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Editor's notes...



Hello and welcome to this month's edition of **VISION**RayleighWickFord. We're into February now - that fateful month when New Year's resolutions begin to scurry away like a thief in the night, never to be seen again. I admit that rarely does the start of a year go by without me promising to make either my own or someone else's life healthier or happier. This year I didn't, even though I'll be the first to admit that my fitness levels have taken a dive after the buoyant festive period.

Nik Allen, Editor

That's not to say I don't want to get back to a routine of regular exercise. I've already started, in fact. I'm on my bike every other day, choosing to walk over driving when I can and have cut out those sneaky snacks.

The difference is that I want to get away from this being a New Year thing. I know so many people fall down on a resolution and believe the game is up. Not true! Not only should we take failure in life

as just a temporary blip, but we should also be solid in the belief that good habits, new initiatives and a drive for self-improvement can and should happen at any time of the year.

My advice is therefore to do something good in 2023, but use the whole of 2023 to do it.

Nik Allen

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KITITIP ON BILIN

WOMBLING FREE, THE WOMBLES OF WIMBLEDON COMMON ARE WE

o celebrate 50 years since *The Wombles* first appeared on our screens, we explore how Orinoco and his furry chums were well ahead of their time.

The early 1970s was an era of rising food and fuel costs, political and social unrest, and dubious fashion choices. It also marked the moment when the very first episode of *The Wombles* aired, at 5.40pm on February 5, 1973, on BBC One.

Based on Elizabeth Beresford MBE's 1968 beloved children's book, the five-minute stopmotion masterpiece was titled *Orinoco and the Big Black Umbrella*, and was voiced by British actor Bernard Cribbins OBE. It told of a blustery day on Wimbledon Common, which corresponds perfectly with the story of how the Wombles came to be. When Beresford took her daughter Kate for a walk on the same common, the young girl mispronounced it as 'Wombledon', and the rest is history.

'There is still much to be appreciated and even learned from *The Wombles*'

Though we have moved on in terms of animation styles and childhood heroes, there is still much to be appreciated and even learned from *The Wombles*. Back in 1973, Britain didn't have recycling bins and nationwide initiatives to reduce waste, making the Womble mission to "make good use of bad rubbish" an almost revolutionary concept.

The seven Wombles, including Great Uncle Bulgaria, Orinoco and Madame Cholet, were highly creative in the way they recycled and gathered rubbish – even fronting a Keep Britain Tidy campaign – and would certainly be applauded by environmental activists today.

So let's mark their half-century on our television screens not just by introducing our children to their adorable 35 mini-adventures – and, of course, their hit theme tune *The Wombling Song* – but also by passing on their teachings.

From Wimbledon Common and beyond, let's keep making "good use of bad rubbish".

MOW YOUR SMOW

Who doesn't like that crunching noise as you walk on a patch of fresh snow? And what place doesn't look a little prettier with snowy roofs and trees? But what exactly is snow, and how does it happen?

WHAT'S SNOW MADE FROM?

When it's 0°C or under, the water vapour in clouds freezes into minute ice crystals. These crystals stick together. And if enough of them do it, they become heavy enough to fall out of the cloud and float to the ground as snowflakes.

HOW COLD DOES IT HAVE TO BE TO SNOW?

It won't snow unless it's 2°C or under. The snow will be powdery if the temperature is 0°C or below and the air is dry. When the temperature's slightly warmer and the atmosphere is moist, the flakes will be bigger because they melt around the edges and stick together. This sort of snow is perfect for making snowballs and snowmen.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SNOW, SLEET AND HAIL?

If the water vapour in the clouds freezes but the air temperature exceeds 2°C, the snowflakes melt and become sleet. At around 5°C, it'll become rain. Hail forms in thunderclouds when water droplets are blown up to the tops of the cloud, where they freeze. When the updraughts in the thunderclouds can't hold up the frozen droplets, they fall to the ground as hailstones.

WHAT DO SNOWFLAKES LOOK LIKE?

Under a microscope, snowflakes can look very different from each other. It all depends on how the ice crystals form and stick together. In 1951, the International Commission on Snow and Ice divided snowflakes into seven main types. These are plates, stellar crystals, columns, needles, spatial dendrites, capped columns and irregular forms.

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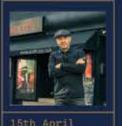


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The Dave

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Trio



Kenny Thomas



22nd April Jaki Graham





29th April Rose Windross







Kenny Thomas

5 STYLISH WAYS TO STORE

Mether you can't resist treating yourself to the latest celebrity cookbook or you were gifted a few culinary classics at Christmas, you may be wondering how you can store and showcase your latest additions.

