

Gardening club

with DAVID DOMONEY

features@sundaymirror.co.uk
 daviddomoney.com
 @daviddomoney
 /daviddomoneytv

Q&A

Ticking the boxes for happier roots

What's the best kind of material for a sunny window box? **Sally, Devon**
DAVID: Window boxes come in a range of materials and each has its upsides and downsides. In strong sunlight, it is usually best to choose light-coloured, non-metal boxes as these are slower to heat up than other options so protect roots and retain moisture for longer.



Bitter end for your stressed cucumber

How can I stop cucumbers from going all bitter? **Simon, via email**
DAVID: Stressed cucumbers can produce bitter crops. So reduce stress by planting in a sunny spot, watering deeply and regularly and fertilising with a balanced liquid fertiliser from the moment they begin producing flowers. Removing male flowers - with no swelling at the base - in greenhouse crops will also help to keep fruit sweet.

TIP of the week

Punch drainage holes in the bottom of empty tin cans to create fun garden planters that you can embellish with colour and that won't break the bank.

GET IN TOUCH

For loads more hints and tips on gardening visit daviddomoney.com or follow me on Facebook at @DavidDomoneyTV or on Twitter @daviddomoney

Get little ones away from the screens and into the garden this Easter, with fun activities to stir up a love for nature that will keep on growing

Spring is the perfect time to get children gardening. As the weather warms up, exciting new life is everywhere. So here are some inventive ways to get the kids growing this Easter and make the most of the great outdoors.

DESIGNATED KID ZONE

When I was a kid, I grew mint, raspberries and strawberries - I loved doing it. It installed a lifelong interest in plants.

You should do the same for your children and grandchildren. Giving them a bit of ownership works wonders and you'll be amazed at the incredible ideas they come up with.

If you want to get creative, section off a small, manageable patch of garden and have them paint their own rainbow-coloured picket fence or their own named signposts. Then let them go wild.

If you're not lucky enough to have a garden, make space for a planter or pots on your balcony or patio.

Flipping through a gardening catalogue with them is a great way to spark their interest in the amazing varieties of plants on offer. If your kids

Its leaves have an incredible texture, like an elephant's ear

love being on the go, taking them to the garden centre and letting them pick plants and seeds off the shelves can be really inspiring.

These days, they can also pick their own miniature gloves and brightly coloured tools to express themselves.

Giving them their own container or window box to plant in or letting them choose small plants, such as tasty herbs, to grow indoors are all fantastic options.

Taking before and after photos can also be a real motivator as they get to see the difference they have made.

SENSORY DELIGHT

Choosing plant varieties that delight your children's senses with enticing smells, tastes and textures, is another great way to get them into gardening.

My older two love Aloysia citrodora, lemon verbena, which smells like lemon sherbet, and cosmos, as the flower has a chocolate scent.

For leaves with a fun texture, grow bergenia. It feels like a leathery elephant's ear.

Or try fuzzy Stachys byzantina, which is textured like a lamb's ear - perfect to encourage children to engage with nature through touch.



ARTY Pick flowers for crafting



PONG Smells have endless kid appeal

GROW WISER

Best ways to bond with grandchildren



Plant an idea

Another big hit with my girls is chocolate peppermint, which has leaves that smell of chocolate creams.

EXTRA-FUN PLANTS

There is no doubt about it, growing food with children is a big hit. Mine get so excited as they watch fruit ripen and we have so much fun picking together come harvest time.

You can even get raspberry and

blackberry cultivars that are practically thornless so very safe around your little ones.

If you are short on space, go for a potager gardening style with a mix of crops, flowers and herbs to enhance the space. This combines a functional vegetable plot with the visual appeal of a garden.

Plant in a sunny spot in the middle of an ornamental border and take care

to buy primocane varieties, such as Polka raspberries and Reuben blackberries, that fruit on new growth if you want fruit this summer.

Treat them well and plants will continue producing for years to come.

You can also buy crops in unusual colours - from 'Deep Purple' carrots to 'Sungold' tomatoes and 'Pink Sapphire' blueberries.

You will find lots of unusual varieties

that appeal to junior gardeners at garden centres these days.

GET CRAFTY

If your kids love craft activities, there are many ways to put this to good use.

They could paint flat stones to serve as plant labels or decorate terracotta pots with colourful designs. Funny faces on pots work particularly well because the plant looks like a crazy

haindo on top. Use acrylic paints and apply a sealer for use outside or use up leftover emulsion for indoor fun.

Roll a crafty decoration and wildlife haven into one by making a bug hotel out of hollow bamboo canes, corrugated cardboard and pine cones.

These serve as nesting sites for friendly solitary bees, which will help to pollinate crops and flowers, as well as for ladybirds and lacewings, which eat garden pests, such as greenfly.

You could also make bird fat balls together in the kitchen and hang them up in your garden.

For full details of how to make insect hotels and bird treats, visit my website, daviddomoney.com.

You can also give kids a magnifying glass and colouring-in sheet that asks them to spot mini beasts.

Or task them with picking flowers to press, then use them to make special cards for birthdays.

And for young children, old kitchen pans and utensils in a disused border will make for hours of fun as they cook something up in the mud kitchen.

So get into the garden with your little ones for many days of family fun.



SEEDLINGS Messy laughs at Abacus

Count on nature to solve tricky sums

The great outdoors is a brilliant classroom. And engaging with nature can have a huge positive impact on children's health and brain power.

Shirley Wilks and Jill Vella, co-owners of Abacus Nursery School, say they see the benefits every day.

Shirley said: "Outside play offers our children a sense of freedom and relieves anxiety. It promotes motor and observational skills, team work, sharing, problem solving and creativity."

Jill, says gardening at their nursery



in Lickey End, Bromsgrove, Worcs, has helped children learn about patience, "while waiting their turn to plant a seed and in anticipation for a seed to grow". "The learning opportunities are endless and include the weather, pollination, recycling, sustainability and a safe introduction to life and death," she added. "Gardening promotes

language development too. It leads to discussion about where foods come from, cooking activities and trying new fresh food they've grown."

Stones, conkers and sticks are also used as an outdoor abacus for maths lessons. Students of all ages can reap rewards from learning outside.

The Cultivation Street competition, sponsored by Callope, celebrates schools for their fresh approach to harnessing the outdoors. For details, visit cultivationstreet.com

OFFER of the week

Trailing Bacopa Topia produces mixed masses of large blue and white flowers throughout summer.

This beautiful and popular trailing plant is very reliable and easy to grow successfully.

Expect a height of 15-20cm, trailing 50-60cm. UK-grown maxi plug plants are supplied.

You can buy 33 for £15.99 or you can double up for just £1 extra and receive 66 for £16.99.

Delivery within 14 days.

To order by debit/credit card, call 0843 922 5000 quoting

SMTG020 or send a cheque made payable, using blue or black ink, to

'Garden Offers' to Bacopa Topia Mixed Offer (SMTG020), PO Box 64,

South West District Office, Manchester, M16 9HY or visit

mirrorgardenoffers.co.uk

GADGET



Kent and Stowe's ratchet anvil secateurs feature a two-in-one cutting action, making them easier for people with arthritis or gardeners with a weak grip.

Their carbon steel non-stick blades ensure a smooth action. And they are fitted with a non-slip grip.

When purchasing pruning tools, I always look for kit featuring a safety lock for safe storage and these have that too. These cost £10.27 at

uktoolcentre.co.uk.