



# Thompson & Morgan's little book of garden wisdom



**Thompson & Morgan**  
*Experts in the garden since 1855*



# Introduction

A little friendly advice can help you get the most from your garden.

We've been talking to experts across the UK, asking them to share their prize nuggets of gardening wisdom.

The result is this little book – a treasure trove of essential gardening knowledge.

Here you'll find helpful tips on caring for your soil and your tools, and advice on how to conquer weeds once and for all.

There are sections on allotment growing, as well as growing fruit, veg, and flowers.

Our little book shows you how to get the best from seeds, seedlings, and containers.

There are even sections on wildlife gardening and creating free garden equipment from repurposed junk.

We'd like to thank all our generous contributors for sharing their expertise.

We hope these tips will serve you well for years to come.

Yours,

Thompson & Morgan



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Effort in your garden results in feasts for your eyes as well as your table

Image: Annie Spratt, Unsplash



When you're starting out, the important thing is to enjoy your garden

Image: Eco Warrior Princess, Unsplash

# Chapter 1

## GARDENING TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

We'll start off with some handy beginners' tips from expert gardeners across the UK. If you're just getting into gardening and need some expert advice, you'll find plenty of knowledge to help you get the most from your plot.

For the seasoned pros among you, this chapter will provide encouragement and inspiration for those days when your fingers feel less than green.

### Enjoy it

The first advice from our experts is to remember gardening should be fun. Yes, growing can be frustrating, stressful, and hard work – but so is anything that's worthwhile doing.

*"Above all gardening is all about enjoying what you do",* writes Mike at [Flighty's Plot](#).

*"Take a step back to enjoy the fruits of your labour,"* advises Hayley of [Hayley's Lottie Haven](#):

*"Sometimes we get so wrapped up in weeding, watering and harvesting, we forget to look at what we've achieved."*

Thomas at [Thomas Stone Horticultural Services](#) agrees:

*"Take 15 minutes to enjoy your garden; sit down and relax in it and enjoy your hard work."*

Enjoyment comes when we learn to appreciate the gentle rhythms

of working with the land. As Adam, of [Carrot Tops Allotment](#), says:

*"The world is moving at a faster and faster pace these days, so make the most of something moving slowly for a change."*

Be gentle on yourself – especially when you're just starting out. Patricia from [The Forgotten Garden](#) in North Devon thinks it's important to relax and enjoy what you're doing:

*"Don't spend time focussing on what you can't do, just focus on what you can, with an eye on the wildlife that shares the garden with you."*

### Embrace the learning curve

Gardening is a steep learning curve and, if you're just starting out, chances are there'll be a few hiccups along the way. Instead of beating yourself up, try to embrace your failures and learn from them.

*"Nobody gets it right first time,"* agrees Kate of [Diary of a Country Girl](#):

*"Plants can be moved, new varieties of fruit and vegetables can be sown and garden designs can be developed. When something works it's amazingly satisfying and surely that's why we all garden!"*

Learning from your failures is what counts; and it's this that helps you to grow as a gardener.

Alice Vincent of [@noughticulture](#), and author of “How to grow stuff - Easy, no-stress gardening for beginners”, says:

*“It’s a tough one, but I suppose it would boil down to ‘if you kill something, try and learn why’ – I maintain that the vast majority of my gardening knowledge stems from accidentally killing plants, working out why and trying to avoid that happening next time.”*

Richard, creator and curator of the wonderful [Veg Grower Podcast](#), agrees:



Take time to relax in the garden  
Image: NinaMalyna, Shutterstock

*“Whether it’s a seed that didn’t germinate or a plant that didn’t flourish it’s not the end of the world. Look into what went wrong and rectify that for next time.”*

Gardening knowledge comes with time, patience and open-mindedness.

Professional gardener Judi, of [Judi Samuels Garden Design](#) sees many clients over-pruning shrubs to force them to conform to a particular space in the garden

She advises growers not to impose their will onto a plant, but rather, *“allow it to be what it knows it is.”*

It’s about learning *“right plant, right place - celebrating the form of a plant and allowing it to be.”*

### Start small

It’s easy to get carried away in the early days of starting a garden. But taking on too much too soon can be demoralising and disheartening. Start off small, develop your skills and knowledge bit by bit and, before you know it, you’ll have your dream garden.

*“Don’t be afraid to be utterly realistic about your goals,”* says Lucy at the [Smallest Smallholding](#):

*“Focus on one thing at a time and try to enjoy the rambling and vigour of nature. Accept that imperfection is part of living in the natural world!”*

This is particularly important if you’re taking on an allotment. *“Don’t bite off more than you can chew,”* says Jono of [Real Men Sow](#): *“Even if you are lucky enough to get a full size plot, don’t feel pressurised to use it all.”*

Keeping things small and manageable makes sense, he says:

*“Concentrate on growing the food you enjoy, and not trying to grow so much that you can’t maintain a neat and tidy plot.”*

### Experiment

Once you’ve mastered the basics, keep the enthusiasm flowing with new growing challenges.

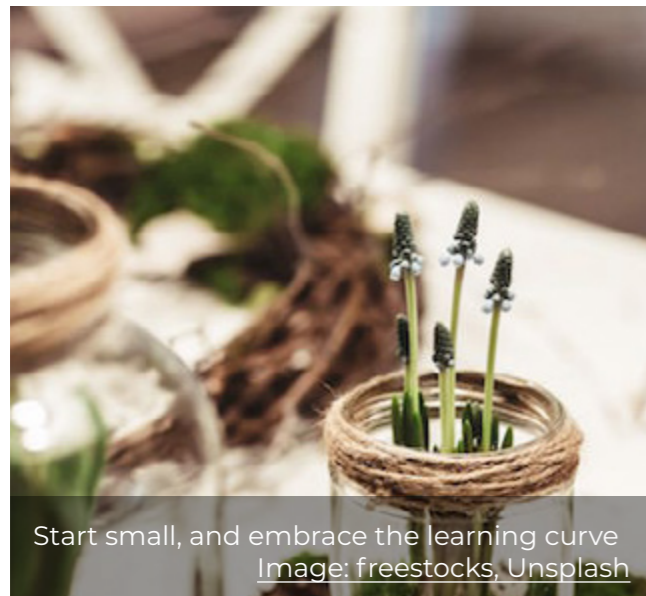
*“Be adventurous – if you want to have a go at growing something different, go for it. You don’t have to grow what everyone else grows,”* says Dawn of [Being Self Sufficient](#) in Wales.