LINE THEM UP AGAINST THE BACKSPLASH

If you want to proudly display your collection of cookbooks for all to see, then why not line them all up in a row against your backsplash? Providing easy access and a visually appealing feature, this is a great option for all kitchens.

ADD BUILT-IN SHELVES TO THE ISLAND

A kitchen island provides the perfect space for storing all your favourite cookbooks, especially if you have a vast collection. Choose to either take advantage of existing shelving or incorporate new storage space that accommodates all your books.

STORE THEM IN THE PANTRY

Pantries are a godsend for many families, providing additional space and somewhere to keep items out of sight. If you're lucky enough to have one in your home, then designate an eye-level shelf for your cookbook collection so that all your favourite recipes are within reach.

DISPLAY YOUR FAVOURITE WITH A BOOK HOLDER

If you have a go-to cookbook that you use on a regular basis, you can keep this on display at all times using a simple book holder. Enabling you to create the perfect culinary focal point in your kitchen, you can even prop the book open at your favourite recipe.

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HOW TO CHECK IF YOUR ROOF TILES ARE KEEPING OUT THE ELEMENTS IN WINTER

oof tiles are said to last for anything between 30 and 50 years which, considering the battering they take from weather conditions, is a notable achievement.

However, while we may think we can leave our roofing materials to their own devices, proper and regular maintenance of these terracotta, clay, concrete, slate and metal tiles is essential - after all, without them, we would be living a rather soggy existence.

They are most susceptible to damage after a storm, though can be compromised even from birds dropping stones from above.

Here are four ways to check your roof tiles are still in order.

GROUNDED

Look around your garden and pathways for any fragments of tiles that have slipped from your roof. If you find anything on ground level that should be on the roof, you have a problem.

I SPY

Get a pair of binoculars and examine the roof from a reasonable vantage point. This is an easy way to spot chipped or cracked tiles. Once the deterioration begins, the damage will only worsen over time, so it's vital to get this repaired as soon as possible.

MOSS BROS

You may also spy moss or green matter on the roof this is a key indication that water is remaining in gaps and not running into gutters.

INSIDE OUT

In daylight hours, get up in your loft and into the eaves. By looking out through the roof, you will spot gaps or holes in tiles and can direct a professional to where cracked or damaged titles need replacing.

It's best to let professionals attend to any tile repairs. They have all the necessary insurance and safety knowledge that ensures the job will be done without any mishaps.







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∧ Rayleigh mother and son who were involved in Athe distribution of class A drugs throughout the county have been jailed.

Jane Cook, 50 (pictured left), and Tye Cook, 30 (pictured right), both of Worcester Drive, Rayleigh, pleaded guilty to charges of possession with intent to supply a class A drug, conspiracy to supply a class A drug, and acquiring, using or possessing criminal property.

At Southend Crown Court on Friday, January 13, Tye was sentenced to six years and nine months in prison, while Jane was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison.

Officers found four kilos of cocaine inside a car being driven by Tye after stopping it on the A127 at Rayleigh on May 19, 2022.

When they searched the family's home, they found more than three kilos of cocaine, four kilos of ketamine and 60 grams of cannabis. Police estimate the total worth of the drugs to be around £800.000.

Detective Inspector Yoni Adler said: "Both Tye Cook and Jane Cook will no longer be able to cause harm to our residents and have rightly been jailed for their part in attempting to supply drugs."

Artists to share their work with community

ocal artists in Rayleigh have once again been given the opportunity to take advantage of free exhibition space to showcase their art.

From April until the end of September, budding painters, sketchers and art groups who applied on Rochdale District Council's (RDC) website will have four weeks each to have their work displayed in two major public spaces.

Some artworks will be shown on the second floor of the historic local landmark, the Rayleigh Windmill, while others will be exhibited in the busy fover of The Mill Arts & Events Centre.

Councillor Daniel Efde, RDC's portfolio holder for customer services, legal and leisure, said: "By making these iconic spaces available to artists, creators and groups, we hope that this will be a great opportunity to get their work out there for the public to see."

In previous years, artists have also been in attendance, allowing visitors the chance to find out more about the meaning behind the artwork.

The list of artists has yet to be confirmed, but updates will be posted on www.rochdale.gov.uk

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Member of Parliament for Rayleigh and Wickford

LOCAL NEWS RAYLEIGH

Prior to Christmas, as a member of the House of Commons Defence Committee, I participated in a committee visit to the strategic port city of Odesa, Ukraine. The purpose of our visit was to gather information on the conduct of the war, but also to demonstrate our firm support for the struggle of the Ukrainian people for freedom and democracy.

