



# Newsletter

January 2021

...for the birds!



Welcome to your TCV Newsletter packed full of ideas, tips and activities for all ages!

## Take 5 on your winter walk!

The 5 steps to wellbeing or Take 5 are great pointers to help us look after our mental health. Next time you are out for your winter walk try and build in these principles and engage with nature.

If you or someone you know needs support check out [www.mindyourhead.org.uk](http://www.mindyourhead.org.uk)

### GIVE

You feel better when you contribute to something. Doesn't have to be money - it could be time, attention or support. Not only giving to others, it can be giving to yourself.

### KEEP LEARNING

Keep your mind active, not just traditional 'learning'. Read that information board you always pass. Learn a little about the wildlife and trees that are around you.

### CONNECT

Connect with a person or nature. Say hello to a passerby - even a bird or a tree. Making a connection with something or someone is very important currently.

### TAKE NOTICE

Slow down a bit, be in the moment and take notice of the of the small details such as the sounds and smells. Try and pick out the little things you don't always see.

### BE ACTIVE

Simply go for a walk. It can be short or long, flat or mountainous, just get out into nature. This will also have a huge benefit on your physical health.

**TIP:** For walks in your local area check out the Walk NI website <https://walkni.com/>

## Jobs in the garden

As the evenings start to get longer so the garden slowly starts to awaken. With the emergence of snowdrops heralding the imminent arrival of Spring, there are still jobs that can be done in preparation.

### TOOLS

If you have not already done so, give your garden tools some TLC. Clean them well with a stiff brush to get rid of any mud, sharpen shears and secateurs and oil any moving parts. Start up the lawnmower and run it for 5 minutes to keep it working properly.

### ROSES

Bare root rose season runs until March. Providing the soil isn't frozen, if you plant your roses now, they should put on a display of blooms that lasts all summer long.

### TUBERS

Check on stored Dahlia or Canna tubers. Cut away any damaged parts such as rot or mice nibbles.

### BIRD BATH

Fresh water is essential for birds, not only as a source of drinking water to help digest those dry seeds, but also as a bath to help keep plumage in tip top condition. Requiring only a few simple materials, it can be easy to make your own. Check here for some ideas; How to make a bird bath - Discover Wildlife at [tinyurl.com/discoverwildlife](http://tinyurl.com/discoverwildlife)

### HOUSEPLANTS

To encourage a profusion of blooms next year, once the Christmas cacti has finished flowering, they may need a rest. When the last flower has dropped let them dry out for about 6 weeks. They may develop a pink tinge and shrivel a bit but don't allow it to become too dehydrated. Then give it a good soak and repot into a slightly larger pot. Water and feed to encourage new growth.

Before watering your other houseplants check the compost is almost dry. It can be easy to overwater in the winter.



BLUBBERIDGE/PIKABAY



KONEW/PIKABAY



MICHAEL KAULER/PIKABAY



SHINCHIGASU/PIKABAY



ANDREW MARTIN/PIKABAY

# Garden haven

Gardens are our own personal nature reserve and have never been more important than right now. Garden birds are perhaps the first experience of close-up wildlife many of us have. The colours, the songs and the quirky behaviours are fascinating, and their antics very often take place right under our noses. Our gardens provide invaluable havens for these birds and there are many ways that we can improve our space to cater for and encourage birds to take up residence.

As well as a water supply for bathing and drinking, a variety of food sources is necessary to provide for the wide range of tastes, preferences and needs that many birds have. When planning your garden for the coming season consider plants that will provide nutritious protein snacks for growing chicks and insect loving birds. Including plants for seeds – sunflower, teasel; plants for fruits – bramble, holly; plants that attract insects – buddleia, coneflower, as well as herbs, will entice a wide variety of birds to your garden.

Nest boxes are a great addition as they help to replace natural habitats that have been destroyed. See our plans on how to build your own nest box and see who comes to visit.



