

READY, STEADY... GROW With David Domoney

DAILY EXPRESS

Dig for victory

As we come out of lockdown, with a fresh emphasis on healthy living, here's how YOU can channel the famous wartime campaign in your own patch...

WHETHER small or large, patio or balcony, our outdoor space is a sanctuary

where we can relax, de-stress and enjoy the sights, fragrances, textures – and the tastes! No matter how big your patch, growing plants and veg will bring you joy.

Whether it's window boxes filled with herbs, juicy strawberries cascading from hanging baskets or a proper plot or raised beds, homegrown produce will help you appreciate your food.

My tips for spring and summer planting in this eight-page pullout will transform your garden into an oasis.

And as we come out of lockdown, with a fresh emphasis on the nation's health, I'd like to start a new Dig For Victory crusade to boost healthy eating and honour the wartime battle to keep the nation fed.

Dig for Victory was one of the most important campaigns of the Second World War. With rationing continuing until 1954, long after hostilities ceased, by 1943 the number of allotments had doubled to 1.4 million. Even Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle had veg gardens to help food production.

Then something happened and many of us lost the love of growing our own. Lives got busier, gardens smaller, supermarkets arrived and diets changed.

Thankfully, that love of growing your own has been rekindled. And starting from scratch is not as hard as you think. So let's get digging for victory again. Happy gardening!

Picture of David: HEATHER HAYTON

DIG FOR VICTORY





The heart and

OUR gardens aren't just spaces to relax and de-stress, but also somewhere we can make the most of our free time to grow tasty and nutritious food. Seeing something grow from seed to plant to fork is truly special. And early April is the ideal time to get planting...

PICK PEAS

THERE is nothing like the sweet taste of freshly-picked peas and growing your own is so easy you'll never go back to shop-bought ones. Mangetout and sugarsnap varieties are the easiest to grow. Give them a head-start by sowing seeds indoors in small pots or modular trays.

When they have germinated into seedlings, transplant your baby pea plants to a sunny, well-drained outdoor spot with plenty of peat-free compost or well-rotted manure (raised beds make brilliant, easily accessible veg patches). Remember, they will need a bit of support when growing – canes, sticks or old branches can be used for the tendrils to wrap around and climb up.

Your peas will be ready to harvest from June to October. For the sweetest flavour, eat them straight after picking.

READY TO GROW RADISHES

ADD a peppery zing to your summer salads with radishes. They grow well in pots or can be sown directly in the ground in summer. Sow them in stages throughout the season and you'll have a continuous crop.

Not only will they add a burst of vibrant colour to the veg garden, but they are fast-growing. In just four weeks, you can have your own radishes to harvest.

Start by sowing seeds in their growing spot outdoors in the ground, growbag or container. For big, fleshy radishes, ensure the plants get plenty of moisture so the roots continue to grow without splitting.

A popular variety that gives a harvest of cylindrical radishes with striking red and white roots is 'French Breakfast'.

BECOME A YOU-TUBER

POTATOES are grown from special seed tubers that have been cleared of disease and bred to produce strong, viable new plants.

Before planting, you'll need to prepare your tubers by chitting them – which means placing the potatoes in an egg box in a warm sunny spot like a windowsill until they start sprouting shoots.

When the shoots are about 3cm long, your tubers can be planted out. Potatoes really love a sunny spot as they're not frost hardy. When planted, water them well unless we have particularly wet weather.

Rather than planting them just in the ground, small crops can be grown in large, deep containers. This is a clever way of getting an early batch of delicious new potatoes.

But you can grow them almost anywhere, in the ground, in bags, even in a dustbin as a cheap way of getting started.

There are three types of potatoes to be aware of: earlies, second earlies and maincrops – these names refer to the time they are harvested.

Earlies are the easiest to grow and take up the least space in your garden. But the other two are simple crops and will give you loads of potatoes.

BEET IT

BEETROOT is a great root vegetable to start growing if you're a relative beginner and, when harvested, it's surprisingly versatile in the kitchen. Sowing beetroot in the ground



EASY PEASY: Pea plants and radishes are quick to grow



FIVE VEGETABLE TIPS

★ **The secret is in the soil.** Apply as much well-rotted organic matter as possible. Buy in bags from your neighbourhood garden centre or pick up some from a local farm. Well-rotted manure isn't just a fertiliser, it improves soil structure and provides food for microorganisms.

