



Make sure your tools are 'spring ready'

It's time to spring into action

Bring those green fingers into play: The jobs you need to do in the garden right now

With springtime buds in full bloom, your patch of greenery is probably a hub of activity...

"Making sure your garden is 'spring ready' is a wonderful way to get yourself outside and enjoy the early spring sunshine," encourages David Domoney, gardener and chartered horticulturist (pictured above).

"I always look forward to the early spring months, as there are so many excuses to get outside – and in the garden."

One of the most important overall gardening jobs you should focus on, regardless of whether it's your flowering beds or your vegetable patch, is weeding, says David.

"Making sure you are on top of perennial and annual weeds is essential to guaranteeing a healthy garden patch.

"Hoing a larger area will be ideal for dislodging small and annual garden weeds, whilst weeding by hand will help you to remove more established weeds," he advises.

"You could use a digging or border fork for this, or a more directed approach, using a hand fork to wrestle those weeds out from the root."

As well as the weeding, there are plenty of other tasks to start in your vegetable patch.

Now is the perfect time to plant onions, shallots and garlic sets – you can do this successionaly to produce batches of this crop throughout the year.

Also, you can plant your second-early and main crop pota-

toes at this time, after any risk of frost has passed.

"The second earlies, 'new' potatoes, will be ready to harvest in July and August, and the main crop potatoes can be enjoyed from August to October, perfect for warm meals in cooler temperatures," says David.

"Additionally, early and mid April is the ideal time for sowing flowering companions for your vegetable plots, such as pot marigolds, whose fragrant foliage can deter some garden pests from your crops," he adds.

Home & Garden

Finding your forever home

Could a derelict property become your dream home? Lucy Alexander of A Place In The Sun (pictured below) shares her top tips.

The housing market has had a tough time in recent months, with some would-be buyers waiting to see what the future holds.

But if your property search is proving tricky, it could be worth bearing in mind that your 'forever home' might be sitting right under your nose – perhaps on your daily walk or commute to work, even. It may just need a little bit of tender loving care to give it a new lease of life.

More than half (52%) of people pass by an abandoned building every week, according to research by Cenuswide for property lender Together.

For some people, the idea of buying a property that isn't turnkey ready may seem daunting. But it may be a chance to really put your own stamp on a property and totally transform it.

TV presenter Lucy Alexander, known for shows including BBC1's Homes Under The Hammer and Channel 4's A Place In The Sun, has teamed up with Together to offer some tips for those looking for a hidden gem.

The campaign aims to highlight the scope and scale of the UK's abandoned and derelict buildings, and the opportunities out there for restoration and redevelopment.

If the property you're interested in looks to have been abandoned, Lucy says: "Firstly, it's important to work out who the owner of the property is."

Local word-of-mouth can be key here.

"I would be chatting to all the neighbours, checking the deeds of the property, subscribing to auctioneers' and estate agents' details as well," Lucy says.

"You can always pop next door to the abandoned building and maybe ask a neighbour,

a shop owner in the road... Everybody knows everything on the street, usually it wouldn't take long, if you're going to the local pub, things like that.

"Once an owner is identified, the next step is to contact them to make a formal offer," Lucy adds.

She says checking energy use is also key – and can help to avoid any nasty surprises further down the line.

She suggests: "Find out is it (the property) on mains gas, is it oil-fired? The energy usage would be part of your main homework."

"Confirming how much energy and running costs of an existing building before you purchase is critical. Set ample time aside to contact the supplier and check you are on the best energy tariff for the property."

Lucy also recommends engaging with your local authority. When contacting them, she suggests having a list of questions already prepared, joking: "It's like when you go and see a doctor."

She adds: "After purchasing an abandoned or derelict property, it is important to think about planning permission."

This is especially true with larger scale refurbishments that may involve a change-of-use to the property," she adds.

Ultimately, Lucy suggests: "If you've decided you want to purchase a hidden gem, I would say go for it. You can turn an ugly duckling into a swan."



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