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DOWNLOAD

"If you look the right way, you can see that the whole
world is a garden"

Frances Hodgson Burnett, The Secret Garden

This April

GET INTO THE GARDEN

With your Kids

A gardening task for every day of the month with
low-cost, easy ideas for even the tiniest of plots.

No special equipment needed, just show up
and get stuck in.

(suitable for ages 4-10)

Tamsin Westhorpe

DISCOVER 30 DAYS OF FUN

in the garden this April

We all know that being stuck at home with children is a challenge, so I've put together a list of gardening projects for April as a little gift to the community in this difficult time. I've always loved to garden, ever since I was a child; I remember the thrill of seeing things come to life and I'm excited to share that with you all.

These projects are low-cost and require little or no gardening skills. I hope that these activities will bring some happiness whether you have your own garden or just space for a couple of pots on a windowsill. Please share your results on twitter and Instagram – we'd love to spread the joy of gardening so be sure to tag us.

Supervision is required for all projects and gardening gloves are recommended if you don't want to be constantly scrubbing fingernails!

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APRIL

First things first. What will you grow?

Have fun choosing some seeds together and grab a bag of compost. If you don't have either to hand, your local garden centre or nursery might deliver, or try thompson-morgan.com for seeds.

You can always use soil from the garden (remove any stones or lumps) and ask around if someone has any opened packets of seed they could post to you. Quick results are what you're after, so I'd recommend having cress, lettuce, rocket, radishes, marigolds and nasturtiums on your list. But there's so many to choose from, and seed is quite cheap, so do experiment.



1st Make your own plant pots

Look through your recycling and pull out plastic pots and bottles. Yoghurt pots are perfect and milk bottles too (a 4-pint milk carton can be cut in half). In fact, anything can be used as a plant pot if you remember to put a few holes in the bottom for drainage.

2nd Create great labels

Before you start planting, let's get inventive and make some labels for your pots of seeds. Then you'll remember what you've sown and where. An old wooden lolly stick works a treat. Using a pencil, or a marker pen, write the name of the seed and the date you sowed it. Alternatively find a large flat stone and paint the details on it. You can use clear varnish on top, or just use nail polish that won't wash off in the rain!

3rd Sow some salad

Now that you have your pots, seed and labels ready to go it's time to sow. Fill your pots with compost, making sure to rub out any lumps. Gently firm it down but don't press too hard. Sprinkle a few lettuce, rocket or basil seeds on the surface and then lightly water. Place your seeds in a sunny porch or on a sunny doorstep or windowsill. Don't throw the seed packet away.

4th Decorate a seed box

Now you have a collection of half-used packets of seed so you'll need to store them. Find a small box (a children's shoe box is a great size) and decorate it. You could paint flowers and fruits on the box or stick on plant pictures cut out of magazines. Don't forget to put 'Seed Store' on the lid. Keep your seed box in a dry place.

5th Mark out your patch

If you have a garden, then growing outside is great. Choose a sunny spot together and prepare the soil. Adults can turn the soil over, children can pick out the stones and pull up the weeds. Mark out your patch with the stones.

6th Slug patrol

This is a really fun project to do after tea. At dusk, head out with a torch and a bucket or plastic pot and search for snails who want to nibble the leaves of your plants and munch on your seedlings. Put the bucket near the bird table and the birds will eat them.



7th Breakfast birdwatching

Set your alarm to get up early. Find a place inside where you can see your bucket of snails. Sit very quietly and see how many birds you spot. If you have a camera take some photos and then spend some time trying to identify them. Once you know which birds they are, you can try to identify their birdsong. Every bird sings differently. The Woodland Trust website has a good guide to help you.

8th Make cane-toppers

If you watched the birds yesterday feeding on the snails then you will have noticed that they left the shells behind. Go out and see if you can find the empty shells. These are very handy for putting on the end of garden canes and pea sticks, so you don't accidentally poke your eyes when weeding. Corks from wine bottles work too!

9th Home-made Easter cards

This is the last day this year to post an Easter card. Pick a few flowers from the garden, put them in a jam jar and enjoy drawing them. Primroses are easy to draw and so are daffodils. Have fun and create your own style on your cards. Then take a walk to the post box. Who do you know that would appreciate your art?