★ **Crop rotation** involves taking a look at the groups of vegetables and annually rotating the type grown in each bed. Using crop rotation in your vegetable garden will reduce the risk of disease as well as making sure your vegetables have the essential nutrients that they need.

★ **Bear in mind that vegetable are mostly water.** During summer, we tend to get dry spells and our plants can miss out on vital moisture. Consider investing in an irrigation system or have plenty of green breaks, where you water your garden often to ensure there is a regular supply in the soil.

★ **Feeding is incredibly important.** Compost and organic matter won't necessarily supply everything your plants need, but you can incorporate soil additives like superphosphate or sulphate of potash to keep them going by providing extra energy for good harvests.

★ **Keeping an eye out for pests is absolutely essential.** Feeders around your vegetable patch will encourage birds to visit your space and, in return, your feathered friends will help to keep harmful pests under control.

from March to July will give you a continuous crop that ends just before the first frosts. It'll grow equally well in peat-free compost in a container if you're stumped for space. For happy beetroots, you'll need to keep on top of watering to ensure the soil is moist.

Getting a vegetable patch or herb pot going is SOW easy... follow my simple advice to get started and before you know it, you'll be dining out on the fruits of your labour

GROW FOR IT: Raised beds are ideal for starting your veg patch

'Boltardy' has been specifically bred for beginners and ease of growing, bearing deep red roots that have a delicious, sweet taste. Roots can be ready to harvest in as little as seven weeks if picked young, but can also be grown for around 12 weeks. Typically, they should be somewhere between a golf ball and a tennis ball in size. After harvesting, shake off any excess earth but never wash them clean. They may look nicer washed, but they store far better with a bit of mud on them.

GROWBAG YOUR TOMS

WHATEVER the size of your growing space, tomatoes are a great starter crop and

home-grown ones are particularly tasty and nutritious. Growing from seed is incredibly easy, and there are many seed varieties available.

Pick up a packet from a garden centre, a seed tray and seed compost, sprinkle the seeds over the surface of the peat-free compost and they will germinate before you know it.

Once these have grown enough to be handled, they can be transplanted into small pots and, within a couple of weeks, will be big enough to move to a growbag.

A Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics Fruit & Veg Planter growbag or similar is perfect, enabling you to grow bigger and better crops. What I tend to do is cut three holes in the top of the bag and plant straight

soil of your garden

THYME IS ON YOUR SIDE

EVEN if you don't have much space to spare, a window-box or herb pot is a fantastic way of growing goodness to flavour your meals. A container on a balcony or box near your kitchen window will allow you to harvest the herbs straight to your dishes.

SATISFY THE SENSES

THE fragrance and textures of rosemary, sage, basil, bay, thyme, mint and oregano are guaranteed to bring you happiness. What's more, evergreen herbs such as rosemary, sage and lavender will ensure you have an abundance all year round, whilst being great for bees too. Sow annual or biennial herbs like basil, borage, coriander and dill every few weeks through spring and summer for a supply of fresh herbs. Perennial types such as sage, chives and fennel can be sown more permanently where they'll continue to supply you with delicious herbs year in, year out. Just think of the money you could save by growing your own!

GET GROWING

Sow tender seeds such as basil and coriander indoors and plant out when the risk of frost has passed. The rest of the herbs can be sown at the same time indoors or wait until May and sow straight outdoors in containers. Generally, herbs need plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil so ensure they are placed in a prime position. On the other hand, if you are growing an indoor herb garden, a bright windowsill where they get at least four hours of sunlight per day is ideal. Once you've enjoyed an abundance of herbs at your fingertips, you'll never look back.



LITTLE SPROUTS: TV gardener David Domoney, with daughters Alice and Abigail

into the bag. If you don't have the time to grow from seed, young plants can be bought and planted straight into the growbag. From then on, nature does almost everything else. As the plants grow, they will need support from canes.

Pinch off side shoots to keep the energy of the plant in the right place. Feeding regularly during the growing season with an additive like Tomorite will help boost fruit production. But you'll be picking and enjoying them in no time.

