

OUR PLACE *News*

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

DECEMBER 2025

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PLUS...

**What's on • Health & Beauty • Money & Work • Leisure & Travel
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Letter from the Editor

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

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

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

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

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

We welcome you and hope you enjoy Our Place.

The Editor - Our Place

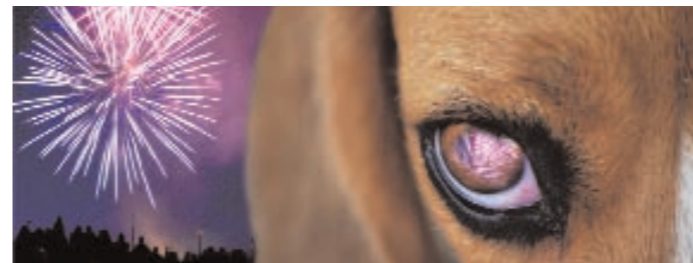
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FIREWORK FEAR

How to deal with your dog during New Year's Eve

Once again it is the time of year when many pets suffer from the effects of firework phobias. Phobias can be complex and it is important to tailor behaviour modification to each individual's circumstances, but there are some changes owners can make that will benefit most noise sensitive dogs.

The secret is to look round your home and watch how your dog is affected. See how you can use the principles to maximise the benefit for them. Here is the solution:

On the day of the fireworks:

- Take your dog out for a walk to empty before the fireworks start.
- Feed a stodgy meal of high carbohydrate, low protein, an hour before the fireworks (unless they suffer from stress related diarrhoea, when this is NOT a good idea).
- Put on some music with a heavy bass beat - not too loud, but loud enough to mask the more distant bangs.
- Take your dog to their den and provide chews, stuffed Kongs and dog food. Water should always be available. Don't worry if the food goes untouched - some dogs are so stressed they are unable to eat.

When the fireworks start:

DON'T:

- Pet, praise or cuddle your dog if they are displaying anxiety - they may see this as approval and continue with the anxious behaviour.
- Tell your dog off - this will make them even more worried.

DO:

- Take your dog to their den.
- Ignore any anxious behaviour. They have to learn to cope on their own - dependence upon people will not help.
- Ignore the noise - set a good example.
- Reward any relaxed behaviour with stroking, a massage, or food treats.
- Play games if your dog is able - if there is another, more relaxed, dog, play games with them and hope that the stressed one joins in.

WINTER CAT WARNING

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



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

HEDGEHOG WARNING

At this time of year please check for these prickly creatures before lighting your bonfire.



Bonfires are perfect sleeping areas for hedgehogs and every year many get burnt alive. If you are having a bonfire, just make sure you check inside before lighting it. If you do find a hedgehog, move it to a safe place. This year second litters have been born later than usual. This means that there may still be young and underweight hedgehogs around. Remember if they are under 600gr they will not survive hibernation and need to be taken to a local animal rescue centre.





Stay connected: 8 ways to stay social after retiring - and why it's so important

Retirement brings the gift of time - time to relax, explore, and finally focus on what makes you happy.

But one of the biggest adjustments many new retirees face isn't about finances or schedules - it's about staying connected.

When the daily routine of work ends, so can many of the built-in social interactions that came with it. Staying social isn't just enjoyable - it's essential for your physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing.

Why staying social matters

Studies consistently show that maintaining strong social ties can: Boost brain health - Social engagement helps keep your memory sharp and may lower the risk of dementia.

Improve mood and reduce stress - Meaningful connections lower rates of depression and anxiety.

Enhance longevity - People with active social lives tend to live longer and healthier lives.

Keep you physically active - Many social activities naturally get you up and moving.

So how can you keep your social life thriving after leaving the workforce? Here are eight uplifting ideas to help you stay connected, curious, and fulfilled.

Join a club or group

From book clubs to hiking groups or community choirs, joining a regular club gives structure to your week and introduces you to people who share your interests.

Many local libraries, community centers, and online groups (like The Oddfellows) host gatherings for retirees.

Volunteer your time

Volunteering offers a double benefit - you give back to the community while meeting compassionate, like-minded people.

Whether it's mentoring young people, helping at an animal shelter, or supporting a charity, volunteering can bring deep purpose and connection.



Take a class or learn something new

Many community colleges and lifelong learning institutes offer classes just for older adults.

From cooking and painting to technology or foreign languages, learning sparks your brain and connects you with others who share your curiosity.

Embrace technology

Video calls, social media, and online interest groups make it easier than ever to stay in touch - even with friends and family far away.

Don't hesitate to ask for help learning new apps; mastering them opens up a world of virtual connection.