10th An easy-to-grow Easter gift

Have boiled eggs for breakfast and when you're finished, keep your empty eggshells in their egg cups, or pop them back in the empty egg box. Soak some cotton wool or paper towel in cold water and squeeze out the excess water. Carefully place the damp material in the eggshell. Now sprinkle some cress seed inside. Draw a happy face on the eggshells with a felt-tip pen. You can give your Egg Head to someone in the family so they can watch its 'hair' grow. Don't let it dry out and in 7–14 days, the Egg Heads will have sprouted cress, which you can cut to go in an egg sandwich. Yum!

11th Design an Easter garden

Using a shallow plant pot, an old plate or a tray, have fun creating a miniature Easter garden. Collect small stones, moss, flowers and twigs to make a mini garden on a plate. What tiny people or animals might live in a world like that? Let your imagination run wild and make up a story.

12th Easter egg hunt

Hopefully you will have a few wrapped mini eggs in the house. Ask an adult to hide them in the garden so you can go on a chocolatey hunt. A scavenger hunt is also lots of fun – make a list of things people need to find like 'a red flower', 'something blue' and so on. You can give prizes for the most unusual finds.

13th Hunt for tree seedlings

There is treasure in the garden if you look hard enough. Search very carefully in the flower beds and between cracks in paving for baby tree seedlings. If you spot one, carefully pull or dig them up with a trowel and put them in one of your recycled pots to grow on. The world always needs more trees.

14th Bark rubbing

Grab a few pieces of paper and some crayons (waxy ones work best) and find yourself a tree or shrub. Place the paper against the trunk and then rub over the paper with the crayon. The pattern of the bark will end up on your paper. This is great fun. Don't forget to hug the tree afterwards! You can also do this on other objects like stones or even flower pots.



15th Toilet roll seed tubes

Don't throw out the empty cardboard tubes from finished toilet rolls. Save them up and place them upright in a shoe box. Then you can fill the tubes with compost and push a broad bean seed into each one. Water them and once the seeds have formed mini plants they can be planted outside in larger pots or the garden. (Yes, the rolls and the box will get soggy, so probably best to place them on a plastic tray.)

16th Experiment with propagation

Different plants are propagated in different ways. Propagation is how gardeners produce new plants for free. Conduct your own mini experiment by taking cuttings from all sorts of plants in the garden and then placing them in jam jars filled with water. You'll soon see if they start to produce roots or not.

17th Have a window ledge feast

Only got room for a window box? Make the most of it this year by sowing radish. Radish is quick to germinate and grow and best of all, it's really tasty. It can take as little as 4 weeks from sowing before you are munching on your own crunchy and delicious home-grown radishes.

18th Start a compost heap

You don't need a big garden to create a compost heap, just enough space for a plastic dustbin. The bin will need holes in the bottom before you add anything to it. The secret to a good compost is a mixture of different materials. You can compost tea bags, shredded cardboard and paper, weeds, prunings, grass clippings and vegetable peelings. (Avoid composting cooked food, though, or your friendly neighbourhood rats will visit!)

19th Become a worm charmer

In a large jug of water, add a little washing up liquid. Swish it up with your hand and then pour over one area of the lawn. Watch and wait and soon you'll see worms come wiggling up to the surface.

20th Watch what worms do

Using a large recycled clear plastic lemonade bottle, you can create a wormery. Cut off the top $\frac{1}{4}$ of the bottle and fill the rest with alternate layers of sand, soil and compost. Collect some worms you've charmed from the garden and place them on top of the soil. Now wrap the outside of the bottle in a dark coloured paper to make it dark inside. Over the next week, unwrap it now and again to watch the worms make their way down the wormery. Remember to release them as soon as they have made it to the bottom.

21st Sandpit secrets

If you have a sandpit, use a garden rake to level and smooth the sand. In the centre of the sandpit, place a tray of bird seed or breadcrumbs. The next day you can head out to see how many bird footprints you can find in the sand. Are they all the same?

22nd Nesting time

Birds nest at any time between February and August but the peak time is right now. To help them build a home, collect together some materials they'd use to make their nests. If you have a dog, give them a brush! Then you can place a tray of hair, twigs and dried grass on the garden table or lawn. If you're in the country, sheep's wool is the best prize you can give a bird. Another very helpful thing to do is make a muddy puddle in the garden because birds use mud to stick their nest together. Watch from a distance as they enjoy what you've offered.

23rd Easy to sow flowers

Hardy Annuals are seeds that can be sprinkled directly onto the soil outside. Suttons (suttons.co.uk) have a wonderful range of children's seeds and within this range the nasturtiums are so easy to sow direct. Just choose your flowerbed or pot, sprinkle then water, watch and wait.



