OURPLACENews

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

APRIL 2024

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

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

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

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

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

We welcome you and hope you enjoy Our Place.

The Editor - Our Place

PS. Do you have an interesting story or article? If so, send us an email by visiting: www.ourplace.co

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The Grand National 2024

Saturday April 13th at 4.00pm

Aintree Racecourse, near Liverpool.

The greatest steeplechase in the world.

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

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

London Marathon

Sunday 21st April 2024

London



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

Cheltenham Jazz Festival

1st - 6th May 2024

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

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

Spirit of Speyside Distilled Food & Drink Festival

1st - 6th May 2024

Speyside, Scotland

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

Liverpool Sound City

Saturday 4th - Sunday 5th May 2024

Liverpool, North-West England



Liverpool Sound City is an annual international music festival and industry conference taking place over the weekend.

The event welcomes global stars, local artists and key industry

The festival has provided a platform for many future stars early on in their careers, including the likes of Ed Sheeran, Alt J and Calvin Harris.

> Do you have an event near you? If so, send us an email by visiting: www.ourplace.co



Happy horticulture: Why gardening makes us feel better - and how to make the most of it

Gardens can be great for the environment and for wildlife - and they're good for people too, according to an increasing body of research.

Gardening has a long and connected history to science and medicine. For centuries gardens have been a source not only of food on the table but also remedies to treat common ailments.

Some of these, such as St John's wort for depression and willow for headaches, have been embraced by modern science. But what about the benefits of gardens and gardening themselves? Are they well-evidenced, and if so, how can we make the most of them?

Make gardening part of your everyday life

It is increasingly acknowledged that gardens and green spaces are associated with better physical, social and mental health. British physician Sir Muir Gray famously said that everyone needs a 'Natural Health Service' as well as a National Health Service.

The NHS has, since January 2019, officially included social prescribing in its Long Term Plan. As the population ages and healthcare costs spiral, social prescribing and preventative healthcare have a renewed importance.

We need to consciously embed gardens and gardening into daily life for everyone. In 2021, the RHS released research that revealed those who garden every day have wellbeing scores 6.6% higher and stress levels 4.2% lower than people who don't garden at all.

Surveying more than 6000 people the research showed a significant association between gardening more frequently and improvements in wellbeing, perceived stress and physical activity.



Health & Lifestyle Feature

Feel the multiple benefits of exercise

It's common knowledge that exercise is good for you. The NHS considers it essential to living a healthy and fulfilling life and it's medically proven that people who do regular physical activity have up to a 35% lower risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. Physical and mental illnesses associated with our increasingly sedentary urban lifestyles have a growing economic and social cost.

But lesser known is the role that gardening can play in helping to keep you fit and healthy. Gardeners might be delighted to learn that the number of calories burnt from 30 minutes of gardening is comparable to playing badminton, volleyball or practising yoga.

However, as with any physical activity, like running or weight lifting, there is the potential for injury if done incorrectly. The RHS has embarked on research with Coventry University to better understand how common garden practices like digging can be done with minimal muscle strain.

Using technology more commonly found on Hollywood film sets we've been examining, for the first time, the loads exerted on the body's joints, bones and muscles to help people enjoy gardening and digging for longer.

Preventing mental ill-health

The benefits of being in the garden run much deeper than just exercise. A King's Fund report on the health benefits of gardening were found to be broad and diverse, with research studies showing significant reductions in depression and anxiety and improved social functioning.

Gardening can also help maintain independence and prevent cognitive decline. Tokyo and Exeter Universities also found robust evidence for the positive effects of gardening on health, calling for governments and health organisations to promote gardening.

An increasing number of GPs are prescribing gardening not only for rehabilitation but also as a preventative mechanism. In Lambeth, London, 13 GPs have opened community gardens with positive effects.

In 2014, researchers from the University of Exeter Medical School analysed mental health data from 1,000 urban residents and used high-resolution mapping to track where the subjects had lived over 18 years.

They found that people living near to green space reported less mental distress, even after adjusting for income, education, and employment. In 2009, a team of Dutch researchers found a lower incidence of 15 illnesses -including depression, anxiety, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and migraines - in people who lived within half a mile of green space.

