

Top Tips to Share

During the first weeks of lockdown we focussed on positive things people could do in their gardens to help improve biodiversity and grow their own produce and shared them on social media. We spoke to local experts for their tips and here they are:

Say “No” to Mow and Make a Mini-meadow! – Ali Tuckey, Durlston Ranger

Durlston’s meadows are some of the richest and most colourful in the country, but your lawn can also provide a great home for wildlife. The best bit is, not only will you save time, petrol and water, but you’ll create a valuable and beautiful habitat.

To Make a summer meadow:

Mow your lawn now and then don’t cut it until August or September. When you cut, leave the cuttings to dry for a few days, so that seeds can drop out – (turning them after a day or two helps). Then remove the cuttings. It really is that simple! By removing cuttings, you will gradually take nutrients out of the system, reducing the dominance of grass species and by cutting only once flowers have set seed, you are creating next year’s seed bank.

Docks, thistles or other perennial ‘weeds’ can be removed with a trowel if they get out of hand, but as nutrient levels fall over a few years, they will gradually disappear.

Although part of the fun is seeing what plants find their way into your meadow, for a quick boost, grow some native wildflower seeds as plugs and plant into the lawn. Buying or collecting Yellow Rattle seed and scattering in autumn will also help. As a semi-parasite it will weaken grasses, creating more space for wildflowers. Before going all in, why not try this with one section of your lawn, or stop mowing for a month in May or June – although the best meadows can take many years to develop, you may be surprised by what pops up!



To find out more, visit <http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk/>, where you can find some resources to get you started, or for some inspiration visit <https://www.durlston.co.uk/wildlife-and-marine-wild-flowers.aspx>

Tips for growing fruit and vegetables in containers by Regula Wright from Godlingston Manor Kitchen Garden

Grow quick and easy crops that you really enjoy, for example radishes and ‘cut and come again’ lettuces which are easy to grow and produce quick results.

- 1) Clean your containers with water and a brush. This helps remove harmful tiny organisms that might be present from the last plants grown in there, especially terracotta pots.
- 2) Use fresh good quality compost.

- 3) Use fresh seed as they do have a shelf life. Old, opened or poorly stored seed may not germinate.
- 4) Some seeds are fine to germinate outside, others need warmth to get going – just think where the plant originated from to help give you an idea. Eg. tomatoes and courgettes need warmth and beans and salad are fine outside at the right time of year.
- 5) Most leafy crops won't need extra feeding, the compost provides nutrients. Fruiting crops such as tomatoes, peppers etc will need a bit more when they start producing. I recommend using liquid fertilisers such as seaweed.
- 6) Pests - slugs and snails are a common problem. Avoid using traditional slug pellets as they are harmful to other animals in the food chain. Remove them by hand, this can be helped by putting something down to collect them such as a beer trap or an upturned orange half. You may also need to protect against cats and birds.



Gardening tip – Simon Goldsack, Holme for Gardens.

A garden doesn't need to be perfectly tidy. Leaving an area completely untouched allows a safe haven for all sorts of wildlife to live. You can hide this area off behind a hedge if it spoils the look of your garden but having it there will undoubtedly increase the biodiversity of your plot. Also if you have wooden or wire fences leave some small holes at the base, large enough to allow hedgehogs and toads to pass through but small enough to stop cats and dogs. If all your neighbours do the same, you'll have a wildlife corridor!



Finally, if you are doing any pruning of wood, how about;

- 1- Chopping it up into woodchip and using to mulch shrub borders and hedges. You'll be keeping the carbon locked up, saving on weeding and eventually the nutrients will recycle into the borders for your plants to use
- 2- Chopping it into small sticks and logs and leaving it out of site at the back of the border or under a hedge so wood boring insects can feed on it as it composts down.

Both of these options are better than burning it which immediately lets the carbon into the atmosphere undoing the good, nature had done locking it up.

Plants for containers

One of our local wholesaler nurseries provided some tips on suitable plants for containers.

For the smell of baked Mediterranean hillsides plant Santolina the Cotton Lavender with their yellow pompom flower heads, Lavender, Rosemary and the yellow or purple leaved Sage (*Salvia officinale*). The coloured sage and the Rosemary can be used for cooking.

Hardy Fuchsias and shrubby Salvias will flower from mid-May until we get the first autumn frost.

Phormiums the New Zealand Flax have wonderful sword shaped coloured leaves.

Euphorbia, Euonymus and Vinca the periwinkle are great in sun and shade.

Last but not least fantastic ferns which grow well in those horrible shady areas which often look so dull. They come in a huge variety of variety of shapes and sizes from Dicksonia the tree fern with fronds (leaves) already 1 meter in length to the silver grey Lady Ferns to the elegant shuttlecock fern (*Matteucia struthiopteris*) guess what shape that is, to tiny ferns which only grow to about 20cms. Many are evergreen and some have red pink and gold coloured new foliage which turns green with age.

All the above and compost is available from Holme for Gardens, Ballard Down Stores in Ulwell and Norden Farm shop. By purchasing the above you can have a super looking garden with the satisfaction of knowing you are helping support local shops and producers.