AVBYXU/519966

### TOOLS

- **Drill and screws** or **hammer and nails**
- **Pencil and tape measure/ruler**
- **Carpentry saw**
- **Ladder**
- Optional: **Staple gun**
- Optional: **Hole saw**

### MATERIALS

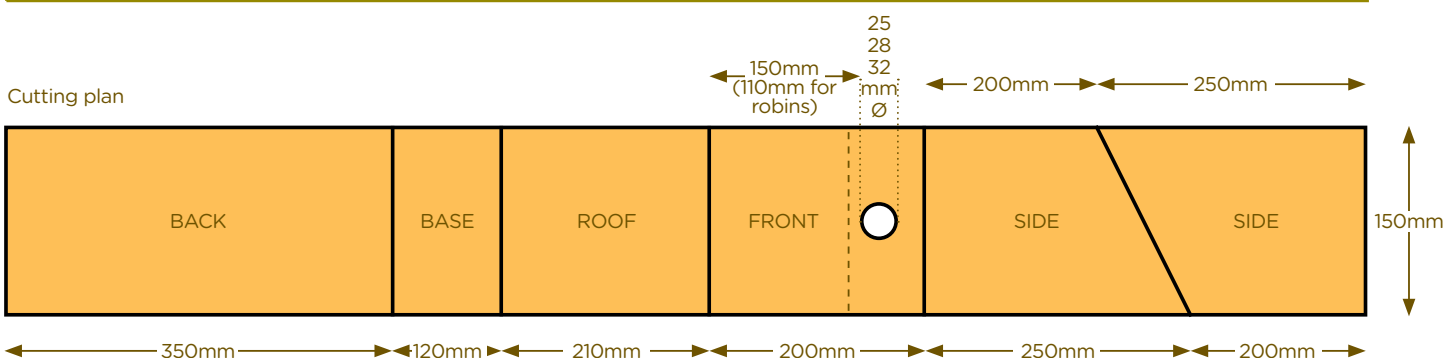
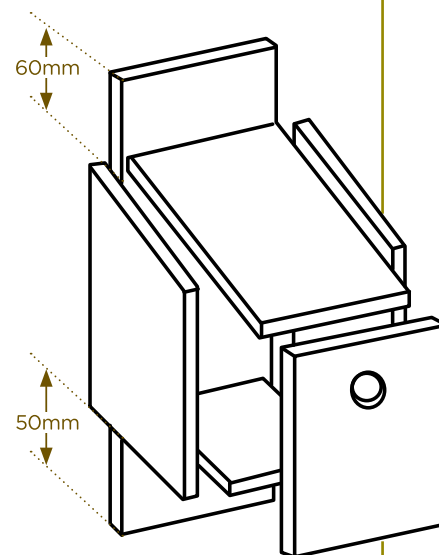
- Rubber for hinged lid (pond liner or bicycle inner tube will do)
- Plank of untreated wood (dimensions as close as possible to W 15cm, D 1.5cm and L 1.4m)

All measurements are in millimetres.

The front can be either straight across (see dotted line on the plan at 110 mm) – suitable for robins, flycatchers and wagtails.

If you wish to drill a hole:

- 25mm diameter: small birds such as blue tits.
- 27mm diameter (draw round a 10 pence piece): a great tit.
- 30mm diameter: sparrow, starling.





# RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch

## 29-31 January 2021

Now in its 42nd year the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch is a UK wide initiative. It has been a vital survey that has helped identify challenges faced by wildlife. It was one of the first studies to recognize the decline in song thrushes dropping 76% since 1979.

### GET INVOLVED!

All you need to do is choose an hour between Friday 29th and Sunday 31st January. So, whether you're an early bird or a night owl, you can still take part. Get a quiet space where you get a good view of your garden or green space then get comfy and start recording!

It is a great activity to take part in at home, by yourself or with your household young or old!

### TIPS ON HOW TO IDENTIFY A BIRD

- SIZE** If this is tricky, try and compare to the size of a bird that you know.
- SHAPE** Check out the beak, legs and tail.
- COLOUR** Take notes of any patches of bright colours or patterns.
- HABITAT** Where did you see it.

