

# Clippings

Our roundup of the month's latest gardening news and views

## Making space for bugs in your garden borders



Plan your border to incorporate plants and bare earth for wildlife

Leaving bare patches of soil in your borders and lawn helps wildlife, reveals the third and final paper of the four-year Royal Horticultural Society research project, Plants For Bugs. While dense planting offers food and cover for insects, some soil-dwelling creatures, such as hunting spiders, do better in areas of sparser ground.

"It may be that hunting spiders can prey more easily where there is space and we know that ground-nesting bees also prefer to make a home in south-facing uncovered earth," Andrew Salisbury, lead author on the reports and principal entomologist at the RHS, tells us. "There's still a misconception that gardening for wildlife equates to a plot that's densely planted, messy or full of native plants – that's not the case and growing in a variety of ways with a range of plants is what is vital for a healthy garden."

He recommends buying and incorporating young plants that fill out in the garden over time, rather than overplanting to fill gaps,

as this will provide some bare ground that will help to support wildlife.

Previous papers in the Plants For Bugs project reviewed benefits for pollinators and plant-dwelling insects. "Bugs living on the ground have been out of sight and mind for a lot of gardeners," says plant biologist Ken Thompson,

“Ground-dwelling bugs recycle dead plant matter... they're almost Wombles!”

a researcher on the project. "But they are just as important as pollinators. They eat dead plant matter, recycling it into humus, and maximise the store of carbon in the ground – they're practically Wombles!"

Evergreen plants are also flagged as helpful for insects for the cover they provide, and Ken recommends growing ivy as the best all-rounder: "All kinds of insects can snuggle down in it overwinter, and our few overwintering butterflies in the UK, such as the small tortoiseshell, will use it, too."

Turn to page 80 for more information on how you can help wildlife in your garden and read *Plants For Bugs* at [rhs.org.uk/plants-for-bugs](https://rhs.org.uk/plants-for-bugs)



Sir Attenborough has been making wildlife documentaries since 1952

### Gardening to save the world

David Attenborough has highlighted gardening as crucial in battling the climate emergency. "The world depends on an understanding of the natural world. And where does that start? On our doorsteps, in our gardens," he said as he received the 2019 Medal for Lifetime Achievement at the Landscape Institute Awards, hosted by *GW* presenter Arit Anderson. She tells us, "Gardens are mini units of the wider environment. Everything we do can make a difference. Mimic the natural world by growing organically, reduce waste and grow as many plants and trees as you can!" *David Attenborough and his team are working on a new five-part series, The Green Planet, to be shown on BBC One. This will explore the behaviour, emotional stories and surprising heroes in the horticultural world, offering a fresh understanding of the lives of plants.*

### Knotweed for good!

Japanese knotweed could be used to help gardeners. Environet, a specialist knotweed removal company, is working to develop a system that transforms waste knotweed into biochar, a charcoal-based soil improver. So, rather than sending it to a specialist landfill once it's been dug out, knotweed could end up enriching gardens.



WORDS: MIRANDA JANATKA PHOTOS: SARAH CUTLER; PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/ARLUNDO 71, SIMON LITTON, ANDREW MONTGOMERY



Swiss chard 'Flamingo'

Viola 'Helen Mount'

30cm-diameter terracotta pot

**Good enough to eat** Create a pot that's as pretty as it is productive this spring by growing Swiss chard 'Flamingo' mixed with cheery violas. It's just one idea from *Grow Fruit & Vegetables in Pots: Planting Advice and Recipes from Great Dixter* by Aaron Bertelsen, with photos by Andrew Montgomery (Phaidon, £24.95, out 12 February).



The Association of Professional Landscapers' show garden, What Lies Beneath

### Designer know-how

Get expert tips on redesigning your garden at this year's BBC Gardeners' World Live (18-21 June). The Association of Professional Landscapers will be there to reveal essential expertise, with ideas to steal from its show garden, What Lies Beneath.

The garden's designer, David Stevens, tells us his top tips for making your garden feel bigger: "Declutter! Just the same as you would inside the home and remember that simple works best. Make a small space feel bigger by swapping in broad-leaved plants for feathery grasses, it works just like smaller prints on wallpaper." Buy tickets at [bbcgardenersworldlive.com](https://bbcgardenersworldlive.com)

### Exoskeletons on the brink of extinction

You can't have too many woodlice, believes Dave Goulson, Professor of Biology at the University of Sussex. His new report, 'Insect declines and why they matter', reveals that insects help to break down compost and draws on research that suggests 41 per cent of the world's insects are under threat of extinction. He warns against the use of all unnecessary pesticides to help insects. See more at [bit.ly/insect-decline](https://bit.ly/insect-decline)



### Hope for robins

Our UK robin populations have 'strongly increased' in recent years, according to a new report\* published by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The British Trust for Ornithology tells us this means populations are recovering from the series of cold winters that devastated numbers between 2008-12. However, birds such as greenfinches and chaffinches are 'strongly declining' due to the continued problem of trichomonosis. This is a gastrointestinal disease carried by parasites that is spread in food and water, and causes problems with the birds' throats, making it hard for them to feed.