Stay physically active together



Group exercise is one of the most fun and effective ways to stay social.

Try walking clubs, dance classes, water aerobics, or yoga groups. It's easier to stay motivated - and much more fun - when you're moving with friends.

Reconnect with old friends

Retirement can be the perfect time to rekindle old friendships. Send a message, plan a lunch, or organise a mini reunion.

Most people are thrilled to reconnect, and you'll likely pick up right where you left off.

Get involved in your community

Attend local events, join a faith group, or participate in neighbourhood projects.

Even casual interactions - chatting with neighbours or volunteering at the local fair - help you feel rooted and valued in your community.

Explore intergenerational opportunities

Spending time with younger generations can be incredibly rewarding. Consider mentoring programs, tutoring, or simply spending more time with your grandchildren and their friends. Sharing stories and experiences bridges generations in meaningful ways.



The Bottom Line

Retirement isn't the end of your social life - it's the start of a new chapter filled with possibilities. Staying socially engaged supports your health, sharpens your mind, and fills your days with joy and connection.

Whether it's through volunteering, learning, or laughter over coffee, nurturing relationships is one of the most powerful ways to make your retirement years truly golden.

(Article source: Silver Surfers)

Winter warmers: Finding warmth in cold days

As the chill of winter sweeps through, it's easy to feel the weight of grey skies and cold winds.



Silver Surfers reports that but here's the thing: winter is nature's invitation to slow down, reflect, and discover the hidden joys of cosiness. This season can remind us of the beauty of life's quieter moments and the warmth we carry within ourselves.

Here are five ways to find brightness and cheer on even the coldest days:

Rediscover the magic of small pleasures

Cold days are perfect for embracing small, heartwarming rituals. Make that cup of tea or coffee extra special by sipping it from your favourite mug, nestled under a soft blanket. Light a candle, even if it's just for you. These little actions may seem trivial, but they're moments of self-care that remind us of life's simple joys.

Move, even just a little

It's tempting to stay tucked in on cold days, but a little movement can do wonders for the soul. Take a brisk walk, even if it's just around your block or your living room. Feel the crisp air on your face and know it's part of what keeps you alive and thriving. Or, try a gentle indoor yoga video - it'll warm your body and calm your mind.

Connect to stay warm

Winter can feel isolating, but it's the perfect excuse to reach out to loved ones. Call an old friend, start a group chat, or write a letter. Better yet, organise a "winter potluck" with neighbours or friends - everyone brings a dish, and the laughter and chatter will leave your heart warmer than a fireplace ever could.

Dive into something new

There's no better time to explore a new hobby or interest. Have you ever wanted to knit, paint, write, or bake that perfect loaf of bread?

Winter gives you permission to sit indoors and immerse yourself in creativity. Think of it as adding new chapters to your story - a story that's far from over.

Celebrate the beauty of this stage

Being over 50 means having layers of experience and wisdom to draw from. Let the winter remind you that, like the season, you are a mix of resilience and beauty. Laugh at the silly things, relish the memories that warm your heart, and remember that every stage of life has its own kind of magic.

A warm thought to carry

Imagine that life over 50 is like winter itself: a time when things slow down but also grow richer and deeper. The quiet can be nourishing, and the cold makes the warmth all the sweeter. So, on this chilly day, wrap yourself in gratitude, connection, and the belief that the best moments can be as simple as a shared smile or a warm bowl of soup.

Winter doesn't last forever, but the memories you create in it will. Keep your heart glowing!

(Article source: Silver Surfers)

The one change that worked: I was burned out and stressed - then I found a steamy solution

After a bereavement and world events left me struggling to cope, I tried meditation, yoga and therapy. But it was my local sauna that helped me find peace and purpose.

The Guardian reports that earlier this year, I was approaching burnout. I felt as though my career as a freelance journalist was on permanent life-support, I was juggling a hectic family life, and I was consumed with worry about a world seemingly hellbent on self-destruction. I was struggling, too, with the death of a close family member and an old school friend. Grieving had become a default status. Despite support from family and loved ones, I needed to find a way to cope with this nearly overwhelming sense of loss.

I tried meditation, yoga and therapy, which all helped. Then I heard of Community Sauna Baths, a not-for-profit project in London designed to make saunas accessible and affordable for everyone. From my very first visit, I felt something change. A sense of peace came over me. It immediately felt like a sanctuary, a pocket of calm in the chaotic city that also allowed me to soothe this churning sadness and release some of the bottled-up angst.

Now, I visit regularly. I tend to go alone but the atmosphere is always friendly and welcoming, and it's easy to strike up conversation with other guests.

