



Notes from my garden

Alexandra Campbell explains how to make your garden easier to access.

Too Late!

We're now fully into the birds' nesting season, which means you shouldn't prune trees where birds could be nesting. It is, in fact, illegal to do so. So if you have a tree you meant to prune, you'll have to wait until August. The exception is any tree in the prunus (cherry) family, which need pruning in June. Well, that's one thing off the "to do" list for this month – have a cup of tea instead.



Photographs by Alexandra Campbell and iStock

If you're beginning to find gardening difficult because of a health issue, there are ways to make it easier. I've recently chatted to Gardening for the Disabled, a charity based in Kent who offer funding, practical help and advice for those with physical or mental problems.

And even if everyone in your household is currently fully fit, there are some sensible steps you can take to make gardening safer or easier.

Raised beds are the number one way to make gardening easier for most people.

"We get asked for raised beds more than anything else," Rosie Kefford of Gardening for the Disabled says.

Raised beds really help if you have problems with bending, and they make gardening possible for wheelchair users.



They're also very useful for people who have problems with balance, or who can only stand for short periods, as you can sit while you garden.

Even raising a bed by a foot or two can make it easier to garden, but raised beds at table height are probably the best.

And if I can add a safety note – low raised beds can be a trip hazard.

Gardening for the Disabled's clients often get their raised beds from Harrod Horticultural or Woodblock.co.uk.

The next most important thing to consider if you want

to make gardening easier and safer are the levels in your garden. Steps – especially badly made ones – are impossible for wheelchairs, and difficult for people with balance or sight issues.

One common problem with garden steps is that architects or builders make them with the same dimensions as stairs inside. This is too steep for any garden.

Steps indoors measure 17-18 cm up (the riser) while the step itself needs to be 22-24 cm deep. In a garden, the steps should be lower – no more than



House Plant Inspiration

The RHS and DK Books have just published the "Practical House Plant" book, RRP £14.99. It's full of ideas and tips on displaying house plants. There are wonderful photos of house plant filled interiors, plus all you could want on the practical side, including how to propagate house plants, house plant diseases and which house plant will grow well where. Great for any garden lover wanting to grow more indoors.



Weeding Help

My list of jobs to do in the garden boils down to weeding, weeding and weeding at this time of year. My other half is adamant that he doesn't understand plants so he can't help with the weeding as he would pull out plants I wanted to keep.

It has only taken me 26 years together to come up with the answer, which is "Everything growing in the path is a weed. You weed the paths and I'll weed the beds." This approach could work with children and grandchildren, too.

15 cm up.

And each step needs to be at least 30 cm deep. Steps should also be equal – don't mix high or shallow steps with low or deep ones.

Even if everyone in your family is as nimble as a mountain goat, safe garden steps are really important.

A handrail can help, too, if anyone is a little wobbly. The charity has recently helped an MS sufferer to have her uneven steps replaced with safer ones and to have a handrail added.

She says that "being able to go out in the garden again made me feel that there was a future."

Gardening for the Disabled has also given grants for access ramps with handrails.

"Councils will often adapt a property for someone who gets ill but they don't extend that help to the garden."

Surfaces are another issue. Gravel is impossible for any kind of wheels – I find it

difficult to get a wheelbarrow across a gravel surface, let alone a buggy or a wheelchair. And wheelchairs don't cross lawns easily, either.

However, you don't necessarily have to get rid of all your lovely green grass. Gardening for the Disabled has also given grants for lawn mesh (from Sure-green.co.uk).

Lawn mesh gives a flat, stable surface that is wheel-friendly but which grass can grow through.

Finally, there are many good lightweight tool ranges today (try Fiskars and Kent & Stowe).

Gardening for the Disabled clients with more severe difficulties, such as stroke victims, have also often benefited from using Active Hands gripping aids (Activehands.com).

Gardening for the Disabled is 50 years old this year, and needs more funds to help more people. See <https://goo.gl/iouGXC.uk>.



Growing Some New Varieties

I'm sowing lots of seeds at the moment, especially for the veg patch. We don't have a greenhouse, so I start a bit later than many gardeners as some seeds don't get enough light on window-sills to grow well. This year I asked fellow gardeners on Twitter for the one vegetable they wouldn't be without. It needed to be tasty and easy to grow.

I expected lots of tried-and-trusted favourites, but in fact, I heard about unusual varieties of veg that have done really well for my fellow gardeners. Perhaps the most interesting was Salsola soda, otherwise known as Friar's Beard or saltwort. It's like a mixture between spinach and seaweed, and I can't wait to see how it turns out.

The beetroot lovers universally said that golden beetroots have a better flavour than the traditional red kinds. Try "Burpees Golden" or "Boldor". I had thought golden beetroot might be a bit of a fad, but I'm going to try growing them this year.

Among the "must-have" favourites were kale, Swiss chard and climbing beans – no surprises there. But I must add kalettes or flower sprouts. These were created by combining Brussels sprouts and kale, and even Brussels sprout haters love them. They do take quite a long time from seed to harvest – I've just planted the first seeds now and don't expect to eat them till November. But they are very useful in the dead of winter when there's not much else around.

Most of these seeds are available from Thompson & Morgan, Mr Fothergill's and Franchi Seeds of Italy.

Try something a little different this year.



Visit Alexandra's blog online at www.themiddlesizedgarden.co.uk