During the visit, we met with leading Ukrainian military commanders and politicians, including Gennadiy Trukhanov, the Mayor of Odesa (pictured sixth from right). Everywhere we went, we met Ukrainians who were extremely grateful for the strong support they have received from Britain, in the face of Putin's barbaric invasion of their country.

In a similar vein, in mid-January, I spoke in the House of Commons debate on 'Russia's Grand Strategy'.

In the debate, I described how "the invasion of Ukraine has proved a disaster for Russia and its people, if not yet for its president". Alongside this, I argued that "if we do not stop the Russians in Ukraine, we will have to stop them in the Baltic States or in Poland, and that means an all-out conflict between Russia and NATO, which is far better avoided".

Ultimately, the invasion of Ukraine has been a total game changer in security terms. Accordingly, I believe that if we genuinely desire peace in Europe, then we must realistically invest more in our defences. Either way, it is clear that Putin has massively misjudged the unity and resolve of the West, and thus we must continue to do all we can to support the Ukrainians as, ultimately, they are fighting for our freedom too.

Area's internet to be upgraded

Anew £25million Full Fibre network is set to be Ainstalled throughout Rayleigh, giving residents and businesses faster connection to the internet.

Following the introduction of the network in Rochford and Great Wakering, telecommunications company CityFibre has chosen Rayleigh to be the next to receive the updated technology, which will give users speeds of up to 1,000 Mbps for downloads and uploads.

Construction on the network in Rayleigh is set to begin in the spring.

Councillor Danielle Belton, Rochdale District Council's portfolio holder for climate and the economy, said: "It's fantastic that CityFibre has chosen to upgrade Rochford and Rayleigh's digital infrastructure. Full Fibre will boost the local economy by opening up innovation and productivity benefits for businesses."



CityFibre's area manager Jean Gowin, who will be responsible for the project, said: "We're thrilled to be bringing the best available digital connectivity to the Rochford, Rayleigh and Great Wakering areas and cannot wait for the local communities to unlock the many benefits of Full Fibre infrastructure."

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LOCAL NEWS

Problem bridge to be relaid for second time

Abridge connecting Wickford town centre to Wickford Meadows is set to be relaid once more. For several years, residents have expressed concerns over the safety of the surface of the bridge in icy conditions.

Five years ago, the bridge was resurfaced with new tarmac to try to solve the problem, but Essex county councillor Malcolm Buckley said that this only marginally improved the situation.

Cllr Buckley told VISIONRayleighWickford: "The situation goes back a few years. The bridge itself has been around since the late Seventies/early Eighties.

"The surface was originally flat tarmac, but several people got minor injuries."

Now, Essex Highways has announced resurfacing works to take place in the spring, with a new type of surface not used before.

An Essex Highways spokesperson said: "The scheme to resurface Wickford Gibraltar Walk bridge has been included in the draft programme for next year and has been allocated £150,000."

However, cllr Buckley believes that the problems will continue.

He added: "Steel and concrete bridges are perhaps more susceptible to these issues.

"In terms of a long-term solution, the bridge is due a major revamp in 2025/26, that will hopefully see a new decking installed."



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Plans submitted for new retirement home



Plans have been submitted for the construction of six bungalows, 30 apartments and a retirement home on green belt land in the south of Wickford.

The development on Cranfield Park Road would see the existing buildings on the site demolished, one remaining building converted into a tea room, the creation of an internal access road, and parking and landscaping.

Proposed by Great Broomfield Developments Ltd, the care home would have accommodation for up to 70 individuals.

Despite being on green belt land, the developers believe the plans fit the special measures required for construction to be approved.

The planning statement reads: "It is considered that the proposed development is compliant with the development plan on the basis that 'very special circumstances' have been demonstrated, and there will be enhancement to the designated heritage asset.

"It will result in very clear and tangible benefits. The proposed development also clearly constitutes sustainable development."

A decision on the application, to be made by Basildon Council, is not expected to be announced until March 31.

To find out more about the development, search reference 22/01804/FULL on Basildon Council's planning portal at bit.ly/3kMfpXH

The agent for the applicants, Tom Pike of Lanpro Services, has been contacted for comment.

First successful grant scheme applicants revealed

Wickford Town Council (WTC) has announced the first groups which have successfully applied to its grants scheme.

The newly formed council has introduced the initiative to provide financial support for local organisations which carry out activities for the benefit of residents. Wickford in Bloom has received a grant of £7,500. This money will go towards providing hanging baskets, planters and flowerbeds to improve the general appearance of the town, particularly the High Street. The group will also use the cash to buy high-visibility jackets and equipment for its volunteers, and to get appropriate insurance cover for the decorations.