There are some great resources on the RSPB site to help identify the birds, so no matter your age or ability you can join in. Sign up to the Big Garden Birdwatch through their website. Just follow this link to sign up [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch)



JANS CANON-WIKIMEDIA

**BIRD FEEDER TIP:** Keep your feeder clean to help stop the spread of disease in birds, so just wash with warm soapy water.

## Go green, help the environment!

### LOVE A TAKEAWAY COFFEE? FLASK-UP!

So do 7 million other people in the UK. In just a single day, 7 million coffee cups are thrown away. Many of these coffee cups are made from polystyrene complete with plastic lids. Bring a flask or reusable cup on your next walk instead of using disposable coffee cups. A great way to reduce your disposable waste, and coffee vendors would be only too happy to refill yours.



FREEPHOTOS/PIXABAY

### SUPER SOCKS

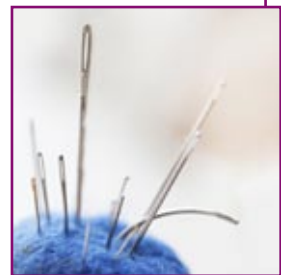
Stop throwing out old and mismatched socks, and instead make a fuzzy sock snake that kids will love cuddling. Or why not make a draft excluder, one of the quickest and cheapest ways to keep your home warmer. By making your home more efficient at trapping in the heat, you will cut your heating bills and use less gas or oil.



CONGER DESIGN/PIXABAY

### REPAIRING IS BEAUTIFUL

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of putting broken pottery pieces back together with gold - built on the idea that in embracing flaws and imperfections, you can create an even stronger, more beautiful piece! Why not mend something that has broken instead of buying new. Eg that shirt that has a hole in it - embroider a flower on it. Or, the trousers with a rip - patch it up with a funky patch.



INA HOEIJSTRA/PIXABAY

### DITCH THE PLASTIC WRAP!

Though the portable, cheap wrap keeps leftovers fresh for longer, there are several catches: Plastic wrap contributes to the larger plastic pollution crisis, it's difficult to recycle, and it's made from potentially harmful chemicals, especially as they break down in the environment. Wax wraps or reusable containers are a great alternative that can be used time and time again.



JUN YANG/PIXABAY



## Spotlight on seasonal veg – Leeks

With long white stems merging into green leaves, leeks belong to the Allium family of vegetables which also includes onions, garlic and shallots.

Leeks are a versatile vegetable with a delicious flavour that is milder and sweeter than onions and which enhances a variety of dishes. They are also a nutritional bomb with potential health benefits.

Leeks contain vitamins A, C & E, Folate, vitamin K and a host of B vitamins, all of which are essential nutrients supporting different functions within the body and the immune system.

Leeks also provide a vast range of minerals in varying amounts. They are a particularly rich source of manganese

which aids the metabolism of carbohydrates and fats. They are also a good source of the plant version of iron.

Including leeks in a healthy, varied diet may potentially lower the risk of some cancers and help to lower blood pressure as well as contributing to good eye health.

Traditionally associated with Wales, where it is said they were worshipped for their medicinal properties, leeks have a long and varied history. They were part of the Ancient Egyptians diet from as far back as 2000BC. The Greek physician, Hippocrates, prescribed leeks as a cure for nosebleeds and Shakespeare mentions them in his play, Henry V. Today leeks are known as the national symbol of Wales and are proudly sported by Welsh people every St David's Day, 1st March.

### OVEN BAKED LEEK AND BACON RISOTTO

#### Ingredients

*1 tbsp olive oil  
6 rashers smoked back bacon, roughly chopped  
2 leeks, halved lengthways and finely sliced  
250g risotto rice  
700ml hot chicken or vegetable stock  
175g frozen peas  
3 tbsp soft cheese  
zest 1 lemon*

#### Method

- Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6. Tip the oil into an ovenproof casserole dish. Add bacon and fry for 2 mins. Add the leeks and cook until soft, but not coloured, for about 4-5 mins. Tip in rice and cook for 1 min more. Pour over stock. Cover and place in the oven



for 20 mins, stirring halfway.