*“It’s your garden and if you provide the right growing conditions then the growing world is your oyster.”*



Remember to enjoy the fruits of your labour

Image: Elaine Casap, Unsplash



And don't just experiment with your plant choice, she adds. Try new things with your growing space too:

*"Experiment: growing vertically will give you more growing space."*

Geoff of [Driftwood by Sea](#), who created his amazing seaside garden from scratch as a beginner, agrees that confidence is key:

*"Go for it and you will succeed."*

### Seek expert advice

It has never been easier to learn about horticulture – our generation has infinite gardening knowledge available at the click of a mouse.

Our own [site](#) has a wealth of gardening guides to help you learn, and we'd heartily recommend you check out all the experts quoted in this little book.

If you prefer reading printed matter, invest in a good beginner's gardening book to get you started, like Sally of [Sally's Garden](#):

*"I bought a really basic gardening book which had a weekly gardening project. I loved it, it really made me want to get gardening."*

25 years later, via a postgrad degree in landscape architecture, and a lecturership in horticulture, she now works as a professional gardener.

Pete at [Weeds up to me Knees](#) advocates the gardening courses available through your local authority:

*"the secret is, whatever gardening knowledge you have you can always expand on it as there's so much to learn!"*

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IF YOU'RE STARTING OUT AS A GARDENER: ENJOY IT, EMBRACE THE LEARNING CURVE, START SMALL AT FIRST BUT DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPERIMENT, AND CALL ON THE EXPERTS WHEN YOU NEED A LITTLE GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

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Part of the joy is watching the progress

Image: Kostenko Maxim, Shutterstock



Look after your soil and reap good quality produce

Image: LedyX, Shutterstock

# Chapter 2

## LOOKING AFTER YOUR SOIL

Look after your soil and your soil will look after you – it’s that simple. Everything starts with the quality of your soil. From no-dig methods to improving your soil Victorian style, here’s how to keep your beds in tip-top condition.

### Get to know it

Understand your soil and you’ll get the best from your garden, advises [Milli Proust](#). Is it heavy or light? How well does it drain? What’s the pH level? How much sun does it get? With the answers to these questions, “*you’ll have the tools to know what will thrive on your patch of land.*”

### Improve it

Dawn of [Being Self-Sufficient in Wales](#) sums it up perfectly:

*“Feed the soil and the soil will feed you.”*

If you’re wondering where to begin, start with a good fertiliser, says Jim of [Jim’s Allotment](#). And what better way to feed your soil than to dig in some good old-fashioned manure.

Jim’s grandad used it, and Jim swears by it:

*“It’s free (even if it does require a little bit of work) and the benefits to your crops are superb.”*

Or follow Belinda of [Plot 7 Marsh Lane’s](#) lead, and make your own

compost:

*“Layer different types of waste (vegetable waste, cardboard, straw, manure) and make sure you keep mixing it up.”*

Belinda’s top tip is to water your compost heap if it looks dry, or the ants will soon take over.

### Learn from the past

If your soil’s just too dry an environment for plants to thrive, try the Victorian method of ‘puddling in’, as advocated by Thomas of [Thomas Stone](#). When you’re planting your seedlings, simply “*dig the hole and fill with a mix of water and liquid seaweed, and then plant directly into the hole and back-fill while it is still filled with water.*”

An unusual suggestion comes courtesy of John of [Allotment Garden](#), who recommends adding salt to your onion beds. He says:

*“It’s an odd tip that does work well, given to me by the much missed Lawrence D Hills who founded the HDRA, which became Garden Organic.”*

FANCY GIVING IT A GO? ADD 60G OF SALT PER SQUARE METRE OF SOIL, AND ROTATE YOUR BEDS EACH YEAR SO THE SALT DOESN’T DAMAGE THE GROUND.



## Stop digging

If you haven't heard of no-dig gardening, you could be missing a trick.

The method involves dressing the soil each autumn with compost or manure, allowing nature to break it down over the winter, and then planting directly into it the following spring – no digging in.

Charles Dowding has been practising no dig for 35 years and says it “saves time, gives bigger harvests, is ecologically beneficial and keeps carbon in the soil.”

Steph at No Dig Home agrees:

*“No dig means healthy soil, far fewer weeds, much less work, and abundant harvests.”*

*“Not disturbing the soil means that the natural diversity remains intact, the soil flora and fauna flourish, and so do all of my fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers!”*

Alternatively, why not let the moles do the digging for you? Rosie at Leavesnbloom swears by the crumbly, weed and seed-free earth she gathers from molehills.

*“I grow anemone de caen corms for my flower photography. Once I've steeped the anemone corms overnight in water I plant them in troughs full of as much mole soil as I can find.”*

It's the perfect consistency for Rosie's delicate flowers and widely available – free of charge!





If you're not a fan of weeding, try the no dig method

Image: David Prah

# Chapter 3

## WEEDING 101

Pesky weeds can be a gardener’s nemesis. Keeping unwanted greenery under control is essential if you’re going to get the best from your garden, but weeding often feels like a never-ending, thankless chore.

If you’re at the end of your tether with keeping them down, don’t despair. Our experts have some surprising advice that could change the way you look at weeds forever.