CHILLIES

ANOTHER perfect pot crop is chillies. Last year I grew the variety 'Apache' that first produced fruit in summer and continued well into the autumn. I froze my unused

chillies to preserve them so I still have a stock at home. Their fiery flavour makes them great for sauces and as a pizza topping.

Sow seeds and when germinated into seedlings, pot the plants on into 9cm pots. They should be moved outside to help make them hardy.

Eventually, they can be potted on into containers the diameter of an ordinary bar stool where they will continue to grow happily. Keep them watered but don't over-do it and look out for pests like greenfly or blackfly.

SPEEDY SALAD

YOU SIMPLY can't go wrong with growing speedy salad leaves. Rocket, spinach, lettuce are all great crops. Get hold of a large

container the size of a dinner plate and fill it with peat-free compost, before sprinkling half of the salad seeds on the surface. Then, sprinkle some more compost over the top and in a matter of days, the plants will germinate.

Within 14 days you can start harvesting the crunchy, fresh leaves to add to salads, sandwiches and stir fries.

Wait for a second flush of foliage, which can be cropped, then use the other half of the packet to sow another round of seeds for a successive crop of salad leaves. Keep going all summer and you'll never be short of fresh leaves.

This is definitely one to get the children or grandkids involved in, as they are fun, fast and really easy to grow.



Create your own cottage container garden

COTTAGE gardens are great fun and incredibly beautiful, especially during the summer. Most cottage gardens are a combination of shrubs and herbaceous perennials, which flower during the summer months and die back over the winter. But these most eclectic and English of displays are not as difficult to achieve as you may think.

What's a cottage garden without roses? Get started with 'patio rose' varieties that will give you all the beauty of a rose in a compact container. The light orange, peachy flowers of 'Sweet Dream' boast a subtle fragrance and bloom best in full sunlight in any soil type. This small shrub grows to around 50cm tall, so remains nice and dense.

For a pretty pink patio rose, 'Queen Mother' has semi-double flowers and dark, glossy foliage. In a sunny spot, you can enjoy repeat flowering, and so will your bees – attracted to the lightly-fragranced blooms. When potting your roses, choose a compost and fertiliser specifically designed for them. They will deliver exactly the right balance of nutrients to help them flourish.

Most cottage gardens have the taller plants and shrubs at the back of the displays, with the shorter varieties to the front. It's a simple but highly effective design trick.

Cottage gardens are full of blooms and foliage, with a wild aesthetic. So, cram containers full of plants to create that unruly but charming appearance.

A few favourite plants that go particularly well together, including lupins and delphiniums, thistles, and day lilies. Both couple up well in these types of border.

Mix them with flowering shrubs forsythia and flowering current for colour and Philadelphus mock oranges for fragrance. Roses obviously also bring that colour to your garden. Shrub roses are extremely popular in cottage gardens.

Consider planting in some fruit bushes in between your perennials. During the war when food rationing was in place, many people added gooseberries, raspberries and a host of other soft fruit varieties to their gardens. The flowers, foliage and fruit of the bushes will add depth to borders.

THE combination of structured plants like roses and more informal plants like delphiniums gives the border a personality and that's the magic of cottage gardens.

But not only are cottage gardens stunning, but they are functional too. Use containers to plant colourful edible plants.

Chard is attractive and tasty, with stunning leaves that are green and pink-red stalks.

Don't worry if you're working with a patio or balcony, you can still create something special using pots, hanging baskets and planters... just add colour



FIVE FAB FRUIT TIPS

★ **Grow as many fruit bushes as you can.** If you have children, enjoy their excitement when they spot the fruit appearing and, if you're not quick, it'll be all gone by the time you get to look. It's amazing how quick you can eat the fruit off your bushes so try and plant as many as possible.

★ **If this is your first-time growing fruit,** currants are great for beginners. They are the easiest and most tolerant of all fruit. Not only will they thrive in borders, containers, and full sun or partial shade, you can choose between red, white, and black currants for plenty of variety.

★ **Try and keep birds off your fruit bushes if you can.** The best way to prevent them getting their hungry little beaks on your fruit is to use garden centre netting to protect bushes.

★ **Crop your bushes regularly.** As soon as your fruit is ready to harvest, pick fresh and eat straight from the plant. This really is the way to enjoy the best flavour from your crop, and the kids will love it, too.

