



The future in our hands

Our gardens are all being affected by climate change, but many of us have little idea what to do about it. So we're launching our Growing Greener campaign, along with experts in all areas of eco-friendly gardening, to harness the collective might of the UK's 22m gardeners and show you how to take positive action now

Wildlife Editor **Kate Bradbury** launches our campaign with 10 ways all of us can get involved, while we introduce our experts (opposite) and invite you to share your views in a major new research project

Isn't all gardening 'green'? Isn't simply being outside, growing and tending plants, a green thing to do? Well, not when you add petrol-hungry lawnmowers and leaf-blowers into the mix, along with peat-based compost, plastic pots and synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. It's not very green at all. But it could be. From the plants and compost we buy, to the plastic and pesticides we don't, from the way we cut our lawns and trim our hedges, to how we dispose of our waste, there are many ways we can green up our gardening game, for the good of us all.

You may think you won't make much difference as an individual. But there are 22 million gardens in the UK, with countless other balconies,

courtyards and windowsills. Imagine if we all did things a little greener, how much less plastic we would use and carbon dioxide (CO₂) we could store? Imagine how much water we could save and how many more wild species, such as hedgehogs and bees, we could help keep alive?

Every single one of us has the power to make a difference, both in what we grow and how we grow it – from the largest estate to the tiniest

“From the compost we buy to the plastic we don't, we can all green up our gardening game”

balcony. And there's never been a more important time to act.

Our panel of experts (opposite) will guide us all through the coming year with insights into what's changing – from the plants that could literally save our planet, to improving air quality and soil depletion, helping wildlife through changing times and using every inch of our gardens as sources of food – for ourselves, for pollinators and for at-risk wildlife.

So read on to find out how you can get involved in our Growing Greener campaign, what you can start doing now and what we'll cover in the coming months to help you become a greener gardener – for a healthier future for you, your family AND the planet.

MEET THE EXPERTS



Marian Boswall is a leading landscape architect who focuses on how gardening can heal us and the planet

“For me, sustainable gardening means kindness: to ourselves and the land. Think of how many life forms we support and are supported by in the garden. We need to look after each other to survive and thrive.”



Kate Bradbury is our Wildlife Editor and author of *The Wildlife Gardener*

“Helping wildlife is my passion – everything I do has bees, birds, caterpillars and hedgehogs in mind. I believe we gardeners can save species by connecting our gardens to create the largest nature reserve in Britain. Do join me!”



Prof. Nigel Dunnett designs sustainable planting for public spaces, including the London Olympic Park in 2008

“I've always tried to garden sustainably, particularly when it comes to conserving water, drought-tolerant planting and trying to soak up rainfall when we get too much!”



Dr Tijana Blanusa leads the RHS's research into the many environmental benefits plants offer

“I help gardeners make planting choices that not only look and feel good, but benefit the environment too. What we all grow in our gardens and how we manage them can have a significant environmental impact.”



Prof. Tim Lang is Professor Emeritus of Food Policy at City University of London and president of Garden Organic

“Fruit and veg gardens can be hubs for biodiversity, soil and water management. Sustainable gardening is a way of thinking about gardening, not just doing it. Plant. Nurture. Eat. Enjoy!”

ILLUSTRATION: ELIN BROKENSHAW. GREENER FACTS SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CLIMATOLOGY, JULY 2021

Greener facts

- 2020 was the UK's third warmest, fifth wettest and eighth sunniest on record
- 2011-2020 was on average 1.1°C warmer than 1961-1990
- 2011-2020 had 25% fewer days of air frost than 1961-1990



10 STEPS to a greener garden

If you're keen to grow greener, but not sure where to start, here are some simple suggestions. However big or small your garden, we have constructive actions you can take right now that don't require dramatic changes or lots of extra effort. So just pick one or two from our list and give them a try. We'll cover all of these topics in more detail in the coming months

1 Just grow

Raising plants, and more of them, is a key weapon in the fight against climate change. Plants absorb CO₂, remove pollutants from the air and hold water in the soil, helping to prevent further climate change, improve air quality and prevent flooding. Trees are key but so too are the layers of shrubs and perennials underneath. And don't forget your pond – a well-planted pond stores more CO₂ than an equivalent area of trees. Why not start sowing seeds indoors now – see [GardenersWorld.com/sow-indoors](https://www.gardenersworld.com/sow-indoors)

2 Farm at home

Make food miles a thing of the past by growing your own veg and enjoying seasonal eating. Start with easy crops like salad leaves, fast-growing herbs, courgettes and climbing beans. If you have a greenhouse or sheltered patio, try tomatoes and peppers. You won't be totally self-sufficient, but it all adds up! Start off chillies now on a warm windowsill. And if you love cut flowers at home, grow your own – imported flowers come with eye-watering air miles, so learn to love your local blooms. For our beginners' veg-growing advice, see [GardenersWorld.com/easy-veg](https://www.gardenersworld.com/easy-veg)