### Blitz them

If you’re faced with a plot that’s gone back to nature and is choked with weeds, the only thing to do is blitz them, advises Jack Wallington of [Jack Wallington Garden Design](#):

*“In my first winter I got down on my knees and hand weeded the entire plot. It’s more enjoyable than it sounds and it’s paid off big time.”*

Jack also found the process helped him to learn his weeds:

*“In future you’ll know what’s a weed seedling and what’s not, you’ll also know which to worry about and which to go ‘meh, whatever’ to.”*

### Little and often

Once you have tackled the weeds, it’s time to keep them under control. Frequent weeding is the best way to do this, says Jono of [Real Men Sow](#):

*“Little and often – A great mantra for anything to do with allotmenting, and no exception where weeds are concerned.”*

Richard of [Sharpen Your Spades](#) agrees:

*“I’ve got into the habit of visiting the plot frequently... and as soon as I arrive I do the task of weeding. It gets the ghastly job out of the way first and it makes the task of staying on top of the weeds so much easier.”*

Make the hoe your friend, advises [Thomas Stone](#):

*“In dry weather, try and get around with the hoe as often as you can – 5 minutes weeding with a hoe can save 2-3 hours hand weeding.”*

### Try membrane

Carol Bartlett, AKA [The Sunday Gardener](#), says using membrane will suppress 95% of weeds:

*“If you want to beat the weeds and reduce weeding to the absolute minimum a good method is to lay a weed suppressing membrane.”*

Create planting circles by cutting cross-shaped holes into the membrane and folding the flaps back. Covering the membrane with bark chips will make it look more attractive and will attract blackbirds, says Carol.

But, she warns, membrane has its disadvantages: the spread of your plants will be limited to the size of the holes you cut, and self-seeding flowers will not be able to work their

magic:

*"Using a membrane may be considered more suitable for a shrub border than a mixed or herbaceous border."*

## Go no dig

Did you know that digging the ground and turning the soil actually encourages more weeds into your plot? Richard from [Sharpen Your Spades](#) recommends the no-dig method for dramatically reducing weeds:

*"When you mulch the surface of the beds with organic matter and never turn the soil over, the weed seeds that are invariably in the soil never have the incentive to germinate."*

## Destroy them forever

Once you have pulled up your weeds, be careful what you do with them. As Jono of [Real Men Sow](#) warns:

*"I know ploholders who compost down everything, including their weeds. I prefer to keep my compost bins free of weeds as I reckon they're perfect environments for weeds to revitalise themselves and end up back in your soil."*

Richard of [Sharpen Your Spades](#) prefers to annihilate weeds and then compost them:

*"...to be on the safe side, the weeds should be either put in a plastic bag, or similarly drowned in a bucket of*

*(smelly) water to rot down before composting."*

## Embrace the weeds

If you can't beat 'em, enjoy 'em – that's the advice of James of [Totally Wild](#). He advocates leaving a 2m square patch of ground alone as a *"free and easy to keep allotment."*

*"Once you know what grows there, discover what you can do with it. The nettles are edible, the dandelions can make coffee, the chickweed a salad, and ground elder is fantastic wilted."*

It's certainly radical, but it could work for you and the local wildlife!



Fight the good fight!

Image: Gabor Tinz, Shutterstock



Look after your tools and they'll look after you

Image: Jon Bogna, Unsplash

## Chapter 4

### LOOKING AFTER YOUR TOOLS

At the end of a long day's gardening, it can be tempting to just throw your tools into the shed. But our experts stress how important it is to look after your gardening equipment. Here are their top tips for keeping your tools in great nick.

#### Clean them

[Catherine Chenery](#) advises buying quality equipment and keeping it clean. This award-winning garden designer advises:

*"Invest in good quality gardening tools where you can and then look after them."*

Michael at [Green Review](#) provides this simple tool care method:

*"At the end of the day, rinse and dry them and then wipe them down with oil and store in a 5- gallon bucket of sand, or hang them up off the ground. Some gardeners add oil to the bucket of sand and use the coarseness of the grains to clean the metal"*

#### Sharpen them

Tool maintenance doesn't end with cleaning, says Thomas of [Thomas Stone Horticultural Services](#):

*"Keeping all your tools nice and sharp; including hoes, spades and secateurs, will make using them easier."*

Benedict Vanheems of [GrowVeg](#) agrees:

*"[Digging] tools with a clean, sharp edge will cut into the soil with much less effort... Well cared for pruning tools will give a cleaner cut, which reduces the risk of introducing plant diseases."*

Benedict recommends a metal file for sharpening digging tools, and a sharpening stone for pruners, loppers and shears:

*"Only sharpen the cutting blade itself, working the stone in the same direction as the bevel. Smaller blades may need to be worked in a circular motion. It should take between two to five passes of the file or stone to complete the sharpening."*

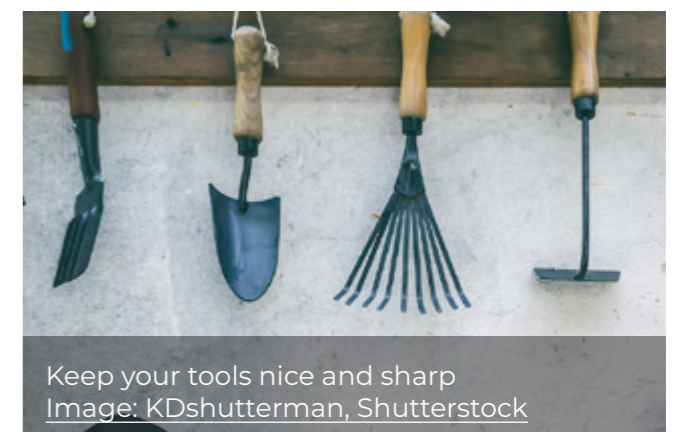
Following sharpening, [Catherine Chenery](#) advises oiling tools with camellia oil:

*"I'm doing this with all my tools and the difference is amazing."*

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“IF YOU CAN'T FIND CAMELLIA OIL, TRY LINSEED INSTEAD”

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Keep your tools nice and sharp  
Image: KDshutterman, Shutterstock



It's all in the planning

Image: Derek Harris Photography, Shutterstock

# Chapter 5

## ALLOTMENT GROWING

Allotments are undergoing a renaissance at the moment, with gardeners snapping up available plots to grow their own fruit, veg, and even flowers.

