

## **Sustainability newsletter – April 2022**

*“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it.” (Psalm 24:1)*

### **3. Plants and gardens**

Welcome to our April hints and tips. This time we focus on ideas to be more eco-friendly in our gardens with a particular focus on small gardens. Anne Sweeney gives us the benefit of her experience.

We hope this will give you some ideas to help you be more sustainable. Maybe there is something here that you could think about trying this spring and summer and enjoy the fruits of your labour!

Like many people living in estate housing I have a small garden, my daughter just has a tiny back courtyard and my mother-in-law lives in a sheltered housing flat. Sadly I found that most of the articles in magazines and newspapers on sustainable growing seem to assume you have acres of land with space to store tons of compost and leave vast areas to 'wild' themselves! So for many people the whole idea seems either irrelevant or an impossible aspiration for when they are wealthier, healthier, or have a lot more time on their hands.

But even for folks in our positions, it's possible to make tiny changes that can have a big impact and simultaneously give a lot of pleasure. I want to start with some of the things we three have actually done ourselves and know will work with minimal effort!

#### **Gardening gifts**

'What can I give you for Christmas/birthday?' Is a question easily answered in this context - a bee or insect hotel or a bird box. These are small, pretty and hang on the outside wall taking up very little space. Right now, I'm looking at a pair of blue-tits starting to build a nest in my bird box. The insect/bee hotels house many helpful pollinators so don't worry that you'll end up with a garden full of 'pests' if you put one up!



#### **Living herbs**

The next very simple change is to buy 'living lettuce/herbs' when these are available in the supermarket. These are the ones with their roots still on, not pre-cut and washed. They tend to be very thickly sown and actually contain a large number of young plants. If you use them one whole plant at a time by cutting it off at soil level the ones left continue to grow so you don't end up throwing out half a pack of salad every week as they don't go 'off' in the same way. When you end up with just one plant left you can let it grow quite big and then use just a couple of leaves at a time for sandwiches & salads. This saves a lot of money too!

#### **Pots and hanging baskets**

It's possible to grow herbs and vegetables from seed in pots. Some examples are tomatoes, radishes, salad onions, rocket and salad leaves. You can find 'cut and come again' salad seeds where you pick the outside leaves and the plants continue to grow. Although a garden centre will have a wider range, seeds can be found in Wilko. For some tips, see [www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/containers](http://www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/containers)

### Edible planting

If you do have a garden/yard consider replacing some of the hedging and plants with edible ones. This won't make it look like an allotment! I suspect that very few people will actually notice and you get the benefits. So here are some obvious ones to start with.

Many people have climbers like clematis, but how about trying an edible climber instead/as well? I suggest green beans, especially the ones with the pretty red & white flowers, cucumber, peas or nasturtium (the leaves are like peppery lettuce). If you want something permanent I suggest thornless bramble, which you tie in like clematis, but which is a mass of beautiful pink flowers in late Spring and dripping with sweet berries ready to top your ice-cream and Eton Mess in summer.



### Edible edging

If are looking for little edging plants for your borders my suggestion is that you don't waste your money, time & effort on bedding like lobelias which have probably been grown in peat in commercial heated greenhouses and certainly will be sold in plastic pots. Instead how about trying chives with their purple Pom-poms, strawberries, thyme and marjoram. If you get the little 'wild' strawberries you won't even need to cut off the runners every year and the flowers and fruits are so pretty and sweet! Thyme & marjoram are a mass of flowers in early summer, smell gorgeous when you rub a couple of leaves and just need a light clipping each spring, as well as being delicious to eat. No effort needed for those of you rushed off your feet as they don't need watering in hot weather and they come up year after year all by themselves!

### Hedging

Finally, if you have a box hedge or one in a plant pot it may well sadly be affected by the current box blight and be dying. I suggest that you replace it with an edible hedge instead that is both more interesting to look at and supports far more wildlife. How about bay, sage, rosemary, lavender and gooseberry? Bay can be trained like topiary or trimmed so it grows bushy like box. Sage has the most gorgeous flowers as well as being edible. Rosemary can act as a backing for cut flowers as well as being edible and feeding the first honey-bees to emerge with its pretty mauve flowers.

Lavender will attract flocks of finches after the seeds to eat in autumn & spring as well as having that heady scent that reminds me of summer holidays in France. You can even get pretty red Gooseberries and thornless ones, so don't be put off by being shredded as a child! Best of all is a hedge made of all of these turn about so you get lovely flowers from early spring onwards as well as food for yourself and so much pleasure from watching the myriad of birds, butterflies and insects that land on them. An autumn clip is all that's needed to keep them in check.



So I hope this has given you a few ideas to get started. As I said, they are tiny changes that can make a big change for the better both for you and for the wildlife around.

We will be providing tips on a variety of topics over the coming months, so if you have any you'd like to share, please let us know by emailing them to [jwilks@jwa-consultancy.co.uk](mailto:jwilks@jwa-consultancy.co.uk).