★ **If you're planning to plant a fruit tree,** research the specific variety and try and add at least two at a time so they can cross pollinate, this can help increase your harvest and fruit size. If space is an issue, there are self-fertile fruit trees available, so ask at your local garden centre and they'll be happy to help.



DELICIOUS: Pots of strawberries. Inset above left, day lilies

'Bright Lights' boasts rainbow-coloured stems and is easy to grow. Sow from March to July and you'll be harvesting tasty and nutritious chard from July to October.

Grow strawberries in a terracotta planters. It's really easy to plant up a strawberry pot, and with a little sunshine you can enjoy great results with minimum effort.

Plant in March to April in a fruit and veg compost, watering well to help them settle in. During the growing season, feed with a liquid potash feed like a tomato fertiliser to boost fruit growth. Growing these type of

edible plants together will have a wonderful effect, the colours and textures complement each other beautifully, and they taste great when you harvest them.

Use containers that match the style, like rustic stone planters.

Unique and repurposed items will also add charm and personality – think old bathtubs, sinks, barrels and buckets. Grouping these containers together helps achieve that classic cottage look.

The main thing to remember when growing in containers is that your plants will

dry out quicker than if they were in the ground. Therefore, it's important to ensure they get enough water. This is especially important if containers are positioned under the eaves of the house, because this can shelter them from the rain. Think about investing in a cheap watering system if this is the case.

Even with a container garden you can create a charming cottage aesthetic. Pack planters with classic varieties for a wild, informal appearance.

Lupins are a cottage garden favourite, as

Pictures: GETTY

Cottage



DIG YOUR OWN COMPOST

COMPOSTING is a natural process that transforms your household waste and garden plants into free, nutrient-rich food for your garden.

There is so much goodness that can come from composting. Not only does it benefit your garden but also your wallet, the environment, and supports your garden ecosystem. By producing your own compost, you're reducing the amount of household waste sent to landfill. Instead, composting puts organic waste directly back into the soil.

Making your own compost is easy, inexpensive and low maintenance and you'll enjoy the rewards.

The process will improve the biodiversity in your garden by putting worms, micro-organisms and insects to work breaking down your waste. As a result, you'll be rewarded with natural, rich compost to help your prized plants and veg flourish.

To get started, try creating a simple square compost bin in your garden using wooden pallets or corrugated iron. These don't tend to have lids and should have slatted sides to keep air circulation at a maximum. But it's a good

idea to cover the top with tarpaulin to protect it from rain. Plastic compost bins are handy because you simply add materials to the top, and there is a hatch at the bottom. Opening this hatch gives access to the compost underneath, whilst the rest of the compost continues to decay from the top down.

Councils often offer these bins with a significant discount to encourage local people to start composting.

Placing your bin directly onto the soil without a base will allow drainage and access to soil organisms to assist with the speed of composting. If the site is on a hard surface, add some soil to the bottom of the compost bin.

Getting to know what can and cannot go in your compost is essential, some materials will attract pests and unwanted bacteria. Avoid waste that is, or has come into contact with, meat, dairy or fish. These can attract rodents and create an unpleasant smell.

And it's not only what's going in, but how much too. You'll need to get to grips with the split of materials, so you have the best balance. Just like any recipe, you need the right ingredients for the best results.

For good compost, you'll need 'green' materials high nitrogen content that are quick to rot down and add moisture to the mix. These include vegetable peelings, tea bags and grass cuttings.

'Brown' materials with high carbon content include small branches, shrub cuttings, cardboard and straw.

Having the right balance of the two is vital for high quality compost. The general ratio is three-parts brown to one-part green, but this can vary as some green materials are higher in nitrogen than others while some brown materials are higher in carbon. Whatever you are adding, break or chop them down into smaller pieces to speed up the process.

You will know when your compost is ready: it'll be a crumbly and dark material that smells earthy and fresh.

Once applied to your garden, it will help soil structure by improving drainage in clay soils and water retention in sandy soils.

It'll also provide the necessary nutrients, including nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.

So, get started on your composting journey. It's a win for your garden, your wallet, and the environment.



