

In the garden

Seasonal ideas for your outdoor space

DASH OF BLUE

Flitting high around trees and vegetation on gentle spring days, the Holly Blue is one of the first butterflies of the year to emerge. In the early days of the season, as its name suggests, it can be found concentrated around holly bushes, which provide nourishment for the caterpillars of the season's generation. The Holly Blue, *Celastrina argiolus*, can be reliably identified by the pale silvery blue underside of its wings, with small black dots, but never any orange as in other blue species. The upper wing is a bright blue, edged with black, with a broader dark edge on females. It is a common sight in gardens throughout England and Wales, particularly in the south, flying much higher than other blue species, which tend to stay closer to the ground. The flash of its bright wings are a welcome sign that days are warming and growing lighter.



HELPING HEDGEHOGS

When Jo Sara began designing mosaic items for the garden, she wanted her creations to be both beautiful and helpful to wildlife. This pretty water dish for hedgehogs is heavy enough not to tip up as they drink. It measures 21cm in diameter and is 4.5cm tall, giving a water depth of 3cm. The dish is made of frost-resistant materials which repel mould and algae.

Rainbow hedgehog mosaic water dish £33, www.josara.co.uk



SOWING WILD FLOWERS

Native wild flowers will provide colour and pollen for bees throughout the summer. As long as the ground is well prepared, they are easy to start off and maintain. The soil is dug over and any plants or roots diligently removed. No fertiliser is required as grasses thrive in nutrient-rich soil and can outcompete any flowers. The soil is then raked to a crumbly consistency and the seeds scattered over evenly by hand. Including some sand in the mix can help make it easier to see where they fall. Many seeds need sunlight to germinate so are not buried, but can be gently raked over to provide some protection and prevent them blowing away. The area is then watered and left alone, except in dry spells when more watering may be necessary. In summer, the blooms will create a vibrant, colourful patch.



HEART OF THE SEASON

The pink pendant flowers of bleeding heart are suspended from a slender arching stem, elegantly lined up side-by-side. This is an early-flowering perennial, first appearing in gardens in April and continuing until June. Its heart-shaped flowers are a rich fuchsia pink at the base, rounding to a creamy, paler pink at the top, with mainly white inner petals hanging below. These pretty flowers sprout from a hardy plant which can withstand temperatures as low as -20°C. Bleeding heart, *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*, does well in either bright sunlight or dappled shade and rich fertile soil. This should be well watered to ensure the ground is kept moist. With the same care, it can also be grown in containers. These bright and unusual flowers make a striking sight in a border when mixed with other later flowering plants to retain interest as the year progresses.



FORAGING IN THE GRASS

A pair of chickens search for seed in the grass, their movements captured in rusted metal. Cut from steel sheets, they have been rusted by hand to a unique finish. Steve and Sara Raven started their business creating unique animals and sculptures after retiring from farming, having been inspired by their work and the surrounding Fenland countryside. Once installed, the hens require no care and can be observed and enjoyed all year round.

Rusty metal hen £16 each, www.rustyrooster.co.uk

GOODNESS FROM WEEDS

Dandelions have a long taproot which absorbs many minerals from the ground, particularly potassium and magnesium. Though often unwelcome in the garden, they can be used in a rich, simple fertiliser. After lifting, the flower, leaves and root are stored in a bucket. The plants are packed tightly and when the bucket is two thirds full, are weighed down with a brick or rock. The bucket is then topped up with rainwater and covered with a loose-fitting lid or mesh to keep out flies and capture the pungent smell. The mixture will ferment, creating carbon dioxide, so an airtight lid is not recommended. It is then left for a minimum of three days and a maximum of two weeks. Before using, it should be strained to remove any seeds and diluted to one tenth of its strength. Other weeds, such as nettles and horsetail, can also be included.