The RHS' own research and practical programmes support these findings. Adding plants to bare front gardens reduced stress as much as 8 mindfulness sessions. Greener front gardens are associated with healthier physiological stress regulation (daily cortisol patterns). Four in five teachers who signed up to the RHS Campaign for School Gardening reported that gardening has had a significant positive impact on pupil health and wellbeing.

In 2017, the RHS teamed up with the NHS to promote the role that gardens can play for good mental health and wellbeing. In 2018 and 2019, the RHS donated gardens from the RHS Chelsea Flower Show to Highgate Mental Health Centre and to Dewnans Centre in Devon. Existing studies have found that patients with rooms overlooking nature recover faster than those who face buildings.

There is an opportunity for gardening to play a central role in improving our nation's mental health and wellbeing; currently the RHS is undertaking research in collaboration with the University of Surrey and the University of Sheffield to better understand how to maximise the health benefits of gardening. For example, the RHS are exploring the role of colour and scent on stress and wellbeing in the garden context.

Eat your greens! Healthy eating and plantbased foods

Research by the American Heart Association has shown that diets higher in plant foods and lower in animal foods may be linked to a lower risk of dying of a heart attack, stroke, or other disease, notably a 32% lower risk of cardiovascular disease.

In terms of weight management and the UK's obesity problems, the NHS cites fruit and veg as being important for maintaining a healthy weight. Yet in 2018 only 28% of adults were eating the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables.

Growing your own really is worthwhile: you'll have plenty of fruit and veg on tap. Finding ways to use them up does dietary wonders, and you can pick as much as you need, when you need it. It's also worth noting that an important by-product of the 'grow your own' phenomenon is a reduction in plastic packaging and food waste.

The RHS has seen an increase in the number of community gardening groups (Britain in Bloom, It's Your Neighbourhood) helping to address healthy eating in their areas. Actions include growing fruit and vegetables in community orchards and allotments, providing and stocking community fridges and supplementing charity food parcels with fresh produce.

These life-affirming actions are changing the lives of thousands of people up and down the country - daily evidence that gardens and gardening benefit the mind, body and spirit. There's never been a better time to pick up that trowel and get growing.

(Article source: RHS)

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Health & Lifestyle News

Danderball: The sport helping over 50s in Belfast stay healthy and social

Walking football is enjoyed by both men and women over the age of 50.



Belfast Live reports that every week, a group of over 50s in West Belfast meet up to socialise and keep healthy by playing an accessible sport many people may not know about, Danderball, also known as walking football, is similar in many ways to the beautiful game - except players walk instead of run, and tackling is prohibited. It's used to encourage those aged 50 and older to get back into team sports and has a number of positive benefits on health and wellbeing, including reducing isolation.

A team from the nearby Healthy Living Centre called The BraveHEARTS meet every Friday morning at Grosvenor Recreation Centre to play the sport. There are currently around 16 players on the team and they are all aged between 50 to 80.

We headed to the pitch on Friday morning to see The BraveHEARTS take on the official IFA Danderball team, and to learn more about the sport as well as the many benefits it has for its players.

Speaking to Belfast Live, Siobhan Skates from the Heart Project at the Healthy Living Centre said the sport, which is open to all men and women aged over 50, has been a great way for people to get involved in sport.

She said: "It's the beautiful game at a slower pace. People love interacting with other people, and in a team sport, especially for guys who've been playing for all their lives and have had to slow down for whatever reason, it's a great option for people who want to enjoy a sport at a slower pace."

One of the players, Gerry, played in the Irish League when he was younger and thought his football days were behind him. However, he said danderball has given him a new lease of life.

"I found out about it really through word of mouth from different people," he explained.

"They asked for people who had previously been footballers in their day. I played a lot in the Irish League for teams like Glentoran and Crusaders, and I thought my football was finished - but here we are. "The feeling of being able to score a goal gives you a great thrill, that never changes. I went through heart operations and this has been a good way back into things for me. It's still a little bit competitive, even though it's called walking football."

Gerard O'Hanlon said when he first started playing walking football, they struggled to get enough people for a match. But demand for the sport is continuing to grow.

He said: "You just have to look how many people are here today, at the start we struggled to get six a side, now we can have 16, 18, or 20 people here at a time. Especially for health and wellbeing, it's amazing.

"We're here every Friday from 10 o'clock to 11 and it'll do you the world of good getting out to have a bit of fun and it's going to do your health a world of good as you're going to be fitter getting out, and they're all a great bunch of lads."

