I am a huge advocate of composting. My compost heap is nurtured perhaps as much as my daughter! It's an unruly second child that requires constant feeding, but rewards me with untold joy when that sweet-smelling compost is ready. It is truly magical to take your waste and turn it into something full of goodness for your soil and plants. Working with a small space? You can get yourself a wormery instead and experience similar pleasures. I add coffee grounds to both, with great results.

For compost piles, you need to add a mix of green (nitrogen-rich) and brown (carbon-rich) materials to get good results. "Green" being grass cuttings, food scraps, green weeds and leaves, manures and (surprisingly, given that they are actually brown) good old coffee grounds. "Brown" additions include cardboard, paper, egg boxes, woody plant material, woodchip, straw and autumn leaves.



Coffee grounds give the compost a decent helping of nitrogen, adding heat and speeding up the process as microbes in the pile break the grounds down. This is also handy in the winter months when there is less green material available. Just layer the waste coffee in with your other ingredients. The process feels a lot like baking a cake, with equally delicious results for your garden!

For wormeries, in moderation and as part of a balanced diet(!), coffee grounds are a lovely addition and my worms have been feasting on them for more than five years now. You could be forgiven for not knowing what a wormery is, but for anyone gardening on a balcony, rooftop or small urban space, I'd urge you to consider getting one.

Wormeries house composting worms (different from earthworms) that will eat through your fruit and vegetable scraps (and dry matter such as shredded paper and loo-roll tubes) to make beautiful, nutrient-rich worm compost from their castings.

This can be used to top-dress pots and garden beds, as well as making a "worm tea" by steeping the compost in water. I don't dump large quantities of grounds into my worm bin in one hit.

Instead I mix with the other ingredients and feed weekly. Our worms are now part of the family and my daughter is intrigued by them.

What to watch out for

As mentioned, coffee grounds are a source of nitrogen - one of the most important nutrients to support plant growth. You will read online that when placed (uncomposted) around plants and used on soil as a mulch, spent grounds can act as a natural fertiliser. And I do know growers who use grounds as a fine mulch. However, proceed with caution, as spent grounds still contain caffeine. Plants that produce caffeine have an allelopathic effect on other plants as a method of survival - this means they can suppress the growth of surrounding species to reduce competition.

So, you must be wary around young plants and seedlings where caffeine can stall growth. If using grounds directly on soil, don't spread them as a thick layer. I advise mixing grounds with another form of organic matter such as homemade compost, well-rotted manure, green-waste compost or whatever it is you are using to mulch beds or top-dress pots. But if possible, my recommendation would be to compost them first.

There is also a lot of information online about the acidic nature of coffee grounds and the necessity to only place them around acid-loving plants. This may be true of fresh grounds, but studies have shown that spent grounds have a pH that veers towards neutral. It is hard to say without testing each individual batch, but saving the grounds for your acid-loving plants such as blueberries, azaleas, rhododendrons and camellias is unlikely to offer significant benefits. The neutral pH is good news if you want to use the waste coffee more widely in the garden but have been concerned about acidity.

Whenever I get a chance, my favourite early morning routine is to head into the garden with a cup of Nespresso while getting my thoughts for the day in order. Being among my plants has a rejuvenating effect that is hard to find elsewhere. Before I had a garden, my windowsill full of herbs had similar restorative benefits. So pour yourself a cup of coffee, wander outside and get tactile with the plants around you - the buzz you get from your coffee will reach an all-time high!

It's also worth noting that as well as recycling your spent grounds, you can easily recycle old coffee capsules through Podback, a new industry-wide scheme co-founded by Nespresso, leaving you with zero waste. If you've got no more room in your garden for grounds, fear not - Nespresso has its own use for spent grounds, turning them into biogas and soil improver. In east Yorkshire, for example, the compost is being spread on land producing arable crops and cereals.

Anna Greenland is an organic grower who supplies chef Raymond Blanc at Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons

(Article source: The Guardian)

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:

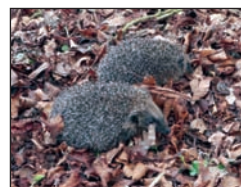
'Julie'



'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