DAZZLING: Lupins are a cottage garden classic

They bring height as well as colour, growing to 90cm tall, with flowers rising above the soft leaves. Preferring a slightly acidic soil, they will grow best in an open, light spot with plenty of sun. Pair these with other tall perennials like delphiniums that are another firm favourite. If the blue-purple tones of delphiniums weren't eye-catching enough, their height towering over other plants will be sure to catch your attention.

Both of these plants could use staking as support, either from individual canes or by interlacing with twine for added support.

Another contender for cottage style containers are foxgloves that have nodding tubular flowers. Position the container in dappled shade with soil that is moist but well-drained.

Once flowering is done you can deadhead them or leave them to set seed to be collected and sown into seed trays to propagate your own.

READY, STEADY...GROW



With David Domoney

IT'S WONDERFUL creating a garden space we can enjoy ourselves – but it's even better if there's an abundance of wildlife, too. Incorporating shrubs and plants that attract birds and insects is a no-brainer. Shrubs provide shelter and food with their flowers, foliage and fruits during different seasons and one of the sure signs of spring is the pink and white blooms of blossom.

Prunus trees are perfect for pollinators during spring – their flowers are nectar- and pollen-rich. Then, come autumn their fruit goes down well with birds. Prunus avium is commonly known as wild cherry, and the second part of its botanical name, 'avium', refers to birds who help spread seeds by eating the cherries.

For smaller gardens, try Prunus pendula 'Pendula Rosea', a small weeping cherry, and Prunus amanogawa which has a tall and thin growth habit, making it a great focal point for a tight space. Berberis darwinii (Darwin's barberry) similarly has fantastic floral displays during spring that are enjoyed by pollinators.

The foliage puts on a show all year round with glossy evergreen leaves. In summer, dark blue-black berries are popular with birds. In addition, they are a fantastic choice for hedging and screening, and Japanese barberry 'Atropurpurea Nana', with its thorny stems, provides a safe nesting site for birds.

The easiest way to attract pollinators like butterflies and bees to your garden is to grow their favourite blooms. Pick a variety of plants that flower at different times of the year to ensure there is enough food to keep them happy from early spring to late autumn.

As its name suggests, the butterfly bush or Buddleia is a great choice for our flying friends. It is a fantastically fast-growing deciduous shrub that adds colour and scent to your garden. The long cones of purple flowers are very attractive to butterflies and bees.

Grow in a sunny or partially shaded space with any moist but well-drained soil and the butterfly bush will grow happily and attract peacocks, small tortoiseshells and red admiral butterflies.

ANOTHER purple flowering plant for pollinators is the ever-popular lavender. It's an ideal choice for window boxes and containers. Plant lavender in full sun, near to your windows, balcony or patio, where you can readily appreciate its richly fragrant flowers and foliage.

Keep it looking neat and compact by pruning each year to stop the plant from going leggy. It can quickly grow out of control if not managed properly.

Bees and other pollinating insects will flock to plants like lavender and Echinops ritro (globe thistle) when they flower in spring and summer.

Use these plants to invite wildlife to your garden and increase the biodiversity of your space.

With plants that have pollen and nectar rich flowers and tasty fruits for birds, you'll have a whole host of visitors through the year.

Shrubs up

Encouraging insects, birds and beasts into your garden is a simple way of boosting biodiversity



BLOSSOMING: Prunus Accolade flowering cherry, above. Inset left, a Tortoiseshell butterfly enjoys Buddleia



FAST-GROWING shrubs provide instant impact in the garden – perfect for filling space while slower-growing varieties get established. If you are starting with a blank canvas or hoping to fill some gaps in your beds and borders, these shrubs will give your garden a boost.

Here are six of my favourites. Not only are they generally easy to grow, but most of these are tolerant of many soil types. With these shrubs, you'll guarantee colour and structure in your garden.

Spirea japonica (Japanese spirea) is a beautifully bushy deciduous shrub which blooms clusters of delicate looking pink

flowers over the summer. Perfect for any garden style from city and courtyard spaces to coastal or cottage gardens, they'll grow to about one metre tall in a sunny or partially shaded spot.

Another of my favourites is Ribes sanguineum (flowering currant) which blooms vibrant flowers in spring and summer. The dark red, tubular shaped flowers will add some dramatic colour to your border.

Its compact, upright habit makes it perfect for filling a gap in the border. Keep them

looking their best by deadheading flowers and pruning in late summer to remove dead, damaged, diseased or crossing branches to create an open and healthy framework.