The danderball team is supported by the Public Health Agency, and Victoria Creasy, the PHA's senior health improvement officer, said they're happy to be involved with the teams.

She said: "We know those two things - catching up with friends for a chat and staying physically active - are key factors for preventing dementia. Activities like this which get people doing both are great for both physical and mental health.

"You can see the craic everyone is having here today, before they even started playing they were enjoying each other so much. It's brilliant being here to see this and the Public Health Agency are delighted to be able to support it."

(Article source: The Guardian)

Hay fever 'misery' for millions this pollen season - expert advice for prevention and treatment

Warmer temperatures occurring earlier in the year are expected to worsen the common condition.

Silver Surfers reports that this spring and summer, an estimated 10 million Britons will experience "absolute misery" as the effects of hay fever set in.

George Sandhu, deputy superintendent pharmacist at Well Pharmacy, says hay fever symptoms, including blocked noses, watery eyes and itchy throats, are triggered by three types of pollen, which affects people at various times throughout the year.



Health & Lifestyle News



Some people are allergic to a single type of pollen, while others are "unfortunate enough" to suffer from symptoms caused by all three: tree, grass and weed.

Warmer temperatures occurring earlier in the year are expected to worsen the common condition, leading to an earlier release of pollen and other allergens into the air. Pollen is usually at it's highest from March to September.

According to the NHS, in 2023, hay fever symptoms prompted over 122,000 clinical visits to general practitioners.

What are the best treatments to alleviate hay fever symptoms?

Hay fever can be treated with tablets, nasal sprays or eye drops. For complete relief, experts say to use eye and nasal sprays alongside tablets.

Sandhu says: "Hay fever symptoms cause absolute misery for millions of people, but the good news is that there are plenty of things that you can do to reduce their impact on your life."

Anti-allergy medicine, known as antihistamines, is often seen by experts as the most popular form of treatment for hay fever.

Carolina Goncalves, superintendent pharmacist at Pharmica, says: "Fexofenadine can help treat a runny nose, sneezing, itchy and watery eyes, or an itchy nose or throat. It is a non-drowsy antihistamine that works by blocking histamine (a substance in the body that causes allergic symptoms). "Other antihistamines worth considering that have a similar effect include Cetirizine and Loratadine."

Sandhu adds: "Since last year, allergy products containing fexofenadine hydrochloride, such as Histallay, are available without a prescription. "Previously these medications were only available with a prescription from your doctor. The benefits can be felt within one hour and last for 24 hours without any drowsiness."

Nasal sprays are another form of treatment that will help alleviate runny noses and sneezing. "Corticosteroid nasal sprays can help reduce nasal inflammation and clear up the nasal passages, preventing sneezing and a runny nose," Goncalves says.

"Individuals looking for a non-corticosteroid option to treat blocked noses may also wish to consider saline nasal sprays to help increase the moisture content within the nasal cavity, thinning out the mucus and making it easier to expel."

Goncalves recommends considering eye drops containing sodium cromoglicate as an effective treatment. This ingredient is known to prevent mast cells in the eyes from releasing histamine and other substances that trigger allergies.

Immunotherapy is considered to be another effective treatment for hay fever. It involves identifying the specific tree, grass or weed pollen that triggers the allergic reaction, and gradually introducing increasing doses of the allergen into the body over a prolonged period. This process helps the body to develop immunity to the allergen, thus reducing or even eliminating the symptoms of hay fever.

Max Weisberg, an airborne allergens expert, says: "For NHS treatment, referral by a GP is necessary, which is usually only if all other hay fever treatments have been tried first and the reaction remains extreme."

How can you best prevent hay fever?

Experts recommend HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filters, which can greatly reduce the presence of pollen and other allergens in indoor air.

Goncalves says: "These filters are capable of trapping microscopic particles, including pollen grains, and preventing them from circulating and settling within the home environment.

"According to numerous studies, HEPA filters can remove 99.9% of aerosolised respiratory particles that are between 300 nanometres and 100 micrometres in size. This includes pollen, which can be up to 200 micrometres in size.

"Integrating HEPA filters into air purification systems and vacuum cleaners can effectively remove these allergens from the indoor air, providing relief for individuals prone to hay fever symptoms."