If you're lucky enough to have acquired an allotment, or are thinking about doing so, here are some expert tips to help you make the most of your patch.

### Take it steady

As exciting as gaining an allotment might be, resist the temptation to dive into growing without a plan, advises Jack Wallington of [Jack Wallington Garden Design](#):

*"Spend ages planning your allotment: I excitedly drew my allotment on paper but on reflection and discussing it with more experienced allotmenters, I changed it... Thankful I hadn't planted anything already."*

When Kris, [The Plot Cook](#) first took over his plot he tried to do too much too soon. In the end he achieved little and "was aching in places I didn't even know existed." Kris says:

*"I learnt to take things a bit slower, plan and be patient... I focused on strawberries, chillies, potatoes and onions. The plan worked and I was eating them all the way through the winter."*

Jono of [Real Men Sow](#) agrees:

*Allotments can be hard work, and take up a lot of your time. If you can't keep on top of things, it can get you down, especially if harvests suffer as a result"*

### Stay focused

When you keep an allotment you'll find you have umpteen tasks that all need doing urgently. The key is to stay focused and achieve one goal at a time. Ronnie of [Hurtledto60](#) does this by breaking down big tasks into achievable steps:

*"When faced with a daunting gardening task set yourself what you will do plus how long and then stop. Today I told myself I was going to clear the paths in one sector and dig over a bed. So much temptation to see other jobs and get sidetracked."*

### Keep on top of weeds

When it comes to keeping your allotment clear of weeds, little and often is key, says Jason of [Owning an Allotment](#):

*"Just make sure you take the time two or three times a week to hoe your allotment to keep the weeds down. It ensures the whole plot stays manageable and that the weeds do not crowd out your plants."*



Sow seeds at the right time for them - not too early!

Image: Markus Spiske, Unsplash

# Chapter 6

## GROWING SEEDS & SEEDLINGS

Growing plants from seed is immensely satisfying and will save you a lot of money. *“I try to grow as many plants as possible from seeds and cuttings,”* says Sally at [Sally’s Garden](#):

*“I find it fascinating, it saves me a fortune, and there are so many incredible seeds available.”*

Here’s how to make growing seeds and seedlings a success:

### Bide your time

Check the weather before planting your seeds. When it comes to growing from seeds and seedlings, our experts recommend you bide your time. Matt of [Grow Like Grandad](#) says:

*“Don’t be in a hurry to sow seeds early or plant out tender crops, you’ll only end up doing the same job twice.”*

Steve at [Seasonal Gardening](#) also recommends planting later:

*“An average temperature of around 15°C (59°F) is required for good germination for most general plant varieties. If it is not possible to maintain the required temperature artificially, sowing should be delayed until the weather is warmer.”*

The same goes for planting inside – leave it until the weather begins to warm up, advises Sue from [Green Lane Allotments](#), because seedlings started off too soon will:

*“grow weak and leggy before the conditions are right for planting out in the ground”.*

Above all, keep an eye on the temperature, says Sue: *“Let the weather and the soil tell you when it is time to plant.”*

### Get organised

Don’t cover seeds until you have sown them all. When you’re sowing into modules or cardboard tubes, it’s easy to forget where you have and haven’t sown.

That’s why Paul at the [Green Fingered Blog](#) advises:

*“Fill them all with compost, make a hole in each and drop a seed in each. But don’t cover any of them over until you’ve sown a seed in every hole. By leaving them uncovered you will see when you’ve done this. If you cover them as you go along you can easily lose track and leave one or two without seeds!”*

Remember to label up your plot so that you know what you have sown and where. Jill Anderson, of [Growing Nicely](#), recommends writing up labels well in advance and storing them with corresponding seed packets:

*“It is highly recommended, because somehow I never have a pencil/ pen nearby when I’m seed sowing, and stopping and writing as you go along seems such a faff.”*

Remember to stagger your sowing, or you'll end up with a glut at harvest time. As Belinda at [Plot 7 Marsh Lane](#) says: *"Succession growing spreads the harvest."*

If you do end up with an overabundance of fruit and veg, share it around or swap with fellow growers.

### Be open to happy accidents

Lastly, it pays to be open to happy accidents in your garden. *"Never weed out seedlings you don't know,"* says Julie of [Garden Without Doors](#):

*"They may turn out to be plants / wildflowers you (or the bees) would be happy to have in your garden."*

Flora at [Plants & Colour](#) agrees.

She says it's always best to wait and see before weeding out your flower beds because there may be *"some fun surprises brought in by birds or other animals"*.

Also, wait before throwing out seed trays containing seeds that didn't germinate. Julie puts hers in a secluded spot in the garden; then she leaves them to see what happens:

*"Some seeds will surprise you months later with bonus seedlings you weren't expecting."*

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THESE TIPS SHOULD HELP YOU GET THE MOST FROM SEEDS AND SEEDLINGS. NOW IT'S TIME TO GET GROWING!

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Grow what you love to eat, be that figs or any other food

Image: K.Sek, Shutterstock



How many courgette plants do you really need?

Image: elesi, Shutterstock

# Chapter 7

## GROWING FRUIT & VEG

Growing your own is a cheap, healthy and environmentally friendly way to provide food for your plate. Whether you've got an allotment, a vegetable patch or some containers on your balcony, here's some expert guidance from green-fingered gardeners and bloggers across the UK.

### Choosing what to grow

Be bold and grow unusual crops like tomatillos for a tasty addition to your table.

Before you start growing, think about the food you like to eat. Do you want staples, or do you like to try new things? Matt of [Grow like Grandad](#) says:

*"If you're a vegetable grower only grow what you (and your family) actually eat."*

That's a view Dawn of [Being Self Sufficient in Wales](#) shares: *"There's no point growing cauliflower if you hate the stuff."*

Her solution is to write up a list of everything your family does eat, and stick to that for your veg sowing selections.