How to stay positive and uplifted in today's fast-paced world

Staying positive and uplifted in today's fast-paced world can feel challenging, but it's not only achievable - it's transformative.

Silver Surfers reports that a positive mindset fuels resilience, creativity, and overall well-being. Here are some key strategies to help maintain an optimistic outlook:

Practice gratitude daily

Gratitude is a powerful antidote to negativity. Taking a few moments each day to reflect on what you're grateful for can shift your focus from what's lacking to what's abundant. Whether it's the warmth of the sun, a kind word from a friend, or simply the ability to breathe deeply, acknowledging these small joys helps uplift your spirit.

Surround yourself with positivity

The people you spend time with and the environments you engage in greatly impact your mood. Surround yourself with positive, uplifting individuals who encourage your growth. Engage with content that inspires - books, podcasts, or social media accounts that promote joy and motivation.

Focus on solutions, not problems

When challenges arise, it's easy to get bogged down by problems. However, shifting your mindset to focus on solutions sparks creativity and empowerment. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from this?" or "How can I make this situation better?" This mindset fosters a sense of control and keeps your mood elevated.

Engage in uplifting activities

Do things that bring you joy! Whether it's exercising, meditating, listening to your favourite music, or spending time in nature, these activities nourish your soul and boost your energy. Regularly dedicating time to these habits is like feeding your inner positivity engine.

Practice mindfulness and positive self-talk

Mindfulness helps you stay present and connected to the now, preventing your mind from spiraling into negativity. Combine this with positive self-talk - affirmations or reminders of your strengths and progress. When negative thoughts arise, counter them with positive, constructive ones.

Help others

Nothing lifts the spirit like helping someone else. Acts of kindness, big or small, create a ripple effect of positivity. Volunteering, offering a listening ear, or simply sharing a smile not only uplifts others but also enhances your own sense of purpose and fulfillment.



Even on busy days, people go out of their way to give each other sauna bench space. There's a genuine sense of community.

There are so many benefits to saunas, I now realise. They reduce stress by releasing endorphins, and help to improve cardiovascular and muscle health. My hamstrings, which usually feel as if they're permanently encased in cement, have loosened up dramatically.

I feel so much more flexible now. I also enjoy the sensory experience of saunas: the smell of the wood, the sizzling of water ladled on hot stones - and, though perhaps less so, the bracing shock of the cold plunge pools afterwards, in which I tend to last a matter of seconds before bailing...

I'd always prided myself on my ability to take heat. Partly, I assumed, it had to do with my mum's Anglo-Indian heritage; partly, a few childhood years living in the scorching Middle East. But I usually - foolishly - framed this ease with higher temperatures as some kind of endurance test.

I've visited saunas before, sporadically, but they turned into how-long-can-you-last competitions, my sweat-soaked torso and singed nasal hair becoming some sort of weird perseverance prize. The therapeutic part of the experience went up in steam.

But now my visits to the sauna feel like exercises in mindfulness; the heat helps you stay focused and present. It feels as if my negative thoughts are being flushed away. It's like a deep cleanse for body and soul.

I emerge from a session feeling rejuvenated, both deeply relaxed and strangely energised. It helps realign my sense of emotional balance. I feel physically and mentally more limber, too, as if some of my old anxieties have literally evaporated. My future is still uncertain but I know I can face it now with the heat of new vigour and purpose.

(Article source: The Guardian)

Do you have an interesting story or article?

*If so send us an email by visiting:
www.ourplace.co*



All wrapped up: The 10 best British towns and cities for Christmas shopping with a local flavour

Where better to source what you need for the season than the places with a reputation for making it? From fizz and food to fine art, here's our festive shopping guide.

Foodie treats, Narberth, Pembrokeshire

Swap Tesco's crowded aisles for Narberth in Pembrokeshire, fast becoming Wales's premier foodie hub. Wisebuys is a great first stop; pick up locally produced goodies: laverbread and rapeseed oils, handmade chocolates, chutneys and cheese, available in a range of hampers. Pop into Rock 'N' Dough Bakehouse for fabulous freshly made pastries and coffee, before stocking up on Mediterranean treats at Ultracomida, a tapas bar and deli offering authentic Spanish cured meats, patés and cheese to take away, along with classic paella pans and ceramics. Stay at Top Joe's Townhouse, with rooms above a buzzy pizzeria, from £90 B&B.



Sparkling wine, Canterbury, Kent (left)

Stock up on festive fizz with a trip to the heart of Kent's flourishing wine region. Start the tastings at Simpsons' wine estate, 10 minutes' drive from Canterbury, then head to Domaine Evremond, Taittinger's UK vineyard, where its first release, Classic Cuvée Edition I, is available at the Cellar Door shop.