- When rice is just tender and all liquid is absorbed, remove from oven and stir in peas. Place back in oven for 2 mins more. Remove and stir in cheese. Add zest and season.

# Seasonal eating

What's better on a chilly winter's day than a comforting bowl of hot soup to warm you up? Its easily transportable too, just pop it in a flask to take with you if you're out on a long walk or hike, or for a healthy lunch at work. Make the most of other fruits and vegetables currently in season with these recipes.

## CLASSIC LEEK AND POTATO SOUP

### Ingredients

*1 tbsp vegetable oil*  
*1 onion, sliced*  
*225g/8oz potatoes, cubed*  
*2 medium leeks, sliced*  
*1.2 litres/2 pints vegetable stock*  
*150ml/5fl oz half fat crème fraiche (optional)*  
*Salt and freshly ground black pepper*

### Method

- Heat the oil in a large pan and add the onions, potatoes and leeks. Cook for 3-4 minutes until starting to soften.
- Add the vegetable stock and bring to the boil. Season well and simmer until the vegetables are tender.
- Whizz with a hand blender until smooth, or, if you prefer a chunkier soup, smash the potatoes against the side of the pan with the back of a spoon.
- Serve, topped with the crème fraiche, if using, and freshly baked wheaten bread.



KATHY DAWSON



KATHY DAWSON

## ROOT VEGETABLE SOUP

Note: you can use any hard, starchy root vegetable for this simple soup, eg, carrots, parsnips, sweet potato, squash, pumpkin, beetroot, celeriac.

### Ingredients

*2 tbsp vegetable oil*  
*2 onions, roughly chopped*  
*800g/1lb 12oz root vegetables, peeled and cut into roughly 2cm/ half-inch chunks*  
*2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced*  
*2 vegetable or chicken stock cubes*  
*1 litre/1.5 pint water*  
*Ground black pepper*  
*Freshly chopped parsley to serve (optional)*

### Method

- Heat the oil in a large, non-stick saucepan and fry the onions for 6-8 minutes or until softened and beginning to brown, stirring regularly.
- Add the vegetable chunks and cook for 5 minutes more, stirring occasionally. Stir in the garlic and cook for a few seconds more.
- Crumble over the stock cubes, add the water and bring to the boil. Reduce heat to a simmer, cover pan and cook for about 20 minutes or until the vegetables are soft.
- Remove the pan from the heat and blitz with a hand blender until silky smooth. If the soup is too thick, add a splash of just boiled water. Season with black pepper.
- Serve with freshly chopped parsley, if using, and some warm crusty bread.



## ORANGE MARMALADE

### Ingredients

1.25kg/2lb 12oz Seville oranges  
1.5kg/3lb 5oz granulated sugar

### Method

- Scrub the oranges and place the whole fruits in a large stainless steel pan or preserving pan.
- Cover with 2.25 litres/4 pints water, then bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for about an hour until the fruit is soft.
- Remove the oranges from the pan with a slotted spoon and set aside to cool. Carefully measure out 1.7 litres/3 pints of the cooking liquid, discarding any extra or topping up with water as necessary. Return the liquid to the pan.
- When the oranges are cool enough to handle, cut them in half and scoop out the flesh, pith and pips into a bowl. Pour this into a muslin bag and secure with kitchen string. Add to the pan.
- Chop the peel into shreds as fine as you like and add to the pan. Set the pan over a low heat and add the sugar. Stir until the sugar is dissolved.
- Bring the marmalade to a rolling boil for 10-15 minutes. Skim off any orange scum that rises to the surface or stir in a knob of butter to disperse it.
- Test for setting point by dropping a little of the mixture onto a chilled saucer, leave for a moment, then push your finger into the marmalade. If it wrinkles it is ready.
- When the marmalade is ready, remove the pan from the heat. Carefully ladle into hot sterilised jars (a sterilised jam funnel makes this much easier) leaving approximately 1cm/half inch space at the top of the jar. Twist the lids on the hot jars to seal. The marmalade will continue to thicken up as it cools.