It is recommended to keep windows and doors closed during pollen season to prevent pollen from entering your home, which reduces exposure and symptoms.

Routine showers and changing into fresh clothes are advised by experts, as during high pollen seasons, pollen grains can stick to clothing, hair and even skin when spending time outdoors.

This measure helps to remove any pollen particles that may have accumulated, ensuring that they are not transferred to indoor spaces where they could contribute to increased allergen exposure.

Applying a small amount of petroleum jelly, like Vaseline, around the nostrils can serve as a barrier to trap pollen before it enters the nasal passages. This method can decrease pollen exposure and subsequent allergic reactions.

(Article source: Silver Surfers)

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Light fantastique: Paris through the eyes of the Impressionists

From Monet to Degas, the luminosity of Paris has inspired countless artists. As the city celebrates 150 years of impressionism it's still shining bright.

Paris is called the City of Light, possibly because of its early adoption of gas street lighting. But that would not explain why, as I approach Gare du Nord on Eurostar during daytime, I experience a soft dazzle, similar to when I see a pebbly beach.

This is not a meteorological phenomenon; the weather in Paris is only slightly better than London's. Instead, the luminosity owes something to the buff or light-grey limestone of the older buildings (including the Sacré Coeur, rearing like a great ghost to my right), its pallor perpetuated by the whitewashed exteriors of newer buildings.

The light in Paris was a concern of the impressionists, the movement whose 150th anniversary is marked by the Musée d'Orsay's forthcoming Inventing Impressionism exhibition.

On 15 April 1874, a group of 31 artists, including Monet, Pissarro, Degas and Renoir, "hungry for independence" (as the Musée d'Orsay website has it) from the strictures of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, staged their own exhibition.

Inventing Impressionism will feature works from that show and others of the time: "Painted scenes of modern life, and landscapes sketched in the open air, in pale hues and with the lightest of touches."

The new movement got its name from Claude Monet's Impression, Sunrise, a blurry view of Le Havre in Normandy, where he grew up. But, as Stephen Clarke writes in his book Paris Revealed, "Paris is the spiritual home of impressionism", and their work is often discussed in relation to the remaking of the city by Baron Haussmann, commissioned by Napoleon III to "aérer, unifier et embellir" (open up, connect, beautify).



Leisure & Travel Feature

Historian Andrew Hussey writes in his book Paris: The Secret History of "an urban infrastructure that had barely been touched or improved since the late-medieval period... There were no straight roads through Paris, whose centre, Île de la Cité, was a dark and muddy labyrinth." Haussmann created a network of boulevards, light by virtue of their width, the limestone he employed, zinc or slate roofs that shine when wet, and the pale trunks of the plane trees.

The Grands Boulevards of the Right Bank were especially important to the impressionists. The 1874 exhibition was held on Boulevard des Capucines, in an upper storey at number 35. Monet painted the view from his rooms there, depicting a boulevard full of light (enhanced by reflections off snow) and full of people.

The Grands Boulevards were pleasure zones, the haunt of flâneurs, and lined with restaurants, theatres and, later, cinemas. (The Grand Rex, on Boulevard Poissonnière, makes its own contribution to the City of Light with its neon blaze.)

Another place important to the impressionists was Batignolles, a northern district annexed to Paris on Haussmann's suggestion. Monet made numerous studies of nearby Saint-Lazare station, following the injunction of Émile Zola to find the "poetry" in stations. In Zola's novel La Bête Humaine, Saint-Lazare is "immense, dreary, drenched with rain, pierced here and there with a blood-red light, vaguely peopled by opaque masses..."

It was this opacity that the painter sought. Obscure and broke at this point, he marched up to the station master, introducing himself as "the painter, Claude Monet" with such authority that his request that all the engine drivers generate as much steam as possible was granted.

In Édouard Manet's The Railway, a young woman and a girl are depicted on a bridge overlooking Saint-Lazare. A gout of steam rises behind them, looking like something that shouldn't be there, a great smudge. It's still interesting to watch the trains from that bridge (I speak as a rail enthusiast) but they are now electric, and the sky above them seems empty.

Batignolles is off the tourist trail and has been called Paris's hippest neighbourhood, but there's something sleepy about it, a sense of having wide streets to oneself. That's the mood of Gustave Caillebotte's painting Peintres en bâtiment.