3 Turn grey to green

Cover every surface in your garden with plants, for so many benefits, including saving money on your heating! Hedges trap pollution before it enters your home, while plants insulate walls, warming in winter and cooling in summer. And the more plants we grow, the more CO₂ is absorbed – so cover ugly fences with climbers, add arches and obelisks for more vertical growing space, use windowboxes and green up patios or concrete yards with containers. For lots of container growing tips, go to [GardenersWorld.com/pots-containers](https://www.gardenersworld.com/pots-containers)

4 Reduce use of pesticides and fertilisers

Pesticides include insecticides, herbicides and fungicides – together they're a deadly cocktail that kills insects and the plants they need. Then, along with synthetic fertilisers, they may eventually leach into streams and rivers, causing

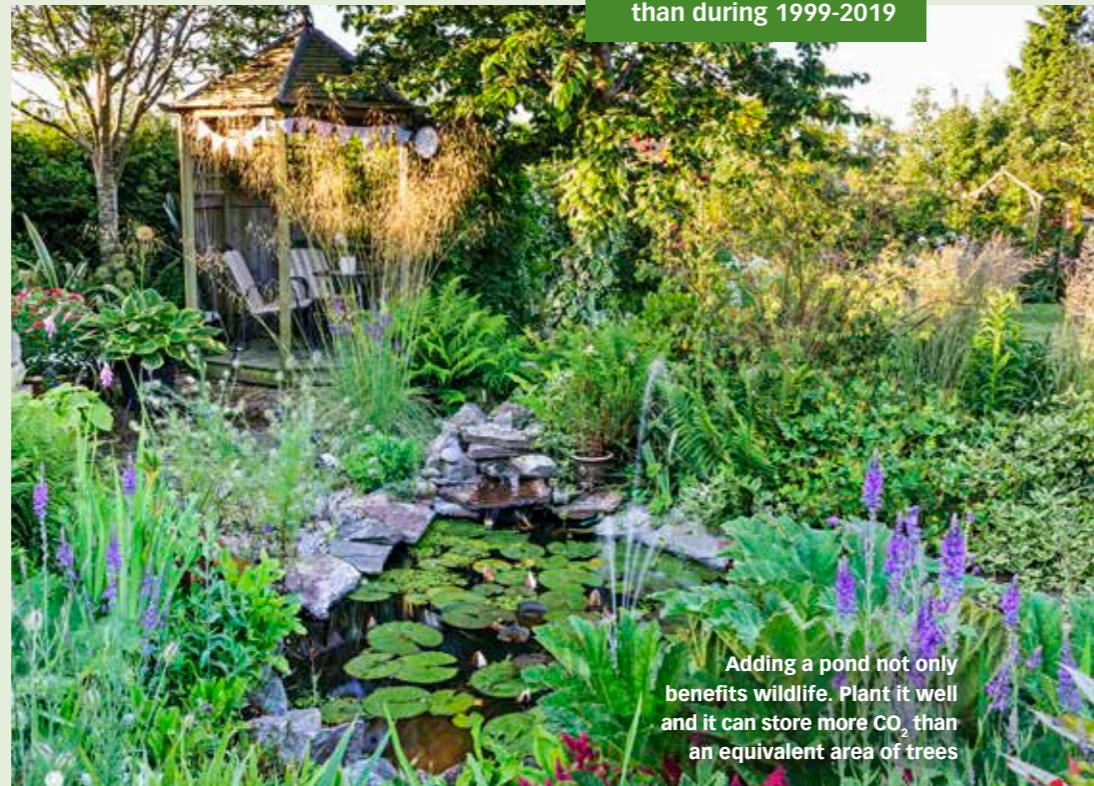
Greener facts

- In 2020 the UK had the fifth wettest winter and fifth driest spring, and England had the driest May since 1862
- In 2011-2020 the UK was 9% wetter than in 1961-1990

to add more, or if you don't have any, invest in one now. Go to [GardenersWorld.com/save-water](https://www.gardenersworld.com/save-water) for more water-saving ideas.

6 Help wildlife

Many of our native fauna are declining, and climate change will push them further towards



Adding a pond not only benefits wildlife. Plant it well and it can store more CO₂ than an equivalent area of trees

algal blooms and killing fish and invertebrates. Switch to organic methods instead – the new year is a perfect time to start afresh! Go to [GardenersWorld.com/organic](https://www.gardenersworld.com/organic) for lots of tips.

