

Gardening club



with DAVID DOMONEY

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Q&A

Beat cheeky beaks bingeing on berries

How can I protect my strawberry plants from birds? **Matty, West Bromwich**
DAVID: Use movement deterrents, such as brightly coloured pinwheel windmills, as they're more hedgehog friendly than netting - which can trap young hoglets. CDs strung near crops will reflect the light and have a scarecrow effect on hungry beaks.

Plants to get slimy scourge on the run

Can you give me ideas for slug-resistant plants? **Jill, Salisbury**
DAVID: Slugs dislike plants with thick leaves and stems that they find difficult to chew. Pelargonium (geranium), ferns, Fuchsia and Scabiosa (scabious) are all good examples. Slugs are also put off by the taste of Digitalis purpurea (foxgloves) and Euphorbia (spurge).

TIP of the week

Keep sowing salad seeds every two weeks to ensure yourself a continuous supply of fresh leaves throughout summer.

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

Things are hotting up in the garden, so it's time to break out the briquettes, fire up the BBQ and get back to nature for a summer of socialising al fresco

With summer time well on its way, it's barbecue time in gardens up and down the country as families get back to treating their outdoor space like an extra room.

Gardens are great as communal, shared areas for all the family and anything that gets people out and active is a plus - be it planting, tidying, cutting the lawn or entertaining.

So let's look at how to get the most out of your garden for this sizzling, social, summer-loving pursuit.

SETTING THE SCENE

When it comes to hosting an outdoor dinner party, you want your garden to look its best. Take the time to wash down garden furniture and fixtures so surfaces look clean and cared for.

Don't forget you'll be eating here so you want it germ-free and gleaming.

Sweep floors and clear the area of untidy debris, weeds and garden tools - it's a great excuse for a late spring clean of tools, kit and patio.

Now think about patio planting that will enhance your entertaining - go for a mix of decorative edible plants in

BBQ is a really social way to break bread with loved ones

borders, with bright colours and unusual shapes, to draw the eye.

Most red, black and white currants are ripe for the picking from mid-summer but the Rokula gooseberry cultivar is early fruiting and offers up flashes of juicy-red colour to any spot.

A peppering of striking *Salvia officinalis Purpurascens* (purple sage) can be picked fresh any time to season dishes with spicy tones as well as adding a splash of colour.

Preferring a dry, sandy soil, sage can grow alongside other Mediterranean herbs such as thyme and oregano for a buffet of ready-to-pick produce.

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

Grilling is a really social way to break bread with loved ones - even the designated chef can join in the chat as the food slowly sizzles away.

For a barbecue banquet that won't disappoint, consider these top tips:

Kettle barbecues are perfect for cooking larger pieces of meat, giving food an indulgent BBQ flavour due to their cover containing the heat.

Great for small spaces, they usually cost around £50 - £150.

Gas-fired barbecues are a quick and easy option, with the advantage of instant heat. They often have multiple burners for flexibility when cooking different food all at once. Your local

Get into bare grills



FAMILY MEAT-UP
It's great to gather round the barbie

SPRUCE UP Be sure to tidy before guests arrive

SPICE GRILLS
Sage adds both flavour & colour

supplier will have a garden gas bottle which you can refill each time.

For serious chefs there are bigger ones with griddles, warming racks and wok burners - you might not need to use the kitchen all summer...

Lumpwood charcoal is kiln-fired wood that lends a traditional smoky flavour and is the cheapest fuel

option. And instant-lighting varieties can mean no more messing around with firelighters.

Keep a lookout for **flavoured wood chips** to add a smoky essence - options such as whisky, hickory, pecan and beech will leave your mouth watering.

Charcoal briquettes are a mix of charcoal and a starch binder. They

aren't pure charcoal but, once lit, they burn for up to twice as long and produce a more constant temperature.

WEATHER PERMITTING

If you find yourself grilling in soaring temperatures, keep a supply of refreshing liquids within arm's reach

to satisfy thirsty mouths. Fill a Kilner jar dispenser with cloudy lemonade and top it with herbs such as sun-loving *Rosmarinus officinalis* (rosemary) - whose sturdy stems can double as aromatic barbecue skewers.