Wickford Town Carnival Association has also successfully applied to the scheme, receiving £4,000 to support the running of this year's Wickford Carnival in September.

The last organisation to receive a grant in this round of funding is the Wick Community Association's Over 55 Club, which has been given £500 to use on hiring a venue for its regular meetings.

The 2024 grant scheme will open in September. To find out more, call the town clerk on 01268 858979 or email clerk@wickfordtowncouncil.gov.uk

Popular burger takeaway closes despite support

Apremium burger takeaway in Wickford has recently closed down, prompting an outpouring of support from loyal customers.

Chunky's Burgers announced on Facebook that it would be closing down at the end of January, prompting people across the community to pay one last visit.

Sam Remblance, the manager of Chunky's Burgers, says he has been touched by the response.

Speaking to **VISION**RayleighWickford, he said: "The response from customers is of overwhelming love and support; you can see yourself from the comments.

"We've also had countless personal and touching messages, some telling us that we've (unknowingly I might add) touched lives personally."

He added: "The main reason for closure is the economic situation of rising costs, and the fact we are a premium takeaway that people cannot afford at the moment. We simply cannot sell our product cheap.

"We are so sad to see it close as this is a personal dream of mine. At least if only for a while, it came true." Sam added that he would love to reopen Chunky's again at some point in the future if possible.



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DYNAMIC

HOW DAVINA MCCALL CONTINUES TO PROVE HERSELF AS A MODERN NATIONAL TREASURE

avina McCall this year celebrates three decades on our screens. From her early break – a female voice dubber for Channel 4's Friday night sleaze bonanza *Eurotrash* – through *Don't Try This at Home, Streetmate, The BRIT Awards, Big Brother, Stars in Their Eyes, The Million Pound Drop, Long Lost Family* and so many more, the now 55 year old has remained relevant, resplendent and always radiant on our screens.

The Wimbledon-born presenter, who has just returned as a judge in the fourth series of *The Masked Singer*, is immaculate in her appeal to multiple age groups and all genders. She carries a confidence and assurance that is effortless and puts contestants at ease, while also knowing when to reveal a more sensitive and emotional side to her character.

From uncovering her ancestry in *Who Do You Think You Are?* to fronting documentaries on the language of love and the mental pain of the menopause, Davina is truly one of terrestrial TV's modern national treasures. At a time when our broadcasters are desperate for consistency and longevity in the face of competition from streaming channels, Davina continues to provide an enduring and vital influence.

"I've just tried to present in a way that feels genuine and accessible," says Davina, who is currently in a relationship with hairdresser Michael Douglas, having previously been married twice. She has three children – Holly, 21, Tilly, 19, and Chester, 16.

"I am incredibly grateful to have been given the opportunity to sustain my career with new and exciting shows and concepts.

"I don't doubt it's probably time to step to one side and let some others have a go, but I'll keep on going until I'm told I'm not needed anymore, because TV still gives me the feeling of having the time of my life, and that's very special to me."

The fact that Davina is someone not just admired by the general public, but trusted too, is arguably what's behind the success of her latest book. In *Menopausing*, she discusses the apparent embarrassment, shame and fear behind the change, blowing away perceptions and encouraging openness and discussion about the subject.

This isn't the first time the presenter has been vocal about life's true challenges. In her own autobiography, she lifted the lid on the highs and lows she has encountered, including drug addiction and a fractured relationship with her mother.

The presenter has also been outspoken recently in criticising the trend for cancel culture. Speaking on entrepreneur Steven Bartlett's podcast, *The Diary of a CEO*, she slammed the failure of those in the public eye to express real feelings for fear of finding work projects binned or sidelined. She added: "No one says what they think or believe anymore."

If anyone can put a sense of honesty back into the discourse, it's Davina. Never one to shy away from deliberation or debate, she refuses to toe the media line.

In fact, while the brilliant brunette has contributed so much to UK culture over the past three decades, it could be said that her most important work is yet to come...