24th Make a bird scarer

We love birds visiting the garden but birds love seed, the more freshly sown the better! To keep your seed safe, make a bird scarer to place near your newly sown seeds. You could go the whole hog and create a scarecrow, but an easier alternative is to tie old CDs or DVDs to garden canes. This works a treat.

25th Flower-pressing fun

Collect some of your favourite flowers from the garden. Find some heavy books and place a piece of kitchen paper inside the centre pages. Evenly spread the flowers out on it so that they aren't touching. Cover them with a second piece of kitchen paper. Close the book carefully and place several heavy books on top in a pile. In a few weeks, take a look. Pressed flowers are great to add into a scrapbook.

26th Make a mud pie

Grab any old kitchen pans and spoons and make a mud pie. What ingredients can you add? How much water makes it sticky or crumbly? How will you serve the pie? You'll definitely get messy but that's all part of the fun.

27th Start a garden diary

Keep a scrapbook or journal of what's happening in the garden. What did you do today? What did you see? Write what's in flower, how many birds you saw and what the weather was like. Take photographs too. You could even make a video journal or dictate your diary.

28th Be a weather forecaster

If you have a garden thermometer take a reading from it at the same time every day and note it down. Take one reading after breakfast, one after lunch and one after tea and discover for yourself the warmest part of the day. You could also collect rainwater in containers and take a reading each day by measuring how much it rains.

29th Play pick-up sticks

Collect a good bundle of twigs. You'll need about 30 and they should be about 10cm long. Place them in a random pile and see how many sticks you can collect without moving another. Don't cheat!

30th Paint stones

Turn unwanted stones into ladybirds. These cheery insects are easy to paint because of their bright colour scheme and symmetrical pattern. If you only have indoor paint that's fine, just keep your bugs inside. You can make a family of ladybirds and pop one into the pot of every houseplant you have.





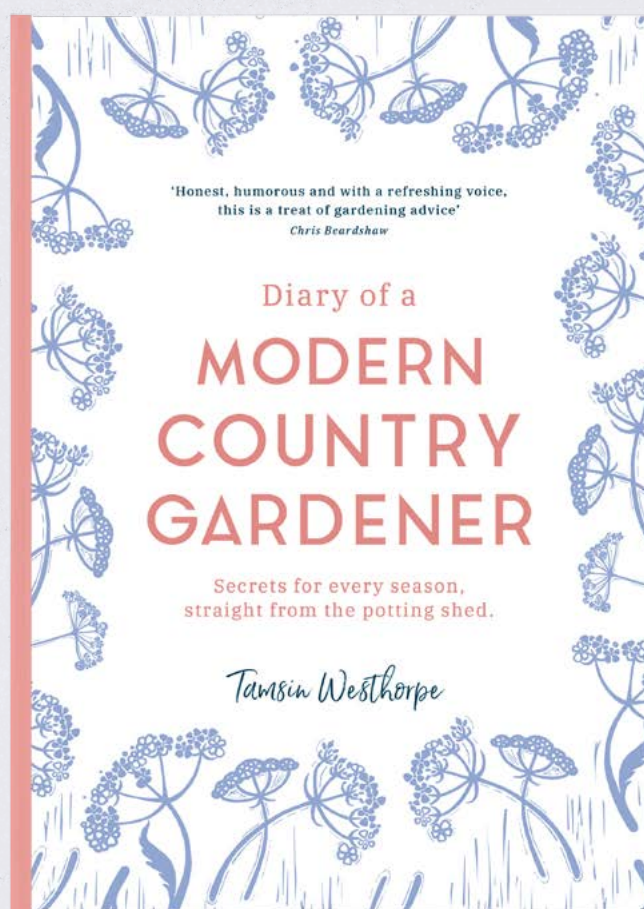
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tamsin is a hands-on gardener at her family garden, Stockton Bury in Herefordshire, which regularly features in round-ups of the best UK open gardens to visit. She is also a public speaker, podcast presenter and RHS judge. Her proudest achievements are being a judge at RHS Chelsea and the fact she started her career as a green keeper at a young age. Tamsin is also a features writer for newspapers and magazines and former editor of The English Garden and deputy editor of Amateur Gardening magazine. She is a prolific lecturer at home and abroad and her aim is to make her audiences laugh.

She is the author of *Diary of a Modern Country Gardener*, a funny, light-hearted and chatty look at everyday life as a gardener out in all weathers. Packed with tips and tricks for all seasons, it was Book of the Week in the Daily Mail and has been described as 'better than beta-blockers for stress'.

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