Workmen paint a shop front, and the long, empty street stretches away, with one of those white Parisian skies overhead. It has been suggested that the workmen represent painters of the more artistic sort, coming to terms with the scale of the new Paris.

But let's circle back to that original heart of darkness: the Île de la Cité. Haussmann made it a zone of grand buildings, with a luminosity of their own - the gilding on the gates of the Palais de Justice can dazzle on a sunny day. In the novels of Georges Simenon, Inspector Maigret works at 36 Quai des Orfèvres on the island: it's a whitish, castle-like building that housed the detectives of the Paris police until they recently relocated.

The detective is a connoisseur of the changing light over the river, and in Maigret's Pickpocket, he observes "a haze hanging over the Seine, less dense than mist, made up of thousands of tiny, brilliant, living particles peculiar to Paris".

Not all the luminosity is down to Haussmann. Anyone who walks through the gilded gateway between the Tuileries Garden (rendered ambiguous, in soft green and pinkish tones, by Monet in Les Tuileries) and Place de la Concorde is in a pre-Haussmann world. In Henry James's novel The Tragic Muse, artist Nick Dormer looks over "the great square, the opposite bank of the Seine, the steep blue roofs of the quay, the bright immensity of Paris".

Place de la Concorde is being embellished for this summer's Olympic Games, and I recently saw a lorry there, loaded with typically ornate lamp-posts. In any other town, this would have looked like a delivery of theatrical props, but in Paris it was just a job lot of streetlights.

They would be too big for the parts of the city Haussmann didn't touch, like the Marais or Montmartre. There, lamps tend to be fitted to the walls of the narrow streets which, for some, are the most characterful in Paris. I love the little bars of Montmartre especially. But the care with which they are lit - often with fairy lights around windows or mirrors - may reflect a lesson learned from Haussmann, in whose favour it could also be said that without him we might not have had the impressionists.

Impressionist exhibitions

Normandy

The Normandy impressionist festival, which started this week and runs until 22 September, examines connections between the region and the art movement. Events include an exhibition at the Rouen Fine Arts Museum contrasting works by James McNeill Whistler with those of his impressionist contemporaries; Robert Wilson's light projections on the facade of Rouen Cathedral (24 May-end September); and Impressionism and the Sea at the Musée des Impressionnismes in Giverny (29 March-30 June).

London

Monet and London: Views of the Thames at the Courtauld in Somerset House (27 September–19 January 2025) exhibits some of the artist's prolific output from his time in the capital between 1899 and 1901. The Houses of Parliament, Charing Cross Bridge, Waterloo Bridge and the Houses of Parliament are depicted "full of evocative atmosphere, mysterious light and radiant colour". Although Monet wanted to show these paintings in London, plans fell through and this is the first time they have been the subject of a UK exhibition.

Andrew Martin is the author of the Reading on Trains Substack. Train travel to Paris was provided by Eurostar. Inventing Impressionism is at the Musée d'Orsay from 26 March—14 July

(Article source: The Guardian)

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Eat beans and live longer: One reason why many Ikarians live to be 100

In The Ikaria Way, Greek American chef Diane Kochilas offers a roadmap for people who want to incorporate aspects of the Mediterranean island's "Blue Zone" diet into their lives.

As one of the world's five designated "Blue Zones", Ikaria, a small Greek island in the eastern Aegean, has lower rates of chronic disease than most other places, and its more than 8,000 full-time residents have some of the longest life expectancies in the world.

In fact, one-third of Ikarians live past 90 years of age, and factors such as strong social and family ties, exercise that is integrated into daily life and frequent napping are thought to be why these island inhabitants often live to be centenarians.

Another important contributing factor is what they eat.

Like the Mediterranean diet, the Ikarian diet includes healthy fats, a lot of fibre and nutrient-rich whole foods. It's highly plant-based, featuring nuts, grains, potatoes, legumes, vegetables and seeds, and olive oil is the main source of added fat.

Yogurt and cheese, fish, poultry and red wine are consumed in moderation, while red meat is limited to just a few times per month. Eating this way has been shown to lower risk factors for health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity and high blood pressure.

In her new cookbook, The Ikaria Way (available on 26 March), Greek American chef Diane Kochilas offers a "roadmap" for people who want to incorporate aspects of the Mediterranean diet, inspired by how residents eat on Ikaria, into their lives.