5 Save water

Climate change may lead to more droughts and hosepipe bans, but also more flooding. Tap water is a precious resource, so try to use as little as you can. Most of us have at least one water butt to store rainwater, but you may be able



extinction. By gardening for wildlife, we can help stabilise or even reverse declines. If we all grow bee-friendly flowers and caterpillar food plants, make spaces for hedgehogs and dig a pond, we would give vulnerable species a helping hand. Act now, to prepare for many creatures emerging from hibernation soon, by introducing suitable plants and creating useful habitats. Get lots of wildlife gardening advice at [GardenersWorld.com/wildlife](https://www.gardenersworld.com/wildlife)

7 Reduce, reuse and recycle

Do you really need to buy new gardening tools and gadgets? By looking after your current tools and propagating equipment better, they will last longer. Start now, with a new-year tool-cleaning regime – simply take the time to clean your tools after each use and store them properly, and you'll keep them working for longer, meaning you buy and throw away less. Watch our video on looking after wooden tools at [GardenersWorld.com/tool-care](https://www.gardenersworld.com/tool-care)

Greener facts

- In 1991-2020, rainfall increased by 12% (winter) and 7% (summer) compared to 1961-1990
- In 2020, trees carried leaves for 6.2 days longer, on average, than during 1999-2019

8 Cut your plastic dependence

Plastics are derived from fossil fuels. They are difficult to recycle effectively and pollute the environment when disposed of. By buying fewer plastic products, you'll use less fossil fuel and create less pollution. And by cleaning and reusing the plastic gardening items you already have, you'll extend their life and consume less. But how much do you use? Conduct a 'plastic audit' today and see how you can use less. Get tips on reducing your plastic dependence at [GardenersWorld.com/plastic](https://www.gardenersworld.com/plastic)

9 Compost more and better

Composting is one of the best things you can do for the planet. Why? Because it's a natural way to regenerate. However small your garden, make space for a bin to recycle green waste. You'll have a free source of nutritious compost, while providing homes for wildlife and reducing waste sent to landfill. See our beginners' guide to composting on p56 and at [GardenersWorld.com/composting](https://www.gardenersworld.com/composting)



10 Less digging and less peat

Climate change is influenced by what lies beneath our feet. Peat bogs store vast amounts of carbon – more per square metre than equivalent forest. So switching to peat-free compost will help to keep carbon where it belongs – in the ground! Soil also stores carbon and digging can release it, so explore 'no-dig' gardening at [GardenersWorld.com/no-dig](https://www.gardenersworld.com/no-dig)



Try biodegradable pots rather than plastic, or make your own from newspaper or old milk cartons



Growing your own salads is quick, easy and means you have super-fresh, organic food with no packaging or air miles

DOING YOUR BIT

Out of the UK population, gardeners are among the most concerned to act positively for the environment. In a recent survey*, 39% of you said you are doing so already – compared to just 14% of the national population. You recycle more, actively avoid waste where you can, and are engaging with environmental issues – and this is no surprise because, as Monty has shared on these pages, gardens are "on the front line of climate change".

Your actions in numbers

GW Magazine readers are more likely to definitely agree that they are willing to make lifestyle changes, even compromises, to help the environment:

- 91% of you make a conscious effort to **recycle**, versus 79% of the UK population in general
- 57% of you definitely agree it's our **collective duty**, versus 43% generally
- 48% strongly agree **single-use plastics** should be banned, versus 31% generally
- 68% make an effort to cut down on **water use**, versus 58% generally
- 79% strive to buy **sustainably sourced products**, versus 67% generally

Be part of the big picture

We're inviting you all to share what you're doing right now for the environment and your fears for the future – whatever your

commitment to greener gardening. So whether you're an 'eco-leader' already changing your approach, an 'eco-worrier' who is concerned but uncertain, or frankly find it all a fad that will pass – it's your voice we want to hear in this huge research project of gardeners' attitudes to Growing Greener in 2022.

Simply go to bit.ly/growinggreenerjan to complete our simple questionnaire – it'll take only a few minutes. We'll report back over the coming months.

Climate issues on the BBC

■ Discover more from the BBC's science and environment correspondents to help us all understand the bigger picture at bit.ly/BBC-climate-change



■ And look out for David Attenborough's five-part *Green Planet* series on BBC2 this month



COMING UP in Growing Greener

- **FEBRUARY: The power of plants** How to make the most of plants to help wildlife, enjoy better, greener food, clean our air and save on heating.
- **MARCH: Food for good** Why even a small bed of veg, herbs or fruit can save air miles, reduce pesticide usage and cut waste.
- **APRIL: Designed for life** No space is too small to benefit from a greener approach, from courtyards upwards – with your health and that of the planet at its heart.
- **And more...** How to support more wildlife, improve your soil, make better compost, reduce pesticides, peat and plastics, and give trees the space they – and you – deserve. Go to [GardenersWorld.com/growing-greener](https://www.gardenersworld.com/growing-greener) to join our campaign.