The findings support our own Garden Wildlife Survey results, which reveal that there are 5 per cent fewer chaffinches seen than two years ago. Discover the wildlife picture in your own garden on page 80.



Robin numbers seem to be on the up, but not all other garden birds are doing so well

\*[bit.ly/uk-wild-birds](https://bit.ly/uk-wild-birds)

News in brief

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**SEVEN WORLDS  
SCULPTURE**

A 'living globe' sculpture celebrating David Attenborough's BBC TV series, *Seven Worlds, One Planet*, is on show at the Eden Project. Our own Wildlife Editor, Kate Bradbury, helped to create the design. [edenproject.com](http://edenproject.com)

2



**CELEBRATING CAROL**

Carol Klein has been given the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Garden Media Guild. [gardenmediaguild.co.uk/awards/winners-2019](http://gardenmediaguild.co.uk/awards/winners-2019)

3

**FOREST CONCERTS**

Singers Will Young and James Morrison will be performing a series of concerts in ancient forests from June, including Westonbirt, the National Arboretum. [forestryengland.uk/music](http://forestryengland.uk/music)

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**HARDY EXOTICS**

A new range of alstroemerias is now on sale that can survive temperatures down to -15°C.

[bit.ly/TM-alstroemeria](http://bit.ly/TM-alstroemeria)

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**SAY IT WITH DRIED  
FLOWERS**

The photo-sharing app Pinterest has found that the use of dried flowers at weddings has increased in popularity by 125%.

**My gardening world:  
Raymond Blanc**

Raymond Blanc is chef patron at hotel and restaurant Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons in Oxfordshire. Over the past seven years, he has planted an orchard with ancient varieties of apples, pears and stone fruits in the hotel's grounds. His new book, *The Lost Orchard* (Headline, £20), follows the project and features recipes for each fruit.

**What's your favourite fruit to grow rather than buy?**

Cox's Orange Pippin is the world's best apple yet you don't find it in supermarkets. It's good for everything and offers an explosion of flavour, with hints of quince, mango, passion fruit and strawberries.

**What does a chef need to know about gardening?**

Chef and gardener must work and learn together. They need to understand each other's problems. Chefs here can dig and harvest, and our gardeners try out crops. We had lots of crying when we tried 50 chillies!

**What did you learn from your mother?**

She taught me that you should not waste anything. We were poor, so we ate everything. If I killed a rabbit, I would use the liver and kidneys, and the bones for stock. My mother loved the animals and would cry bittersweet tears over dinner when we ate them.

**Have young chefs lost a connection with seasonal food?**

No – our young British chefs are well connected with growers and farmers,



and understand the importance of locally grown produce. When you help the farmer, you help your community.

**Have you had any special guests visiting your garden?**

When I visited Prince Charles at Highgrove, I said to him, "You should come and see my garden, it is better than yours", and he came (see above)! He enjoyed seeing the garden and we planted a tree together.

**What has been your proudest moment in the garden?**

After 17 years of trying, I successfully grew lemongrass. We found that it would always get caught by frost and rot away, but we discovered a variety high up in the Himalayas that we have been able to grow well here.

**What has been your worst disaster in the garden?**

I wanted to try going biodynamic. This would mean absolutely no chemicals at all, but it didn't work. I'm now working with the Soil Association to come up with an organically acceptable spray for use in the orchard.



**Pesticides in supermarkets**

Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's and Waitrose are the supermarkets doing the most to phase out pesticides in their produce, according to a review by charity Pesticide Action Network UK. At the bottom of the category, Iceland and Lidl are ranked as 'lagging behind'. Read the report and see the score cards at [pan-uk.org/supermarkets](http://pan-uk.org/supermarkets)



**Naturalist and presenter David Bellamy OBE**, who inspired generations of adults and children to help protect the natural world, passed away, aged 86, on Wednesday, 11 December 2019. His television career spanned 30 years and included programmes such as the BBC series *Bellamy On Botany*.

PHOTOS: GETTY/EMONN MCCORMACK, MYVECTOR, CHRIS TERRY, JASON INGRAM, PAUL WILKINSON