You can't go wrong with the cheery yellow flowers of forsythia which is a woody shrub that packs a punch in spring.

Their hardiness and ease of growth makes them a fantastic choice for an informal flowering hedge.

The 'Fiesta' is a small to medium-sized shrub, with signature yellow blooms in spring. Plant in a sunny spot with well-

drained soil and this hardy plant will grow to 1.5 metres tall and wide.

Evergreen shrubs will bring guaranteed colour all year round.

Mahonia x media (Oregon grape hybrid) has deep green leaves that contrast with the sunny yellow flowers that bloom in spring.

Not only can you enjoy the flowers and their soft fragrance, but pollinators will appreciate them too.

What's more, they grow in any level of sunlight, from full sun to full shade as long as the soil is kept moist, but well-drained.

HOW TO SPRING LOAD YOUR GARDEN WITH THESE FAST-GROWING SHRUBS

Pictures: GETTY; ALAMY

for wildlife



HORTI-HEROES: David Domoney and Express expert Alan Titchmarsh

ROCKERY STARS DIG DEEP

ENJOY tons of more advice on getting your garden set for the summer by tuning into the new ITV1 show *Spring into Summer*.

David Domoney joins *Love Your Garden* co-presenter and Daily Express columnist Alan Titchmarsh, to share gardening hints and tips. The nine-part series will show you ways to engage with nature in whatever space you have available along with practical tips to inspire and help you along.

David says: "Nurturing plants and watching them flourish is one of the joys of Spring. This time of year is great for getting outdoors and appreciating nature. The smell of flowers and foliage, the sight of bright blooms, the different textures of plants, the sound of birds, and of course the taste of delicious harvests – it's a feast for the senses."

With Britons spending record amounts of time in their gardens over the past year, it's become even more important to create a space that you can use to relax, de-stress and enjoy over Spring and summer.

● *Spring into Summer* starts on Monday at 8pm on ITV1

FIVE SUPER SHRUB TIPS

- ★ When planting, ensure the soil is at the same level as it was in the container. Never plant too deep, it can stunt growth and cause disease.
- ★ Always trim to shape. Most shrubs have a tendency to overgrow within the centre. A light prune at the beginning of spring for summer-flowering shrubs will keep them in good shape.
- ★ For maximum bang for your buck, look for three colours when you buy a shrub. Many have different levels and seasons of interest. The labels will show flowers, foliage, and fruit colour, so you can see how the tones and hues of the plant will change throughout the year.
- ★ Fragrance is a sure-fire winner. Introducing scents to your garden will enrich the space and make it a more relaxing and pleasant place to enjoy. If you're buying roses, shop with your nose – smell the fragrances – there are significant differences between them.
- ★ Feeding your shrubs, just like all other plants, is vital for healthy foliage and flowers. Give them a general application at the beginning of the year with something like Miracle-Gro® Growmore combined with pellets slowly release nutrients over a long period.

● *My House Plant Changed My Life: Green wellbeing for the great indoors* by David Domoney (DK, £9.99) is out now. Call Express Bookshop on 01872 562310 or order via www.expressbookshop.co.uk P&P £2.95. Please allow up to 21 days for delivery



For vibrant displays of stems that are very versatile in the garden, look no further than *Cornus alba* (dogwood).

Although they are popular for their bare stems in winter that can be found in fiery tones of orange, red, and yellow, they have great colour all year round.

'Sibirica' has red stems that are borne with green leaves that turn reddish in autumn before falling, and white flowers in spring and summer. Perfect for a low-maintenance garden, they don't ask for much in return for their stunning colour, though some varieties prefer acidic soil conditions. And, finally, the richly-scented

flowers of *Philadelphus* (mock orange) are bound to bring your garden joy. 'Beauclerk' is a stunning variety, with white, bowl-shaped flowers with maroon markings near the centre.

Tolerant of any soil type, it prefers a sunny or partially shaded spot and will grow to around 2.5 metres tall. It's another low maintenance pick that will suit any garden type from coastal gardens to woodland settings.