Nearby, the medieval village of Chilham makes an ideal stop for lunch at the Woolpack Inn. Back in Canterbury, Corkk is a specialist English wine shop with more than 100 labels to try, and cheese and charcuterie platters to nibble on while you decide what to buy.

Stay at the Millers Arms, in the heart of town, with B&B doubles from £93.50.

Outdoors kit, Bakewell, Derbyshire

Blow away the winter cobwebs with a Peak District weekend and bring an empty rucksack to snaffle gifts from Bakewell's plethora of outdoorsy shops.

Trespass is good for van lifers and campers, with folding furniture, lighting and clever cooking stoves, alongside ski, surf and hiking gear; while Mallon & Green has rods, lines, tools and accessories for the angler in your life.



Pause for coffee at Summat, the in-house café at Inov8 - a shop that sells everything from bags and beanies to running and hiking footwear and nifty accessories - and reward yourself with a Bakewell pudding (never a "tart") from The Old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop.

Stay at the Rutland Arms Hotel, a grand old coaching inn right in the centre of town, with doubles from £104 a night, room only.

Jewellery, Birmingham

Whether you're seeking a bespoke pair of cufflinks, a one-off pendant or something for a Christmas proposal, Birmingham's jewellery quarter has more than 100 shops, offering everything from vintage pieces to handmade designs.



Browse the historic workshops on Legge Lane, pop into Deakin & Francis, where jewellery has been designed and created in the same building since 1786, and take a guided tour of the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter.

Ponder your purchases over lunch at 1000 Trades, a historic pub that was originally a jewellery workshop.

Stay at Saint Pauls House, a bar, restaurant and slick boutique hotel with room-only doubles from £99.

Art, Cambridge



Cambridge's historic streets are dotted with galleries and elegant museum shops, which makes it a great place to pick up a one-off artwork or unusual gift.

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Then pop into York Cocoa Works where the Christmas collection includes stocking fillers, hampers, vegan chocolate and mince pie-flavour caramels. Finish up at Monk Bar Chocolatiers - the oldest artisan chocolatier in town.



Stay at the Hilton Garden Inn, with room-only doubles from £132.

Craft beers, Sheffield (pictured top left)

There are 58 breweries in and around Sheffield, making it the perfect place to pick up unusual ales and beers for the festive period, or gifts for any enthusiasts in the family.

Choose from more than 200 beers - from Belgian to barrel-aged - at Hop Hideout, while the Bear offers everything from lagers and sours to dark beers and IPAs.

The wonderfully named Saint Mars of the Desert is also worth tracking down; the taproom is open from 2pm to 8pm on Fridays and Saturdays, with cans and bottles of fruity, hazy bitters to take home.

If coming by train, start with a pint or two at Triple Point Brewery, a five-minute walk from Sheffield station, where all the beer is brewed on site, and stay at the Crow Inn, known for its range of cask ales, with room-only doubles from £50.

Toys, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire



A small market town on the edge of Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons), Llandeilo punches above its weight in terms of shops.

Eve's Toy Shop is a gift when it comes to buying Christmas presents for younger family members, with hand-carved wooden games and puzzles, mini gardening tools and "kidnoculars" for junior explorers, along with all the unicorns you can carry.

Once the kids are ticked off, pop into Davies & Co for handmade Welsh blankets; Peppercorn for culinary-themed gifts; and Dot Clothing for elegant womenswear from niche designers.

Stay at the Cawdor, a revamped coaching inn on the high street, with B&B doubles from £115.

(Article source: The Guardian)

Byard Art, opposite King's College, is a good place to start, with works by more than 50 contemporary artists, while Cambridge Contemporary Art, just along the road, specialises in handmade prints, ceramics and crafts.

Get inspiration from browsing some of the half a million artworks at the Fitzwilliam Museum, before picking up more art-themed gifts at the excellent museum shop; or dip into the shop at Kettle's Yard for art-themed books, homeware, fashion and stationery.

Stay at the Varsity on the banks of the River Cam, with room-only doubles from £155.

Books, Wigtown, Dumfries and Galloway

Home to 17 bookshops and book-related businesses, Wigtown is the perfect place to find literary treats, vintage titles and specialist books that make unusual Christmas gifts.

Allow plenty of time to browse in the Bookshop, where more than a mile of shelving holds about 100,000 new and secondhand books, dip into the Old Bank Bookshop for vintage books on everything from art and architecture to travel and memoirs, and pick up presents for younger family members at Foggie Toddle Books.