For her, the book focuses on two issues: how to be good to your body "without being mean to your mind", and how to cook "in the spirit of a relaxed, healing kind of island where the tempo of life is slow and easy and where people connect through food around a table".



Food & Drink Feature

It highlights dishes for light meals, snacks, dinners for larger groups and everything in between, with recipes such as yogurt cucumber soup with walnuts; grilled peaches and rocket salad with feta; spicy fava beans braised in red wine; and orzo pilaf with pistachios and currants, among many others.

"I think that one of the things that always surprises me is just the level of stress that people accept," she says. "In the US, stress is so detrimental, and most of it is in our own heads and thought patterns." The Ikaria Way aims to help people become more mindful in how they take care of themselves, and Kochilas wants to show them how "food is also love".

In addition to authoring several other cookbooks and hosting the PBS cooking show My Greek Table, Kochilas runs a cooking school on Ikaria, where her family is originally from and where she lives for half of the year. It was during one of her weeklong classes that she got the inspiration for the 100 plant-based recipes that she includes in her new cookbook. She writes, "I had two guests from Montana who stood in bewilderment at the kitchen counter on the third day of the class and confessed that they not only ate meat three times a day back home, but they also never imagined that plant-based cooking, which is mostly - but not all of - what we do during our week together on the island, could be so satisfying, varied and real."

Vegetarian foods found on Ikaria are not only healthy and filling, but also practical. For one thing, on the island, as in other parts of Greece, some people still follow the Greek Orthodox Church's fasting calendar and, therefore, they do not eat meat at certain times of the year, such as during Lent. The ingredients found in Kochilas' cookbook are also bountiful on Ikaria - including yogurt, dried fruits, honey, sea salt, olive oil, nuts, fresh herbs, grains, garlic and a variety of legumes - but she notes that similar products should be available at most supermarkets.

Beans feature prominently in The Ikaria Way and Kochilas makes them the protagonist in dishes such as lemony fresh fava beans with artichokes, tahini and yogurt; dried fava stew; red beans with hot pepper flakes and fresh herbs; and caramelized giant beans with turmeric, fennel and romaine, just to name a few.

According to Kochilas, "Bean consumption helps heart health by lowering cholesterol because beans are rich in soluble fibre, which attaches to cholesterol particles and flushes them out of the body." She also says that they are "palliative when it comes to managing and even preventing Type 2 diabetes". She writes how "eat beans and live longer" has become a mantra for proponents of eating the way people do in a Blue Zone, a phrase originally coined by National Geographic fellow and longevity expert Dan Buettner, who asserts that "eating a cup of beans each day can prolong a person's life by four years".

Kochilas also offers many recipes for beans in the book since they are versatile - as they can be used in soups, salads or main dishes - and people can "find good beans anywhere", she states.

Of her recipe for white bean stew with aubergine, tomato and feta, Kochilas writes that "this simple dish is one of many ways we combine beans and pulses with vegetables in the Greek kitchen." A home cook can use canned beans for the recipe, which should provide a filling, nutritious and balanced meal for those who choose to make it.

Kali orexi is how Greeks wish each other bon appétit, and perhaps this phrase will also become part of diners' vernaculars when they make this recipe as well as others that Kochilas provides in The Ikaria Way.

White Bean Stew with Eggplant, Tomato & Feta recipe - By Diane Kochilas

Beans are one of the healthiest plant-based foods in the world and a seminal ingredient in the Ikaria longevity diet. I only recently joined the canned bean bandwagon because it never seemed like too much trouble to me to soak my beans overnight and then just boil them for whatever recipe I was preparing. But I understand the desire for convenience, and there are certainly plenty of great canned beans. Look for organic and low sodium if possible.

Makes 4 servings

Ingredients: 4 tbsp extra-virgin Greek olive oil, or more as needed • 1 medium red onion, chopped • 2 celery stalks, chopped Greek sea salt to taste • 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped • 2 medium aubergines (eggplant), trimmed and cut into 1-in (2½-cm) cubes • freshly ground black pepper to taste • 2 cups plum tomatoes, drained and chopped • 2 (15-oz/425g) cans good-quality cannellini beans, rinsed and drained • 1 tsp dried Greek oregano • 2 tbsp chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley • 2 tbsp crumbled Greek feta or coarsely grated cashew-milk cheddar

Method

Step 1: Heat 2 tbsp ofolive oil in a large wide pot or deep frying pan over medium heat and cook the onion and celery until translucent and lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Season with a pinch of salt while cooking.