If you're the kind of person who loves trying new foods, growing more adventurous crops will satisfy your tastebuds. Mark from [The English Garden](#), says:

*"I rarely grow maincrop potatoes, onions and carrots. In their places go*

*kailan, salsify, cardoons, Jerusalem artichokes, pea tips and an array of oriental leaves, including mizuna, green in snow, giant red mustard, choy sum and Japanese chrysanthemums (or chop suey greens)."*

Or look for veg that keeps on giving, says Anni of [Anni's Veggies](#). She favours growing perennials:

*"...perennial vegetables are the ultimate in easy gardening."*

Anni recommends Welsh onions, amongst other perennial veg.

### Sowing seeds

*"Work with nature, not against it"* is the motto of Hayley from [Hayley's Lottie Haven](#). She gets two crops from her sunniest spots by sowing earlier there than elsewhere on her plot, and gives shade-loving plants a helping hand by growing them next to taller plants:

*"I plant my lettuces and beetroot in the shadow of my tall plants such as sweetcorn and beans. Everything should work in harmony."*

We've all been there - landed with too much of one crop, all at once. Avoid gluts by sowing less, but more frequently, advises Richard of [Sharpen Your Spades](#):

*"I sow short rows of things like radish, beetroot and carrots every few weeks."*



Jerusalem artichoke tubers - more interesting than tomatoes!

Image: iMarzi, Shutterstock

And Matt of [Grow Like Grandad](#) says:

*"Despite your spring sowing enthusiasm, you only need two courgette plants..."*

### Growing tips

You've chosen what you want to grow and the seeds are in the ground.

Now you're ready for some growing tips from our experts.

Once you've thinned out your carrots, "earth them up a bit", says [Lou Nicholls](#), head gardener at Ulting Wicks. It's a trick her grandad taught her:

*"Firstly it makes it more difficult for carrot root fly to get at them and secondly, it prevents the tops from turning green as it stops the sunlight from reaching them."*

If you're growing carrots this year, try this trick from [Sowing at the Stoop](#), to get things moving:

*"When I'm sowing my carrot seeds direct I always sprinkle a thin layer of vermiculite before the seeds and this has always helped with great seed germination."*

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CHOOSE YOUR CROPS WISELY,  
PLAN TO AVOID GLUTS, AND  
WORK WITH NATURE FOR  
YOUR BEST HARVEST YET.

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Plan wisely for a good harvest

Image: Alicja Neumiler, Shutterstock



For flower lovers, lilies are a very popular choice.

Image: Pelevina Ksinia, Shutterstock

# Chapter 8

## GROWING FLOWERS

Growing flowers brings pleasure, colour and interest into your garden. Here our experts share their favourite flower-growing secrets to get your borders blooming like never before.

### Planning

Choosing a single colour scheme has a dramatic impact. Before you start planting, it pays to plan the kind of display you'd like to create, says Emma at [Palais Flowers](#). Think about the effect colour has on your garden, Emma advises:

*“Block colour makes a real statement whilst clashing tones remind us of the wonder and diversity of flowers!”*

For year-round colour, plan a scheme that blooms at different intervals, says Dave at [Wild Nature Blog](#).

He chooses “winter and spring flowering clematis, verbena bonariensis for summer into autumn, and late-flowering species such as sedum.”

Keeping the blooms coming is great for nature too, wildlife loving Dave says: “Insects are a critical part of any food web, so this will benefit all wildlife in your garden.”

### Planting

When it comes to planting, timing is everything – whether you're starting a flower garden or maintaining one.

The best time to sow hardy annuals is late summer, says Jill Anderson of [Growing Nicely](#). She recommends doing this in September:



A well-planned floral display is always satisfying to a gardener.

Image: Alicina, Shutterstock



A good deadheading regime will extend your flowering season Image: J Kolenda, Shutterstock

*"... the soil is warm and there's still enough daylight, all they need is water and they'll start to grow. There won't be a lot of plant, but they'll be growing a strong root system, develop into stocky, little plants that'll bide their time over winter and flower next year."*

Don't plant stored dahlia tubers straight out in the spring, says Mr J (AKA [The Propagator](#)). He starts them off early in pots in the greenhouse:

*"Mr Slug is very partial to a fresh dahlia stem. It's easier to manage Mr Slug in a greenhouse or similarly sheltered environment, so into pots they go."*

## Prolonging

Regular and judicious pruning and deadheading will prolong the flowering season and produce more beautiful blooms.

We all know that bedding plants can get a bit leggy later in the

summer, which is why Carol, [The Sunday Gardener](#), pinches out the growing tips of her bedding plants in May and June. She says:

*"It makes the plant grow more bushy and throw out side shoots so the plant has more flowers."*

Try this technique with "verbena, begonias, geraniums, busy lizzies, petunias, lobelia, fuchsias, and just about all bedding plants, including sweet peas." Carol also recommends deadheading your plants regularly to help them bloom until October.

## Picking

Don't wait until blooms are past their best to deadhead them, says Sara at [My Flower Patch](#). Picking flowers not only encourages more to take their place, but provides beautiful cut flowers for your home. To help them last a bit longer she advises you to:

*"Pick freshly opened buds in the cool of the morning, or as the*

*temperature cools in the late evening with a sharp pair of scissors or flower snips."*

Pop your cut flowers into "a bucket or jar of water, and leave them to 'condition'...Then choose your favourite vase to arrange them into." Her favourite cut flowers are cornflowers, cosmos, ammi visnaga, sweet peas, scabious and antirrhinums, all of which will go on to produce more blooms as you pick.

[Susan Rushton](#) advises how to get the most from your daffs:

*"Don't cut daffodils, pluck them."*

By gripping at the base of the stem and pulling, you leave the end of the stalk sealed. With the sap still inside the flower will last longer in the vase and won't contaminate the other stems.