Pop into Books & Bakes (6 Bank Street) for hearty sandwiches and coffee, and stay at the Creebridge House Hotel, around 15 minutes' drive away in Newton Stewart, with doubles from £120 B&B.



Chocolate, York

Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without an unseemly amount of chocolate, and few places have a more cocoa-rich history than York, home to Rowntree's, Nestlé and Terry's.

Kick off a chocoday with a visit to York's Chocolate Story, where the interactive displays cover everything from how chocolate is produced to the history of the most familiar brands, with plenty of tastings along the way.

Stay at the Fat Badger, a cosy inn with room-only doubles from £119.

Ceramics, Stoke-on-Trent

There's no such thing as too many mugs - or vases, dinner plates or jugs - particularly when they're handmade in one of Stoke's historic potteries.

Middleport Pottery is a great place to start; it's the UK's last working Victorian potbank in continuous production, with guided and self-led heritage tours, a well-stocked gift shop and the Burleigh Factory Shop, where the shelves brim with affordable seconds.



For quirky, contemporary designs, head to Emma Bridgewater; while for something more classic, World of Wedgwood has a large outlet centre and a store selling Waterford crystal, alongside chinaware.



Brilliant boozers! The 25 best pubs in the UK

From city-centre boozers to idyllic rural gastropubs: these are the absolute best pubs in the UK.

There are an awful lot of things to moan about in the UK, but pubs are not one of them. Pubs are for your friendly catch ups, your Sunday roasts, and your mid-summer sun traps, and we love it all. We really do.

Everyone's got a favourite (probably the one closest to the end of your road), and so do we. But some pubs are really good for food. Others are great for craft beer. The very best pubs do it all. With that in mind, here we are: the best pubs in the whole of the UK. Happy drinking, folks.

1. Laurieston Bar - Glasgow

This Glaswegian bar is somewhere I hope everyone will get to have a pint at least once in their life. Everything about it - from the Formica-topped tables to the horseshoe-shaped bar - has remained unchanged since the 1960s. Even the big red 'BAR' sign outside fits with the old-school aesthetic.



The Laurieston Bar is a proper drinking den and a living, breathing embodiment of the sort of cultural curios and historic spaces that cookie-cutter pub chains are robbing us of.

2. The Compton Arms - London

The Compton Arms is a pub and ale house on Compton Avenue in Islington. A favourite with Arsenal fans local to the area, this bolthole of a pub pulls great pints and serves them alongside some even greater plates of food. The kitchen is currently doing magical rustic Italian dishes thanks to chef Dara Klein's Tiella project.

3. The Marble Arch Inn - Manchester

The first time I went to the Marble Arch, I was told the (possibly apocryphal) story of the regular who got so wasted he fell down and rolled all the way from the door of this pub to the bar. As well as some of the most glorious tiling you've ever likely to see in a boozery, this Grade II-listed pub does indeed have a rather noticeable incline on its sloping mosaic floors. If you're able to traverse it, then you'll be rewarded with excellent ales from the pub's own Marble Brewery. I like it because it's slightly set away from the bustle of the Northern Quarter, but also because I can order a pint of their very good Pint. Which never stops being a fun thing to say.

4. The Basketmakers - Brighton

I don't know what it is about The Basketmakers, but despite its slap-bang city centre location, it retains an old-fashioned, neighbourhood vibe that makes it hard to believe you're not miles away in a cosy village somewhere. It has all the hallmarks of a classic British pub - cask ales, fish 'n' chips, punters who are basically part of the furniture - but there are some secrets here too, just have a snoop in all the tin boxes that are affixed to the walls.

5. Harbour Inn - Solva, Pembrokeshire (top left)

Harbour Inn sits on the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path, so is an ideal stop-off if you're beach hopping along the Welsh coast. The pub overlooks the harbour, is dog-friendly and serves some bangin' cauli wings (although, who doesn't these days?). It also serves award-winning cask ale and often runs drinks offers, things like bagging yourself two pints of Moretti for £7. What's not to like?

6. Bacchus Bar - Birmingham

Bacchus Bar is minutes from Birmingham's New Street station, but I wouldn't suggest the place for a swift pre-departure drink. A legendary pub in the basement of the centuries-old Burlington Arcade, once you've descended into this underground warren of medieval archways and themed seating areas (don't miss the Egyptian room), you can say goodbye to your phone signal and all track of time. Ideal for whiling away the hours sinking some real ale, not so good for catching your train in good time, the Bacchus Bar is just what pubs should be. The frescoes along the staircase are a bit naff, but it's all part of the fun.