EASY PLANTING: Putting a shrub into a border is simple



BUZZIN': Pollinators like bees love *Ribes*, or redflower currant



Now YOU grow for it

CULTIVATION Street is Britain's largest national community gardening contest. Now in its amazing ninth year, the campaign highlights the inspiring efforts of school and community gardens across the nation – bringing together volunteer groups in villages, towns and cities to share their love for gardening and its many benefits.

This year I've teamed up with the Daily Express and our main sponsor, Miracle Gro®, to call on YOU to share the very best projects from around the UK and how they inspire green-fingered groups – with £8,000 worth of prizes up for grabs across five brilliant categories.

Year after year, the entries are truly inspiring. During lockdown, many Britons used their gardens for their daily exercise and much-needed fresh air.

They helped keep us motivated, with many gardeners sharing fresh flowers with care homes and others growing produce to help create food packages for vulnerable members of their communities.

We enjoyed a record number of entries in 2020 – many groups entered for the first time with projects which were started during the first lockdown in March.

Eden G community garden, in Edenthorpe, Doncaster, transformed a derelict area of their housing estate into a haven in just five months.

Many of the 30-strong volunteers, who made the shortlist last year, found themselves furloughed and were happy to use their new-found spare time to assist with the incredible project.

Just two months in, the garden had a woodland play area, mud kitchen and a ground-level tree house for children to

Today I'm relaunching my community Cultivation Street gardening campaign with the support of the Daily Express



GLORIOUS: Volunteers from Me 2 – Allotment Angels in Glasgow won the Gardens For Better Health category 2020

enjoy. They also created a sensory zone and wildlife garden for educational purposes, planting buddleia bushes, wildflowers and shrubs to attract birds and pollinators, along with five raised beds.

Across the board, entrants came with a huge variety of stories and backgrounds.

LOCO-MOTIVATOR: The Eliseg Express in a disused station yard in North Wales is the focal point of award-winning Llannerch-y-medd Community Garden



After such an unprecedented year, it was inspiring to see so many people all over the country using their gardens to help others.

Community Garden of the year winner, Tinsley Allotment in Sheffield, helped members of their community who felt isolated and lonely.

The garden has become a hub for locals struggling financially to access fresh fruit and vegetables. The space is also used for social meetings as well as education, with a cosy fire pit and curved benches, as well as a covered area where groups can gather.

Others like Include Me 2 – Allotment Angels, in Glasgow, winners of last year's Gardens For Better Health category, grow more than 40 types of fruit and veg. They have built their garden to cater for those with mental and physical disabilities.

Their garden is fully wheelchair accessible, and mostly created using recycled materials.

THERE isn't a strict list of requirements to enter, it simply must be a school or community garden. We look at each garden's story to see how they are helping their community grow.

Cultivation Street offers free support for new and established community and school gardens, via social media channels and its website. There's advice on children's gardening and gardening for better health.

It also offers continuous gardening tips and advice blogs with ideas on growing, sowing and planting, PR and fundraising advice and children's educational and recreational activities.

There are also step-by-step guides on how to improve and nurture gardens, monthly newsletters, competitions, a designated contact to guide community and school gardens and features in national newspapers and magazines.

The online postcode finder on our website shows more than 300 registered garden centres where you can find your local Cultivation Street Garden Centre Ambassador who is on hand to help with planting suggestions, advice and inspiration. Good luck!

● For more information:
cultivationstreet.com or
Facebook.com/CultivationStreet
Twitter.com/CultivationSt
Instagram @cultivationstreet

THE CATEGORIES

Best School Garden rewards school gardens that enrich the educational environment for children; Best Community garden is for gardening projects bursting with community spirit; and Gardens for Better Health rewards gardens that have a positive impact on the mental or physical health of the local community. In these categories the prizes are, 1st prize: £1,000 and a Miracle Gro hamper; 2nd prize: £500 and a Miracle Gro hamper; 3rd prize: £250 and a Miracle Gro hamper; Two highly-commended prizes also win Miracle Gro hampers. There's also the Sponsor category Gro Your Best, for the most creative display using Miracle-Gro's free bags of compost. Judge's Choice wins a Miracle-Gro Premium Hamper; and the Public Vote winner gets £200. And, our Cultivation Street Garden Centre Ambassador of the Year wins 1st prize: £1,000; 2nd prize: £500; 3rd prize: £250. With eight runners-up receiving £100 each.