In a heatwave, liven your seasoning up with mint to bring a refreshing zing to marinades and accompanying side

salads. Then pop up gazebos or parasols to keep you, and your fresh food, sheltered and out of direct sun.

If the weather has a mind of its own, the great thing about barbecuing is that you have a heat source ready and you can keep the embers going after the food has been dished.

To incorporate some shrubbery as a natural windbreak, look to dense evergreens such as *Photinia x fraseri* Red Robin, which has both red and green foliage, with white flowers in spring.

AFTER DINNER DELIGHTS

When the party draws to an end, you'll be happy to hear that lumpwood ash won't go to waste either.

In small amounts, you can pop it on your compost heap when it's cold - those heavily built of kitchen waste and lawn cuttings can get overly acidic, and ash can help restore some order.

Or sprinkle ash as a protective mulch around plants and vegetables - don't overdo it, and avoid plants that prefer an acidic soil.

Don't forget to finish with a barbecue clean down and a generous watering for your plants too - they'll need to look their best for next time.

From plot to pot puts friendship on a plate



Keeping fit, making friends and learning new skills are all amazing benefits of joining a community garden - but enjoying the fruits (or vegetables) of your labour must be the best perk of all.

The Petrus Incredible Edible Garden, in Rochdale, Greater Manchester, has created a cooking and dining space within their community allotment for volunteers and visitors to make use of.

Harvesting from fruit trees, strawberry plants, leafy greens and bountiful brassicas, the fresh food is taken to an outdoor cooking area with a large clay oven and dining table for preparing and serving. This crop of crisp



produce is then whisked into an array of delicious dishes including pizza, baked potatoes and corn on the cob.

Designed with socialising in mind, the allotment has several seating areas, from a gazebo for small groups to sit in the shade, to areas of green space to set up picnic blankets where there's an ethos of relaxation and interaction.

Rachel Bennion, engagement officer for Petrus, says outdoor cooking and dining has become a big part of the

culture of the busy garden. She said: "The most enjoyable thing is the social aspect, and being in touch with nature while you're cooking."

"Joining together to harvest produce, prepare the food, get the fire going and then sitting together socialising over food... that's when the magic happens."

"It prevents people feeling isolated or from marginalised communities because we offer the opportunity to come together and socialise like this."

If you are part of a community garden, or would like to find out more about how to get involved, visit our website at cultivationstreet.com.

OFFER of the week

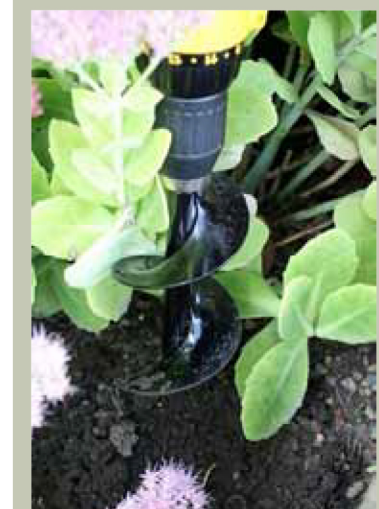
Our Pansy Can Can mixture produces an abundance of vibrant double flowers with unusual waxy ruffled blooms, against a background of deep green foliage.

Plant these stunning flowers in patio containers, pots or borders where they will flower from June to September. UK-grown garden-ready plug plants supplied for instant results. Delivery within 14 days.

You can buy six Pansy Can Can Mixed for £6.99 or order 30 for only £17.47, HALF PRICE.

To order by debit/credit card call **0843 922 5000** quoting **SMTG032** or send a cheque made payable, using blue or black ink, to 'Garden Offers' to: Mirror Pansy Can Can Mixed Offer (SMTG032), PO Box 64, South West District Office, Manchester, M16 9HY or visit mirrorgardenoffers.co.uk.

GADGET



This is a really handy time saver - especially if your soil is compacted, hard clay or gravelly, or you're cultivating a new patch of ground not planted for a long time.

Simply attach the Power Planter garden soil cultivator to your drill (it fits common chuck sizes of 10mm or larger) and you're ready to go with bulbs, shrubs and larger plants.

It's rust proof with a heavy-duty steel shaft. I found it for £45 via amazon.co.uk.