7. Sunflower Public House - Belfast

The first thing you'll notice about this Belfast boozery is that it's got a cage in the front. While it's no longer needed for security purposes anymore, that cage was introduced following a shooting during the Troubles and it remains there today to remind all who see it of the city's rebarbative history. The Sunflower has seen Belfast through thick and thin and it remains an excellent spot to drink a pint of Yardsman (the local draught stout on tap) and listen to live music.

8. The Harp Inn - Old Radnor, Powys

Perched on a hilltop overlooking the Radnor Valley, the Harp Inn might be one of the most idyllic pubs in the whole of the UK. There's no more scenic spot to sip cask-conditioned real ale and reminisce about a time before the internet existed - an age where a 'minion' was simply a derogatory term used to define a servile underling and not something you'd find plastered all over children's clothing. They've even got guest rooms here so you can spend the night if you're so inclined. It's peaceful and perfect. Go.

9. The Dagda Bar - Edinburgh

Lively atmosphere, cold pints, dog friendly. Those are the three main draws of The Dagda Bar and, honestly, what more could you ask for from a pub? You'll mainly find this place full of locals but it's well worth seeking out if you're in Edinburgh on a day trip and gagging for a pint. The tap selection is fairly interesting and they've got a range of whiskies you can explore, too. Be warned, however: the pub quizzes get extremely competitive.

10. The Pilchard Inn - Burgh Island, Devon

Perhaps the oldest pub in this list, The Pilchard Inn dates back to 1336. But that isn't even the wildest thing about it - the wildest thing about it is that when the tide is in you have to take a 'sea tractor' across the water in order to get there. That's because this ancient cutie is on the private, tiny Burgh Island (alongside the art deco Burgh Island Hotel). An old fisherman's haunt, it's more popular than ever on a sunny day, with benches outside by the beach and tables inside the ever so slightly spooky two roomed boozery for sturdy pub grub. And yes, we ordered the pilchards when we went - and they were delicious.

11. The Canny Man's - Edinburgh

Keeping things in the family since it opened around 1860, The Canny Man's is a family-run public house that's been a faithful servant to Edinburgh's drinkers since day one. It's an intimate operation and - as a result - you can expect to be treated like a long-lost member of the clan when you drink here, too. Rick Stein once called it the 'best pub in the world'. And it's hard to argue with that.

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12. The French House - London

For me, the absolute best time to visit Soho's most storied pub is in the afternoon. I like to skip the chaos of the evenings (when getting a seat is nigh on impossible) and instead mingle with the locals and regulars; an endearing collection of Soho flâneurs, artists and writers. long-lost member of the clan when you drink here, too. Rick Stein once called it the 'best pub in the world'. And it's hard to argue with that. I do my best to keep a handle on my saytime debauchery by only ordering half pints, which is all they serve here - only on April Fool's Day do they offer full pints. Food upstairs is so good that it's made our Best Restaurants in London list. The last time I was there I ended up dipping french fries into cheesy, creamy aligot - a potato-on-potato serving suggestion I can heartily recommend.

13. The Boat Inn - Penallt, Monmouthshire (pictured above)

The Boat Inn is a small but bustling pub that provides the community of Penallt in Monmouthshire with a welcome escape from the world. The River Wye is right opposite and sitting outside you can hear the pleasant gurgle of running water tickle your ears as you sip on a sharp and refreshing cider. During winter, it's best to stay inside where hot toddies and arguments about the greatest Welsh rugby tries to have ever been scored come thick and fast.

14. Pen and Wig - Cardiff

Blessed with an Edenic beer garden, the Pen and Wig in Cardiff made the cut for this list because it does exactly what a pub should do. It's the ultimate crowd-pleaser - a location with enough obscure real ales and bog-standard lagers that no one in your friendship group will have any qualms about being here on a Friday night. The inside is fairly traditional (the pub used to be a Victorian terraced house) while the buzzy outside is where you'll want to be whenever any large sporting event kicks off.

15. The John Hewitt - Belfast

Pubs that are named after famous poets are, from personal experience, nearly always very good. The John Hewitt is one of those pubs. And it's very good indeed. Not only is this a reliable place on Donegall Street to find a well-poured pint but it's also Belfast's only social-enterprise pub. The rotational pump system means there's reliably an interesting beer on tap from a local producer and the live music nights are always grand. Mumford & Sons actually played their first-ever Northern Ireland gig here. But don't hold that against The John Hewitt.