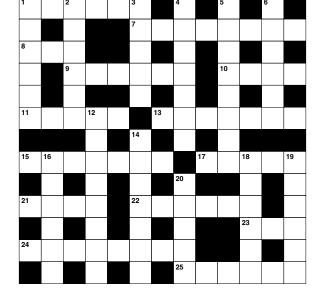


ACROSS

- 1. Mexican cloak (6)
- 7. Swamping (8)
- 8. Belgian town (3)
- 9. Of the immediate past (6) 10. Place with temporary
- accommodation (4)
- 11. Standards (5)
- 13. Sharply (7)
- 15. Give up (7)
- 17. Draw or bring out (5)
- 21. Percussion instrument (4)
- 22. Popular round fruits (6)
- 23. Annov (3)
- 24. Non-functioning period (8)
- 25. Thin candles (6)

DOWN

- 1. Points (anag) (6)
- 2. Closer (6)
- 3. Proposal; suggestion (5)
- 4. Act of touching (7)
- 5. Taught (8) 6. Hard tooth coating (6)
- 12. Memorial (8)



14. Pertaining to plants (7) 16. Subatomic particle such as a nucleon (6) 18. Bearlike (6)

19. Calls forth (6) 20. Surprise result (5)

DID YOU KNOW?

- Valentine's Day was first declared a holiday by a pope. In 496 AD, Pope Gelasius I made the feast of Saint Valentine an official holiday.
- The first known official celebration of Saint Valentine's Day took place in Paris on February 14, 1400.
- Each year, 10 per cent of all marriage proposals happen on February 14.
- Around 25 million Valentine's cards are sent in the UK every year.
- ►UK pet owners will spend £200million on Valentine's gifts for their animals.
- ► Valentine's Day is the second biggest 'event' of the year following Christmas. It is estimated that the UK will spend around £880million on Valentine's Day.

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BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO OWNING A SI.

A HAMSTER IS A GREAT CHOICE FOR A FIRST PET, COMING IN A SMALL PACKAGE BUT DELIVERING LOTS OF FUN. HERE'S SOME TOP TIPS ON HOW TO CARE FOR THEM

There are 24 different species of hamsters, with the most popular ones for pets including the Syrian, Russian dwarf, Campbell's dwarf, and Roborovski.

Hamsters need a comfortable, dry and clean place to live. They do not like draughts or damp. Also, they need to be in a room where the lights go on and off at more or less the same time each day. As they are solitary animals, hamsters prefer to live alone but, with the right care, dwarf hamsters can be housed together.

Hamsters need a good-quality, balanced diet that contains all the essential nutrients and minerals. They can get this from a compound pellet ration, a

mixture of seeds and small quantities of greens, clean root vegetables and fruits.

Although hamsters are generally solitary animals and often showcase timid behaviour. they can enjoy interacting with people who handle them carefully. Hamsters can find the presence and scent of other pets stressful, so you should keep their cage away from other animals in the home.

HOW TO KEEP YOUR HAMSTER HAPPY AND HEALTHY

A hamster needs to sleep undisturbed during the day and have plenty of space to play and exercise at night. They also need a deep layer of litter so that they can dig and construct a burrow. Many hamsters enjoy a running wheel.

HAMSTER FACT FILE:

> Hamsters can catch a cold from humans > Hamsters hoard their food

>Hamsters' teeth never stop growing.



PETS



KIDS

EETHING

HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOUR BABY IS TEETHING AND USEFUL TRICKS TO HELP THEM

t's one of the biggest anguishes for any parent - seeing a baby or child in pain and not knowing what to do about it.

One such pain that all our youngsters have to go through is teething, and while there's nothing you can do to stop those gnashers appearing, here are some useful tips for helping your child get through the discomfort.

In babies, the appearance of drool - and lots of it - is a tell-tale sign that teeth are on their way. Many parents opt for the handy neck cravat to prevent clothes from getting soaked.

Also keep an eye out for your baby gnawing or chewing on any available surface, with red and sore gums showing that there's activity lurking below.

A loss of appetite can indicate dental pain, but perhaps the biggest signal is the distress, grumpiness, moaning and sleeplessness that accompanies this stage.

HELP

We all look to guickfire solutions when our children are ill, but teething is something you have to let progress in its own time, so really your only option is to try to limit the discomfort. Paracetamol and ibuprofen will take the edge off pain, while a number of parents opt for teething powders.

A teething chew - usually made out of rubber or silicon, and which can be kept in the freezer for a great cooling sensation - will undoubtedly provide relief. Teething gel and even some frozen banana can also offer those troubled gums a bit of light relief.

Of course, the biggest cure of them all is one we can all give in abundance and is completely free every time - a nice big hug.



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Springing Into Slife

THE CHANGES YOU NEED TO BE MAKING TO YOUR GARDEN BEFORE SPRING COMES AROUND

We may be moan dropping temperatures and wet weather, but the good news is that spring is edging ever closer. And while the realities of sunny mornings and technicoloured flower beds are still a distance away, we need to be preparing our outdoor spaces for spring now, if 2023 is to be a fertile year. Here are six ways you can start preparing your garden for the sunnier days to come.