## Pruning

Wondering when to prune your wisteria? Horticulturist, [Lou Nicholls](#) says to get the best display, remember the old adage:

*"Longest cut, longest day; shortest cut, shortest day."*

By pruning the "long whippy growth at midsummer back to 5 buds" you'll encourage plenty of side shoots for next year's flowers. Then come midwinter, Lou advises you reduce all those extra side shoots to two buds for plenty of

big flowering spikes next year.

As well as pruning, regularly train new growth on your climbers, says Thomas at [Thomas Stone](#):

*"Look at any climbing plants like roses or clematis at least once per week and tie in any new growth with 3 ply twine."*

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FOLLOW OUR EXPERTS' ADVICE AND YOU'LL HAVE A COLOURFUL GARDEN THAT BLOOMS ALL YEAR-ROUND FOR MANY YEARS TO COME.

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Containers give your garden fantastic flexibility

Image: Derek Harris Photography, Shutterstock

# Chapter 9

## GROWING IN CONTAINERS

Containers provide versatile growing space for herbs, flowers, and fruit and veg. But container plants need a little extra TLC to flourish. Here are some top tips from our green-fingered experts to help them do just that:

### Planting up

Planting up your containers properly will get them on the right track towards health and longevity.

If you're fond of terracotta containers, you might want to follow this advice, handed down to [Geoff Stonebanks](#) by his aunt, Margaret Grindrod:

*"Line your small terracotta pots with tin foil to help retain moisture in the summer heat."*

[Garden Ninja](#), Lee, offers the following reminder for helping new plants settle in a container:

*"Bare roots require soaking before planting as they are dormant. This is an essential step when planting them and shouldn't be overlooked."*

And if you like to fill your pots with more than one variety of plant, ensure you match bedfellows carefully, advises [Susie Babington](#):

*"Ensure all the plants you choose for your container require the same conditions. There's no point planting a lavender (dry loving) with a rose (thirsty) - a very common mistake!"*

### Watering

Every gardener knows container plants require more water than those in the ground. But just how much do they need?

[Garden Dad](#) recommends you do the following:

*"Set up a watering schedule, and check the soil regularly. If the top couple of inches of soil feel dry, you should water. Frequency of watering will vary according to the weather."*

And watch how you water container plants, says [Susie Babington](#):

*"...don't use a 'rain cloud' attachment to your hose, as droplets of water on the leaves leads to leaf scald. Instead direct the hose straight to the roots."*

### Moving containers

*"Never underestimate the versatility of containers; they allow you to create a new look for your garden every year by relocating them,"* says [Geoff Stonebanks](#).

We agree. But if your large containers are too heavy to move around as you'd like, try a tip from Ellen of [Ellen Mary Gardening](#) who half-fills big pots with packing peanuts before planting

*"It's a great way to recycle packaging and lessen waste and all you need to do is place some landscape fabric on top, then your soil and plant up."*



Consider how the design of your garden impacts on wildlife

Image: Coatesy, Shutterstock

# Chapter 10

## WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY GARDENING

You can help native wildlife thrive with just a few small changes to the way you garden. Here are some tips from expert gardeners and bloggers to make your garden more wildlife-friendly.

### Planning

Begin by asking: *“what does the wildlife need?”* says Brian of [Brian’s Birding Blog](#). Think about basics like food, water, shelter, and safety.

Planning your garden around the building blocks of survival will make your garden nature friendly by design.

That’s a sentiment with which Nic of [Dogwood Days](#) wholeheartedly agrees. As her dad always says:

*“The garden is an extension of the wider landscape in terms of its links to nature – the birds, insects and animals.”*

Too often, we design our gardens with privacy in mind; we don’t stop to consider how our wild friends will get around. But with a little thought, hedgehog-loving Adam of [My Life Outside](#) says that’s easily fixed:

*“By creating hedgehog highways through our gardens we can join up vast swathes of land and give these fabulous creatures a fighting chance.”*

So get together with your neighbours and create animal corridors by *“lifting a fence panel a few inches, cutting a hole through wire netting or drilling through boundary walls.”*

And do remember to provide water. As Brian says, a pond *“gives the birds another food source and somewhere to bathe and drink.”*

The team at Freshwater Habitats add:

*“Clean unpolluted water is always better for pond plants and invertebrates – and this in turn forms the basis for a good amphibian pond.”*

### Housing

Next, think about where wildlife will live. Nature expert [Dan Rouse](#) is a passionate advocate of ‘messy zones,’ which can be as simple as *“a small piece of old carpet and some bricks behind the shed”* – the perfect hidey hole for insects and shy creatures like slow worms. She also says:

*“Nest spaces or nesting boxes and roosting boxes are fundamental for wildlife to survive.”*

But it's not just birds who need shelter – think about bugs and beasties too. Bill at [Frodsham Marsh Bird Blog](#) has created a beautiful bug apartment block within a tree, whose “winding twisted trunk and small branches hold a selection of brightly painted bean cans which have been filled with a variety of fibre material.”

Remember to make spaces for lone fliers to hang out – Bill says a couple of catering-size cans fitted with wooden plugs with holes drilled through make ideal accommodation:

*“Solitary bees can access the interior to live their lives away from predators.”*

More bugs mean more bats fluttering overhead during spring and summer evenings, so remember to install a bat box too.

## Planting

Look at your garden through the eyes of prospective wildlife visitors. Do you have a tree? If not, consider planting one. Or if space is a problem, make existing structures work for birds and insects. This is what Bill (at [Frodsham Marsh Bird Blog](#)) has done in his small backyard garden – which he calls his ‘yarden’. He says:

*“The washing line post has ivy growing up it and now provides thick cover where robin and wren have nested.”*

Wildlife expert [Dan Rouse](#) advises creating layers with your planting to make sure there's enough food and cover for all:

*“Shrub-like plants like lavender or fuchsia give off a lot of smell and still carry pollen for our pollinators. Smaller plants like ground creeper are great for our insects and small birds to hide in too.”*

Lisa at [Edulis Wild Food](#) likes to delay mowing until wildflowers growing in her lawn have had chance to bloom:

*“The bees are grateful for the early food and you realise how diverse your lawn can be if not totally mono-cultured.”*

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PROVIDING FOOD, WATER, SHELTER AND SAFETY ENCOURAGES WILDLIFE INTO YOUR GARDEN. FOLLOW THESE TIPS AND YOUR PATCH WILL BECOME A WELCOME PITSTOP FOR BIRDS, BATS AND BUTTERFLIES.