16. Skehans - London

Self-described 'purveyors of craic', Skehans is a proud Irish pub and part of a dying breed of independent family-run free houses in an area of South London that's fast becoming gentrified. It's a crying shame considering just how much fun a night at Skehans can be. If darts and pool aren't your bag then there are jam sessions, quiz nights and even karaoke to pique your interest. A really solid boozier.

17. Dirty Duck - Stratford-upon-Avon

Stratford-upon-Avon is Shakespeare country and there's no public house more steeped in the theatrical traditions of the town than the Dirty Duck. Smack-bang between two separate Royal Shakespeare Company theatres - as I said, this is Shakespeare country - the pub is often frequented by actors nursing a few pints after a night's performance. According to Wikipedia, Kylie Minogue also once pulled a pint during a visit. So it's got that going for it, too.

18. The Gurnard's Head - Zennor, Cornwall

Perched on Cornwall's Atlantic coast between St Just and St Ives, The Gurnard's Head is a perfect spot to stretch your legs and feel the sea spray on your face. A single glance at the striking yellow exterior and you'll quickly realise why we've ranked this as one of the best pubs in the UK. Formerly a coaching inn, the historic building has been kept in good nick by the ownership and the hospitable staff will make sure you're well looked after, too. The food is simple and seasonal, and a dinner will definitely have you debating whether you should stay the night in one of their lovely rooms. One for the Poldark obsessives.

19. Myles K. McCanns Bar - Omagh, C Tyrone

Myles K. McCanns Bar is a pub with bags of character. If the idea of sitting in a quiet Irish pub with a pint of Guinness and watching the world go by sounds good to you, then this is the pub you need to make a pilgrimage to. Unless it's one of the nights they've got live music on, in which case it'll be anything but quiet. There are no airs and graces to this watering hole - but why would you want there to be any?

20. The Pipe and Slippers - Bristol

Pubs should be cosy. Pubs should be friendly. Pubs should have a lively atmosphere but still be quiet enough that you can hear yourself think. The Pipe and Slippers has got all of the above. Popular with students and locals alike, this Stokes Croft pub is a real community hub. The ale selection is sturdy but - if you're having a large one - then ordering one of the lethally strong Pipedreams should be on your agenda. What's in that cocktail? A shot of Kingston 62 white rum, two shots of Appleton Signature, pineapple juice, passion fruit syrup, lime juice, orange juice grenadine, Wray and Nephews, and absinthe. Welcome to Bristol.

21. The Moorcock Inn - Norland, W Yorkshire

Pubs should be cosy. Pubs should be friendly. Pubs should have a lively atmosphere but still be quiet enough that you can hear yourself think. The Pipe and Slippers has got all of the above. Popular with students and locals alike, this Stokes Croft pub is a real community hub. The ale selection is sturdy but - if you're having a large one - then ordering one of the lethally strong Pipedreams should be on your agenda. What's in that cocktail? A shot of Kingston 62 white rum, two shots of Appleton Signature, pineapple juice, passion fruit syrup, lime juice, orange juice grenadine, Wray and Nephews, and absinthe. Welcome to Bristol.

22. The Sportsman - Whitstable, Kent

If you're after a pub with sticky tables that does decent fish and chips then The Sportsman is not the pub you want to be visiting. If, however, you're in the market for a glorious five-course tasting menu comprised of small, seasonal dishes which showcase the local Kentish produce then The Sportsman is exactly the pub you want to be visiting. The food at this pub by the sea puts just about every gastropub out there to shame. Not just one of the best pubs in the UK, but one of the best restaurants too.

23. The Garrick Bar - Belfast

The Garrick Bar is an excellent pub smack-bang in Belfast city centre. Stop by for a swift one post-work and you'll invariably end up staying a couple of hours chatting to the bartender and encountering an assortment of friendly folks in the premises. It's a real classy joint, and one of the oldest in Belfast, with dark wood panelling and leather banquettes giving it a sophisticated feel that's increasingly hard to find nowadays. The portion sizes are friendly when it comes to food but the real reason you're here is for the craic.

24. Camberwell Arms - London



When it comes to pubs that do food, they don't get much better than The Camberwell Arms. Expect plenty of classic British plates on the menu (the scotch bonnet pork fat on toast is an enduring icon and a must-order) and whatever's scrawled on the specials board to be cooked to perfection. Coming here for a drink is a great idea but coming here for a drink followed by a bang-up meal is an even better one.

25. Church Inn - Uppermill, Lancashire

The Church Inn is unique in that it's a pub that's right next door to a neo-Gothic church. Yeah, there aren't many of those knocking about in the UK. And if there are, I doubt there are any doing it as good as the Church Inn. Home to Saddleworth Brewery, Church Inn offers a range of traditional beers, all hand-brewed in small batches with a variety of speciality malt and imported hops. The interior is warm and inviting and it's impossible not to be charmed by all that this stone-walled public house has to offer.