For other healthy recipes and tips, check out [www.choosetolivebetter.com](http://www.choosetolivebetter.com)

## WARM CAULIFLOWER SALAD

### Ingredients

1 cauliflower, broken into florets  
2 tbsp olive oil  
1 red onion, thinly sliced  
3 tbsp sherry vinegar  
1.5 tbsp honey  
3 tbsp raisins  
small bunch dill, snipped  
3 tbsp toasted, flaked almond  
50g baby spinach

### Method

- Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6. Toss the cauliflower with the olive oil, season and roast for 15 mins. Stir in the red onion and carry on roasting for 15-20 mins more until tender.
- While the cauliflower is roasting, mix the vinegar, honey and raisins with some seasoning.
- When the cauliflower is done, stir in the dressing, dill, almonds and spinach, and serve.



The Public Health Agency are asking for help in getting important health messages out into the community. If you

are a community organisation, faith group or business with an audience of your own and this is something you can do.

**Subscribe at [tinyurl.com/phasignup](http://tinyurl.com/phasignup)**

By subscribing, the PHA will email you important health messages and simple ways to share them. Messages will include items you can email to your contacts or to share to social media, as well as items which can be printed and inserted into 'packs', copied into newsletters or displayed.

You will be able to unsubscribe at any time.

Future messages will cover latest COVID developments, and other health and wellbeing issues, such as mental health, healthy weight, smoking, drugs and alcohol.

# Natural explorers

Our journey continues to discover more about some of our amazing local animals and plants...



Unfortunately our garden birds have predators too and this bird is one to watch, the Sparrowhawk. Sparrowhawks and songbirds have existed side by side for thousands of years.

### The Sparrowhawk

- a small, broad winged raptor with a long tail and long yellow legs. They are perfectly formed for

hunting birds in confined spaces like dense woodland, so gardens are perfect hunting grounds.

Female Sparrowhawks are about twice the weight of the males and are therefore more likely to take larger prey like pigeons. The male is a more agile hunter and typically hunts small birds like tits, finches and sparrows.

They like to nest in dense woodland and breed between May and July.

VON WRIGHT BROS./RAWPIXEL

## Word Search

F	I	N	C	H	E	S	D	F	G	T
S	I	W	O	O	C	N	N	R	A	I
P	R	T	B	R	A	P	T	O	R	T
A	D	A	G	L	T	M	D	I	D	S
R	T	L	D	K	E	S	S	T	E	A
R	A	O	I	S	H	A	N	S	N	K
O	O	N	B	R	E	A	H	U	N	T
W	T	S	O	D	E	N	S	A	P	E
S	P	A	R	R	O	W	H	A	W	K

Can you find the following words in the grid

- SPARROWHAWK**
- TITS**
- WOODLAND**
- RAPTOR**
- GARDENS**
- FINCHES**
- TALONS**
- SPARROWS**

## Recycled carton bird feeder



### WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- 1Ltr empty juice/milk carton
- Acrylic paints
- Paint brushes
- Sharp craft knife (adult to use)
- Large Googly eyes
- Wild bird seed mix
- Wooden skewer
- String

### METHOD

Paint carton until all writing and pictures are covered.

If making a monster one, stick on the googly eyes, if not paint on the rest of your design.

Ask an adult to cut the opening for the bird to access the seed and to pierce little holes on either side at the top of the carton to tie the string through and two little holes down near the opening to push the skewer through.

Fill with bird seed and hang it in tree.



Did you try any of the activities in this newsletter? Share your photos with us on our Facebook page:

### The Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland

Have any tips, handy hints or recipes? Share these with us too. We would love to hear from you! Keep an eye out for an upcoming freebie!