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Bug hotels will attract useful insects to your garden

Image: DanyL, Shutterstock



Find new uses for things you might have thrown away!

Image: Jillian Cain Photography, Shutterstock

# Chapter 11

## GARDEN UPCYCLING

The savvy gardener is a frugal one. There are so many ways you can repurpose, reuse and recycle in the garden – saving money and the environment. Here are some of our favourite tips from expert gardeners and bloggers.

### Repurpose

Old tyres make excellent planters for fruit, veg and flowers. *“Stand away from the skip. I repeat, stand away from the skip!”* Pete of [Weeds up to me knees](#) can’t resist examining the contents of every skip he encounters – much to his daughter’s embarrassment. Pete says:

*“I’m always looking when I pass skips etc., as I have found some great stuff in them for use in the garden.”*

Another modern-day womble, Sara from [My Flower Patch](#) collects mushroom and veg crates from her local pub. As well as offering a good excuse to pop in for a pint, she says she uses the crates to plant up her dahlias:

*“I can get four or five tubers per blue crate and it uses much less compost and takes up less space than four or five individual pots.”*

And then there’s Bill, author of [Frodsham Marsh bird blog](#), who, tired of getting sore knees, found this novel solution:

*“An old chair base made the comfiest garden kneeler to put in some new plants!”*

### Reuse

So many gardeners’ essentials can be used over and over again – saving money and the amount of rubbish sent to landfill. For example, make landscape fabric last more than one year by burning your holes, rather than cutting them – or at least heat-seal the edges, says Kev at the [English Homestead](#):

*“Cauterising the cut stops the fabric unravelling, meaning you can use it again year after year.”*

Kev says he gets a whopping ten seasons’ use from his with this method.

Another gardener for whom the term *“single use plastic”* doesn’t compute, is Mal of [Mal’s Edinburgh allotment](#) whose top tip is as timely as it is ingenious:

*“Use rewritable tape to transform single use plastic labels into multiple use plastic labels.”*

Of course, not everyone keeps sheep, but even if you don't, you'll like this idea from Karen at the [Square Sparrow's](#) Scottish smallholding. She reuses sheep's wool to cover her herbs. Her motto is:

*"Sheepish Herbs Survive Winter's Worst!"*

Not even the "Beast from the East" could pierce her tender plants' snugly wool covering.

## Recycle

It can be difficult to see where to water leafy ground-covering plants like strawberries, squashes and courgettes. But Belinda from [Plot 7 Marsh Lane](#) has a wonderful recycling solution.

She cuts the tops off old cola bottles to make makeshift funnels, which she presses into the ground next to the roots of her plants so the water always gets to where it's needed.

Resourceful Rachel of [The Good Life Ain't Easy](#), germinates seeds in toilet-roll tubes and egg cartons and, never one to waste plastic that could be recycled, says:

*"I've found grape boxes make perfect*

*reusable greenhouses."*

And then there's Alan, of [Alan's Allotment](#), who recycles nature's bounty itself – specifically comfrey, which he says grows like wildfire and can be used as "compost activator, liquid fertilizer, mulch or side dressing, companion plant for trees and other perennials, and production of potting mixture."

Got an old plastic striplight cover? Rachel at [The Good Life Ain't Easy](#)'s ingenious tip is to use it as an outdoor propagator to get your seeds to germinate. Hers "worked like mini greenhouses warming up the soil" - what a great idea!

Need a better way to keep slugs at bay? Why not try Wendy Graham's novel approach? Wendy, of [Moral Fibres](#) recycled copper pipe from an old heater into slug-repelling copper rings:

*"When we had an old gas fire removed a few years ago we reused the copper piping and put it round our vegetable seedlings, much like a fortress."*

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FOLLOW THESE TIPS AND  
YOU'LL NOT ONLY HELP LOOK  
AFTER OUR PLANET, YOU'LL  
ALSO SAVE MONEY AND GET  
GREAT RESULTS – A WIN-WIN  
ALL ROUND.