Plan and purchase: There's nothing like planning the first steps on a task, so even though it's cold and wintry outside, now is the time to be selecting and ordering the summerflowering bulbs and seeds that will make your garden look splendid. You'll be planting these in early spring, so get them ready now.

Solv good: Some of your summer seeds will require longer in the soil, so you may want to consider sowing some now. Included in these are geraniums, begonias, peppers and aubergines. Start them off in a heated propagator to give them a head start.

l ip-top tidy-up: It's cold out, but that shouldn't stop you getting beds and borders in order. Removing debris and decaying matter will be the biggest job, but consider the need to repair wood, cut back bushes, and give a new lease of life to paths and walkways.

Green clean: If you have a greenhouse, now is the time to take it back to its bare bones, ready for what you're about to bring in during the spring.

A clear-out and clean-up will leave your transparent studio ready to go.

The rain game: You may as well take advantage of the rainy season by installing a water butt and collecting water in time for the spring. Not only is it better for the environment compared to using the tap or a hose, but a number of plant varieties actually grow better with rainwater, including camellias and rhododendrons.

Flowerpower

FOUR FANTASTIC FLOWER SHOWS IN THE UK TO LOOK OUT FOR IN 2023

There's nothing that feels more like summer than the blooming buds and luscious lawns of a flower show, and in the UK we're treated to an incredible array of events that cater for every type of green-fingered enthusiast.

Harrogate Flower Show: April 20-23

One of the earliest shows on the calendar, this Yorkshire gem is great for children looking to build a knowledge of outside spaces, with a variety of activities designed to inspire young minds. For adults, there's the floral art marquee, the largest in Britain, as well as a wealth of displays and presentations – many with a practical edge.

Chelsea Flower Show: May 23-27

Harrogate

Chelsea

Hampton Court

V36

A royal favourite, the Chelsea Flower Show

represents the pinnacle of our horticultural passions in the UK, showcasing an array of awardwinning designs, an abundance of experts and a wealth of demonstrations designed to inspire. More than 150,000 people attend the show every year, so booking early is recommended.

Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival: July 4-9

This festival claims to be the greatest flower show on Earth. Set in the grounds of Hampton Court Palace, with architecture, history, opulence and Britishness in abundance, it's difficult not to be wowed by beautiful show gardens, interactive activities for children, amazing flower displays and live music.

There's also shopping, demos and expert advice – offering a modern show in a traditional setting.

Tatton Park Flower Show: July 19-23

If you fancy venturing up north, head to Knutsford in Cheshire for a flower show that is much more a garden party than an exhibition.

With shopping, dining and music, the bamboozling range of horticultural heroics acts as a brilliant background to the party atmosphere. All you require is sunshine. **DOWN HALL** GARDEN SERVICES

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APPY DAYS

hile our reliance on technology becomes greater every year, so too does our interaction with the world around us. For all the criticism levelled at them, our communications devices and, specifically, the apps on them, have offered us a far greater understanding of the world.

With that in mind, here are five apps that offer you the chance to broaden your horizons in 2023.

BACKDROP

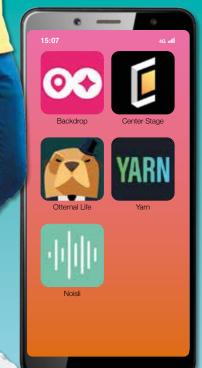
Backdrop isn't a wallpaper app, as its name may suggest. Instead, it's a location

S

discovery platform that aims to help you become more familiar with your surroundings. Rather than listing businesses and attractions, it turns the spotlight on interesting houses, colourful spaces and quirky local elements.

© CENTER STAGE

A US app that can instantly help you value trading cards. Although the technology is still in its infancy, with identifiable cards in the sports of NFL, baseball, basketball and hockey, the plan is to incorporate UK sports, as well as Pokémon and other games-based card collectables.



OTTERNAL LIFE

A habit-tracking app that goes well beyond the norm of health and fitness. Instead, Otternal Life gives you the opportunity to input everything from studies to collections, guiding you and reminding you of daily tasks, while helping you steer clear of temptation elsewhere.

Ч Ш

CHNOLOG

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YARN

Go back to basics with this app that aims to help readers revisit the simple pleasures of storytelling.

Rather than elaborate videos, films or animations, Yarn offers app users a simple choice of stories presented in text message form. Episodes and conversations are updated daily, and you can enjoy stories from several categories, including mystery, romance, comedy, sci-fi, fantasy, and more.

