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10 Minutes for the Planet

Love your garden without using pesticides ©

by Sarah Heath



Hello! I'm Sarah Heath and you're listening to 10 Minutes for the Planet on EnglishWaves.

As spring evolves into summer, green-fingered members of the community are hard at work in gardens across the country as Mother Nature bestows rain and sunshine in equal measure to a point where plants – and weeds – seem to grow in front of your eyes. The pleasure of the appearance of new life is equalled by that of toiling in the fresh air with the knowledge that nature's gifts will soon be your reward, whether a beautifully flowering plant or freshly grown vegetables.

For the environmentally aware, there are lots of ways to tend to the garden which can achieve a glorious result with the added benefit of being kind to nature. The stresses of pollution and use of chemicals can be somewhat counterbalanced by a number of eco-friendly gardening methods and creative recycling.

Monsanto's infamous weedkiller, RoundUp, has made headline news for a number of years and many gardeners have since taken heed of the message that its active ingredient, glyphosate, can cause harm to flora and fauna which are not deliberately targeted but fall victim nevertheless. More natural alternatives are cheaper and largely made from items found at home.

But prevention is better than cure, so taking measures to stop the dreaded weeds growing in the first place can save time later on. Spreading mulch on flower beds can help prevent weeds from growing by blocking their source of light. Mulch is usually made from shredded leaves, wood chippings, old newspaper, compost or even grass clippings, and it also adds fertility to the soil as it decomposes – a win-win!

Adding edging to borders with natural materials such as wood can prevent weeds from spreading to unwanted areas and planting ground cover which will take up space will also push unwanted plants out. Mowing the lawn earlier on in the spring can prevent the onslaught of weeds although keeping the grass a little bit on the long side will ensure weeds will struggle to get through. Some people employ the use of nature's four-footed lawnmower and keep goats!

But if weeds do, inevitably poke their heads through, vinegar is an efficient natural weedkiller as it contains acetic acid. A horticultural version has a higher 20% acetic acid content and is even more potent. Boiling water also does the trick. But don't be too severe on all weeds – many of them are edible! Dandelion leaves are great in a salad; Chickweed is full of vitamins and minerals and Red Clover flowers can be eaten as they are or used to make tea.

Growing your own food is a big tick in the box for the environment but for fruit and vegetable gardeners, bugs can be enemy number one! However, there are ways to remove pests from your veggie patch without the need for noxious substances. The Treehugger website suggests a home-made soap spray insecticide which is very effective at killing mites and aphids without

being any danger to humans. Add raw garlic or chilli to the mix and it repels bugs from the outset.

A method called companion planting is a tried-and-tested way to repel pests and can also be mutually beneficial. French marigolds are known to give off a strong odour which is disliked by greenfly and blackfly thus discouraging them from invading tomato plants. Carrots and leeks make an efficient team: leeks ward off carrot fly and carrots, leek moth. And planting horseradish near potatoes will increase disease resistance.

Native wildflowers in areas of the garden will provide bees and butterflies with a source of pollen. Bees in particular love lavender and thyme.

For garden features, sustainability can be achieved either through the use of recycled materials like old bricks or clay pipes and avoiding the use of cement, whose production accounts for 5% of global carbon emissions. Hedges make homes for birds and insects where walls cannot and berry-producing plants such as hawthorn will encourage wildlife into the garden.

To create a more economical use of water, buying a rainwater butt is a wise investment and one which can be connected to a watering system which will also save time. Making compost from green waste is another time and money economy. Compost can be made from leaves, grass cuttings, old newspapers and egg boxes, tea bags and vegetable peelings and even the contents of your Hoover bag!

As the saying goes, however, one man's weed is another man's flower, so being more open-minded over those determined weeds popping up in unwanted places, is a show of Nature's strength and therefore maybe to be more appreciated. For example, the Japanese love moss which is used for landscaping their gardens whereas in America, it is wiped out as an unwanted intruder.

Tune in next week for more stories on the environment, here on English Waves.