Step 2: Stir in the garlic and cook, stirring to soften for about a minute. Remove the onion-celery-garlic mixture to a plate until ready to use and replenish the olive oil with an additional 2 tbsp.

Step 3: Add the aubergines cubes to the pan, raise the heat a little, and cook, stirring, until the cubes are lightly browned. Add the onion-celery-garlic mixture back to the pan. Pour in the tomatoes. Season to taste with additional salt and a little black pepper, and let the mixture simmer for about 8 minutes, or until the aubergines is soft.

Step 4: Add the drained beans to the pot, season with oregano, and cook all together for about 15 minutes, or until everything is tender. Just before removing from heat, stir in the parsley.

Step 5: Serve, drizzled with additional olive oil if desired, and topped with the crumbled feta or cashew-milk cheddar.

(From The Ikaria Way, by Diane Kochilas. Copyright © 2024 by the author, and reprinted with permission of St. Martin's Publishing Group)

(Article source: BBC)





Safe haven: 5 ways to help garden birds this nesting season

As the nesting season gets underway, our wild birds gear up for the hustle and bustle of building nests, finding a regular supply of food and water and, most importantly, bringing the next generation of birds into the world.

Now is the perfect time to get your nest boxes up, and not only will it heighten the birding activity in your garden, but it will also give you front-row seats in watching the fascinating lifecycle of birds!

Here are some top tips on how to help birds and entice them to nest in your garden this spring.

Use the right nest box

Starting with the most important tool to get birds nesting in your garden- you guessed it- the nest box! But with nest boxes coming in all shapes and sizes and different types of entrance holes, it can be tricky to choose the right one.



The first thing to know about picking the right nest box is that garden birds have their own preferences for entrance holes. So if you would like to entice a particular species to nest in your garden, here is a size guide of entrance holes they prefer.

- 26-28mm size holes will attract Blue Tits, Coal Tits, Marsh tits & Willow Tits.
- 32mm-34mm and oval size holes will attract House Sparrows, Tree Sparrows, Pied Flycatchers, Nuthatches & all Tits.
- Open-fronted nest boxes will attract Robins, Wrens, Black Redstarts, Spotted Flycatchers, Blackbirds & Pied Wagtails.

Find the best place to site your nest box

Most garden birds like their nest boxes sited 2-4 meters above the ground. But if you're siting a nest box for robins, place it between 1-2 meters high. Face the box between North and East to avoid direct hits from harsh wind, rain and heat from the sun.

When securing the nest box against a solid surface (tree or wall), let it sit tilted forward slightly so rain won't get in through the entrance hole.

Keep your bird feeders and water bath full

Now that you have an idea of what nest box to get up and where to site it, you'll want to get the garden birds to notice it.



Setting up bird feeders and a bird bath near the box is a great way to motivate them to settle in. Premium Sunflower Hearts and high-energy Suet Treats are huge crowd-pleasers amongst wild birds.

After some time, you may start seeing the same bird flying back and forth in the nest box; this quite possibly means it has taken up residency! Once this happens, move the feeders away from the box, as activity at the feeder could disturb nesting birds.

Provide garden birds with the right nesting material

You can make nesting season a little easier for your birds this spring, by placing nesting material outside in the garden, but please do not use pet fur, human hair, or yarn scraps.

Many people believe these are suitable materials, but human hair and yarn scraps pose a choking threat, and pet fur may contain flea or tick treatment that may harm wild birds.

If you would like to help birds build their nests, you can place nesting wool in the garden, a sustainable material that is safe for birds to use.

Protect your nesting birds



Predators such as squirrels and woodpeckers may try to access nest boxes to eat the eggs.

They do this by eating/pecking away at the wooden entrance hole until it's large enough to get inside.

Keep your garden birds' eggs safe this nesting season, and fix protection plates to your nest box entrance hole.

These strong copper plates will withstand any attack from predators and prevent them from breaking in. Some nest boxes already have protection plates installed.

(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 <u>HALVED</u> in the last 20 years.



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 <u>HALVED</u> 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:

'Iulie'



'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