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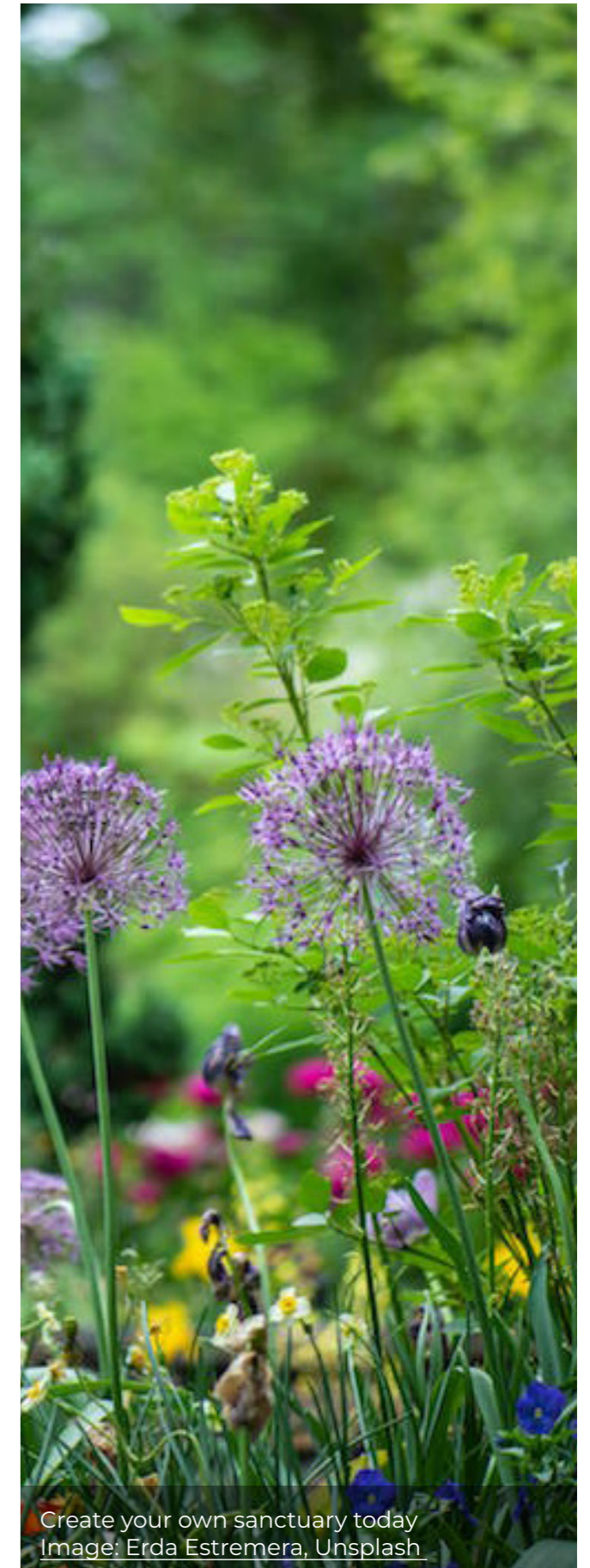
We hope this little book of garden wisdom has filled you with inspiration and that you're itching to put our experts' tips into practice. Remember, you'll find even more help and advice on their blogs listed below, and on our Thompson & Morgan website.

And if you'd like to share your own tips and triumphs with us, we'd love to hear from you. Search for Thompson & Morgan on your favourite social media channels and leave a comment for us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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## Happy gardening!

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Create your own sanctuary today  
Image: Erda Estremera, Unsplash

## Our thanks

We'd like to thank the many kind contributors to this little book.

Visit their websites, and learn even more from these generous and knowledgeable gardeners.

In (rough) order of appearance, they are:

Adam: [Carrot Tops Allotment](#)  
 Kate: [Diary of a Country Girl](#)  
 Mike: [Flighty's plot](#)  
 Patricia: [The Forgotten Garden](#)  
 Thomas: [Thomas Stone Horticultural Services](#)  
 Hayley: [Hayley's Lottie Haven](#)  
 Judi: [Judi Samuels Garden Design](#)  
 Lucy: [The Smallest Smallholding](#)  
 Richard: [The Veg Grower Podcast](#)  
 Dawn: [Being Self-Sufficient in Wales](#)  
 Jono: [Real Men Sow](#)  
 Sally: [Sally's Garden](#)  
 Pete: [Weeds up to me Knees](#)  
 Geoff: [Driftwood by Sea](#)  
 Belinda: [Plot 7 Marsh Lane](#)

Jim: [Jim's allotment](#)  
 John: [Allotment Garden](#)  
 Milli: [Milli Proust](#)  
 Charles: [Charles Dowding](#)  
 Rose: [Leavesnbloom](#)  
 Steph: [No Dig Home](#)  
 Carol: [The Sunday Gardener](#)  
 Richard: [Sharpen Your Spades](#)  
 Jack: [Jack Wallington Garden Design](#)  
 James: [Totally Wild UK](#)  
 Benedict: [Grow Veg](#)  
 Catherine: [Catherine Chenery](#)  
 Michael: [Green \(Living\) Review](#)  
 Jason: [Owning an Allotment](#)  
 Kris: [The Allotment Cook](#)  
 Ronnie: [Hurtled to 60](#)  
 Matt: [Grow Like Grandad](#)  
 Jill: [Growing Nicely](#)  
 Paul: [Green Fingered Blog](#)  
 Steve: [Seasonal Gardening](#)  
 Sue: [Green Lane Allotments](#)  
 Flora: [Wild Dye Garden](#)  
 Julie: [Garden Without Doors](#)  
 Mark: [The English Garden](#)  
 Anni: [Anni's Perennial Veggies](#)  
 Lou: [Louise Nicholls](#)  
 Claire: [Sowing at the Stoop](#)

## More garden wisdom

Just getting started? More seasoned gardener? If Thompson & Morgan's Little Book of Gardening Wisdom has whetted your appetite for more information, read on.

Our team of horticultural experts has provided loads of advice to support your journey.

Visit our [gardening information page](#) for FAQs, quick how-to video tutorials, month-by-month guides, and our [blog](#) for regular stories, competitions and more.

We love to hear back from you too – join our social media communities and let us know how you get on.

Grown something you're proud of? Please do send us photos of special moments and green-fingered successes to share in our gallery. Enjoy!

Dave: [Wild Nature Blog](#)  
 Emma: [Palais Flowers](#)  
 Jonathan: [The Propagator Blog](#)  
 Sara: [My Flower Patch](#)  
 Susan: [Susan Rushton](#)  
 Ellen: [Ellen Mary Gardening](#)  
 Jack: [Garden Dad](#)  
 Lee: [Garden Ninja](#)  
 Susie: [Susie Babington Gardens](#)  
 Adam: [My Life Outside](#)  
 Brian: [Brian's Birding Blog](#)  
 Bill: [Frodsham Marsh Bird Blog](#)  
 Dan: [Dan Rouse](#)  
 Nic: [Dogwooddays](#)  
 Lisa: [Edulis Wild Food](#)  
 Kev: [An English Homestead](#)  
 Mal: [Mal's Edinburgh Allotment](#)  
 Alan: [Alan's Allotment](#)  
 Karen: [Square Sparrow](#)  
 Rachel: [The good life ain't easy](#)  
 Wendy: [Moral Fibres](#)  
 Alice: [Noughticulture](#)

Again, massive thanks to all the contributors - we really appreciate you kindly sharing your garden wisdom with us and everyone else.