(Article source: Time Out)



Christmas creativity: Easy festive wreaths to make from garden materials

You can even use a potato as a base for your wreath, says one expert.

There's little more welcoming than a Christmas wreath hanging on the front door as the festive social season begins.

If you have an hour or two to spare before the whirlwind of Christmas, there are simple ways to create your own Christmas wreath from garden sprigs, twigs and cuttings, bright berries and evergreen foliage.

Potato wreath

You can even make a wreath using a potato as the base, says Judith Blacklock, founder of The Judith Blacklock Flower School in Knightsbridge.

Keep one side of the potato clear (that's the side which is going to be against the door) and use the other as the base for your wreath.



You can use a bradawl (a small pointed tool) or a kebab stick to make the holes in the potato in which to insert the stems.

“Get some very strong stem foliage such as Abies (blue spruce), stick it in the top and bottom, one or two on each side and one in the middle, and then fill it in with whatever you've got available, as long as the stems are strong. Holly is another good one, as are box and pyracantha,” advises Blacklock.

Add slices of dried orange using florist's wire to secure them, along with other bits and pieces to fill the gaps.

Impale the potato on to a nail on your door or wall to secure it, she suggests.

Money-saving tips

If you have an old wire coat hanger, pull it out into a rough circle to use as a base for your wreath, Blacklock suggests, as it only has to be a rough circle. Then gather some moss from your garden and wrap it around the metal circle with garden twine, to act as your base on which to put your foliage.

Alternatively, use a flexible climber like akebia, willow or wisteria, to create a base, making a circle out of the bendy stems and then tucking the ends in, she says.

Ivy base

Horticulturist Natalie Plumbridge, RHS dried flower and floristry specialist, starts her wreaths with a base of ivy wrapped around a metal wreath ring.

“Lots of people have a nice ground cover ivy or ivy growing up tree. Wrapping that tightly around the hoop several times helps you use less wire, because you can inset your evergreen foliage into all the curls you've made.

“You may just have to use a little wire at the start, wrap it around and then, in theory, you can poke in everything else between the ivy stems.”

You may have to use wire to secure heavier pieces which don't quite fit or are being used to fill gaps, she adds.

Foliage additions

Suitable evergreen clippings to add to your wreath include holly, or any evergreen conifer such as cypress or thuja, or even cuttings from your Christmas tree if you need to trim it a bit before bringing it indoors, says Plumbridge.

Variegated foliage also adds hits of yellow to a wreath. Variegated holly and variegated laurel can work well. Shrubby honeysuckle and pittosporum are also good additions, she says.

Variations in style

“Some people might like the ivy look and choose to only put only 50% coverage of evergreen foliage, so that they show off the ivy, and finish it off with berries,” says Plumbridge.

If you want a dense, full look, go for 'buttonhole-type' clusters of greenery with a flower at the front and secure each little posy clockwise around the wreath.

Others might just want to add evergreen or ornamental grass interest in just one corner of the wreath to make an accent, so the focus is on the wreath material such as the willow.

To do this, tie a compostable material such as raffia to the wreath base and take three to five stems, place them in the position you want them and wrap the raffia tightly around them, until you reach what you want your decoration centre to be, then mirroring that with similar stems on the other side and securing them with more raffia.



Sustainable additions

Dried flowers, dried fruits (sliced oranges will dry on a tray in an oven on a very low heat for a few hours), holly, sorbus and pyracantha berries and pine cones from local foraging can make good additions, along with cinnamon sticks, which can be clustered together lengthways in threes and tied with jute, before attaching to the wreath.

“Normally I will harvest hydrangea from the garden here (RHS Garden Wisley) and dry it,” says Plumbridge. “I use them in the wreaths at Wisley, which have to last from mid-November until January.”

Hydrangea flowers can be cut in the autumn to whatever size you'll need, by removing the foliage and hanging them upside down in a dark dry room for a couple of weeks.

Ornamental grass seed heads are in abundance at this time of year, which can be dried in an airing cupboard or a dark, dry room, which are fine to add if you are hanging your wreath in a porch area or somewhere sheltered from the rain. Pampas grass, miscanthus and pennisetum all work well in wreaths.

You may need to refresh

Have some spare sprigs handy because you may need to refresh your wreath if you put it up at the beginning of December and have guests arriving on New Year's Eve, Plumbridge advises.

(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 2, Home Farm, Bishopswood, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire HR9 5QZ**