NOISLI

We can all recognise that our ability to concentrate is affected by the sounds around us. Noisli mixes together a number of samples and sounds, from birdsong to rain to waves to wind, to surround you with effortlessly excellent and personalised audio inspiration.

V38

Are you looking for an ECO HOME?

IS THE GRASS ALWAYS GREENER WHEN IT COMES TO ECO HOMES?

Je live in an era of eco sustainability in our homes, yet is eco design all it's cracked up to be, and do the negatives balance the positives for conscious consumers looking to create a home that has environmental excellence at its heart? Here, we look at the pros and cons of green homes.

PROS OF ECO HOMES

- > Cost: The trend for going green with our homes is supported wholeheartedly by local government. That means grants, subsidies and initiatives will bring certain costs down. If your structure benefits from elements such as rainwater harvesting and solar panels, your running costs will undoubtedly be lower than for a standard home.
- > The planet: Prioritising the homes in which we live can also help us feel as though we are playing a part in the bigger picture. After all, the commitments we make now are setting up the next generation for a better life.
- > Regulations: Future-proofing our homes for rules and regulations that may come about in the years ahead means we are investing now rather than paying further down the line.

CONS OF ECO HOMES

- > Cost: While green initiatives can save us money. the sourcing of some eco-friendly materials comes at a higher upfront cost. After all, going green is very rarely the cheapest option.
- > Longevity: While we know a lot about standardised building materials that have helped us map out huge communities, some of the newer green fabrication technologies are untested over the long term. Without the benefit of longevity testing, they may be more liable to having to be replaced or repaired as time goes on.
- > Ratio: While every environmental action makes a difference, the cost of investing in our homes may be at the expense of green initiatives we can undertake elsewhere (like buying an electric car) that would make a greater overall impact.



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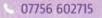
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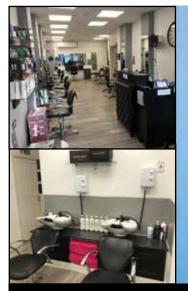


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HERO

o you suffer with a dry complexion? Or maybe it's ageing skin that's your main concern? Either way, a humidifier has the ability to transform the look and feel of vour skin in a matter of weeks.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING A HUMIDIFIER FOR YOUR SKIN? 1. Reduce water loss

If you suffer with dry or ageing skin, then a humidifier can help to reduce water loss and keep your skin looking plumped up and moisturised by balancing out low levels of moisture in the air.

2. Manage skin disorders

Skin conditions such as atopic dermatitis, rosacea and psoriasis can all be made worse by dry, air-conditioned or centrally heated rooms. However, by using a humidifier, moisture is added to the air, and you should see a vast improvement in your skin.

3. Prevent skin infections

Certain bacteria and viruses thrive in both high and low humidity and these can lead to skin infections. A humidifier can help to balance out the humidity levels in a room and prevent microbes from affecting your complexion.

4. Protect the skin from allergens and irritants

Low humidity levels affect the barrier function of the skin, which leaves you susceptible to irritants and allergens in the air. A humidifier can help to increase humidity levels and keep your skin protected from external factors.

TOP TIPS FOR USING A HUMIDIFIER

> Use bottled or distilled water as these contain fewer microorganisms and a lower mineral content

Clean your humidifier regularly – once every 3-4 days Switch on your humidifier before you start your daily skincare routine

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- Best all-rounder: Aennon Cool Mist Humidifier
- Best for winter: Vicks VH845 Warm Mist Humidifier
- Best budget buy: Pro Breeze Premium 3.5L Ultrasonic Cool Mist Humidifier

Best for large rooms: Elechomes Top-Fill Ultrasonic Humidifier.

VAA

ARE YOU READY TO EMBRACE THE COLD WEATHER AND EXERCISE OUTSIDE THIS WINTER?

While 'feel the burn' is a phrase you're likely to hear when it comes to physical activity, working out in cold temperatures comes with a whole host of benefits.

Read on to discover the top four reasons why you should exercise outside this winter.

BURN MORE CALORIES

If you are looking to lose weight, then working outside in the winter can help you to achieve your goals. This is because colder temperatures force your body to work harder in order to regulate its core temperature. As your body works to get warm, your metabolism goes into overdrive and burns more calories and fat.

BOOST YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

Bugs and viruses are everywhere in the winter months, so it can be a good idea to look at ways to boost your immune system. Not only can exercising outside help to fight off the symptoms of a cold, but it also forces your immune system to

work harder.

BETTER CARDIO WORKOUT

When you exercise in colder temperatures, your blood vessels narrow and your heart and lungs work harder. This means that you can enjoy an enhanced cardiovascular workout, which helps to maintain good heart health. Plus, you don't have to exercise for as long to enjoy the same results.

IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH

If you are affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder, which makes you feel down during the darker months of the year, then exercising outside can help to boost your mood. In fact, research suggests that a good workout can be four times more effective than taking antidepressants in improving the symptoms of depression. Getting outside can also help to replenish your vitamin D levels.



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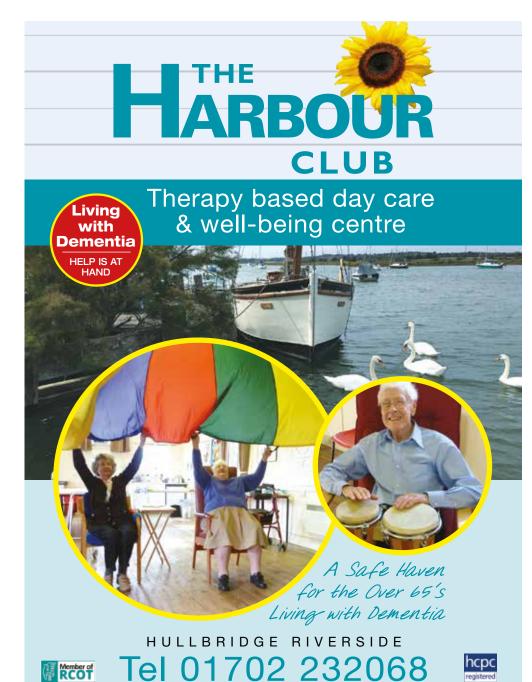
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ENGLISHMAN MICHAEL SMITH BECOMES DARTS WORLD CHAMPION AFTER PLAYING HIS PART IN THE GREATEST LEG OF DARTS EVER SEEN

ORLD DARTS

hey say that to be the best, you have to beat the best, and Michael Smith's elevation to world number one – as he took the 2023 world title in January – certainly made true that statement.

Not only did he see off three-time champion Michael van Gerwen at Alexandra Palace in a memorable final, but he also gave the sport what is being described as the most memorable leg of them all.

It came during the second set, and saw two of the sport's titans begin by scoring treble-20 maximums. The next throws also saw the players hit their respective trebles, setting up each on a legendary nine-dart finish. Van Gerwen went first, knocking off treble 20 twice, before faltering on double 12.

With the crowd barely able to reset, Smith stepped up – taking the more conventional nine-dart finish route of treble 20, treble 19, then nailing the double 12, for arguably the most amazing leg of darts in the competition's 29-year history. Smith seized the momentum, rallying thereafter to take the title 7-4 in sets.

While 'Bully Boy', from St Helens, is excelling in what is a modern, showbiz era of professional darts – with packed arenas, primetime TV billing and a semi-celebrity status for the game's major stars – Smith epitomises something reassuringly old school about the sport. He is a 'larger' man, is adorned with tattoos, and reassuringly doesn't possess any of the media

training associated with those in other sports. For example, having come through his semi-final with Belgian Gabriel Clemens, Smith revealed that he'd spend most mornings during the tournament in bed watching repeats of Catchobrase and Supermarket Sweep.

What's clear, though, is that when the evening comes around, the only programming on display was three decades of dedication to his craft, where laser-like hand-to-eye coordination has made the 32 year old the best darts player in the world.

CARSEAT mistakes

While most parents wouldn't dream of driving around without securing their kids in a car seat, many are inadvertently putting them at risk. Here's how to avoid the four most common car seat mistakes.

Facing Forward too soon

Children have relatively large heads and weak necks which means that, if they are facing forward during a collision, their head can jerk forward suddenly and violently. This can result in spinal injuries. Keep your children in rear-facing car seats until they reach the maximum height and weight limit. This is typically around the age of 15 months or up to 13kg (29 lb).

Twisted or loose harness straps

As many as one in three children are at risk because they are strapped into their car seats incorrectly. Harness straps should lie flat, not twisted, and they need to be tight enough to hold your child safely in an accident. Pull the harness so that it is nice and snug. If you can pinch any excess fabric, then it is too loose.

Too many clothes

Children should not wear coats or other bulky clothes when in a car seat. This is because, if there is a crash, these garments will compress and loosen the harness. Even a hoodie can push your child's head too far forward if the hood is down. Instead, cover your child with a blanket once they are secured if you are concerned about the cold.

Buying a used car seat

Ideally, you should buy a new car seat, as these are safer than used ones. However, if you do buy a used one, then you need to ensure you do your homework. Choose one that comes with instructions, hasn't been recalled, is no more than six years old, has no visible damage or missing parts, and has never been involved in a crash.







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