

# Gardening for beginners

Spending time nurturing plants is good for one's soul and overall wellbeing. For me, gardening means a lot – it is therapeutic, a source of exercise, allows me to engage my creative side, and it's keeping me sane and maintaining routine during this period where I'm spending more time at home. Being able to watch seeds germinate while already planning next year's bulb scheme gives me hope and something to look forward to.

I've taken a break from my garden this weekend to compile some tips for anyone who is spending more time in the garden for the first time:

1. Identifying weeds (or gardening with weeds)
2. Deadheading daffodils & narcissus
3. Cutting your lawn for the first time in spring (or not cutting it and creating a meadow for this year)
4. Recommended podcasts, video tutorials & blog

## Weeds: to weed or not to weed

A weed is “a plant growing in the wrong place”. Whether to remove all plants commonly considered weeds (dandelions, buttercups, hairy bittercress etc.) from your garden is controversial these days, as there's a trend towards rewilding areas of the garden, to restore biodiversity and provide habitats and food for beneficial insects. Last year I left one flowerbed in our communal garden to its own devices and it was fascinating to see what grew there (lots of [mallows](#)); this year I'll be introducing plants that some would consider weeds, to exploit their ornamental appearance or because I can either use them to make home-made plant food or they are key sources of nectar for wildlife:



**Comfrey** ([Symphytum officinale](#)): you can make a home-made fertiliser call “Comfrey Tea”: [recipe](#)

**Nettles** ([Urtica diocea](#)): you can make “Nettle Tea” ([recipe](#)) as fertiliser. They are also a key source of nectar for butterflies.

**Thistles** ([Dipsacus fullonum](#)): tall, architectural and not (in my eyes at least) a weed at all.



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If you want to work in harmony with “weeds” in your garden, you may want to buy Jack Wallington’s book “[Wild about Weeds](#)”. Jack’s website is: <https://www.jackwallington.com/>

## Some common weeds that most people will want to remove

### ***Perennial weeds that you must remove both the foliage and roots of***

Some weeds will regrow if you leave any part of them in the soil. If you chop up the roots while digging, each bit can regrow into another plant. Therefore, with these weeds, be careful to remove everything, roots and all.

- Dandelion ([Taraxacum officinale](#))
- Creeping buttercup ([Ranunculus repens](#))
- Ground elder ([Aegopodium podagraria](#))
- Japanese knotweed ([Fallopia japonica](#)) – N.B. this might need professional treatment.
- Couch grass ([Elymus repens](#))

### ***Annual & ephemeral weeds that you can pull out without worrying too much about the roots***

- Hairy bittercress ([Cardamine hirsuta](#))
- Sticky weed/Cleavers ([Galium aparine](#))
- Groundsel ([Senecio vulgaris](#))
- Chick weed ([Stellaria media](#))

Many of these weeds can host pests and diseases, so it’s usually recommended to remove them.

The RHS has lots of pictures of common weeds, to help you identify them:

<http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/common-weeds>

**Top tip re. weeds and composting:** if a weed has already set seed (i.e. it has finished flowering and has is about to spread its seed (e.g. a dandelion flower has become a dandelion clock)), don’t put it your home compost bin. Instead, put these weeds in your bin or your local council’s food/brown bin. While it’s great to make home-made compost and the crumbly soil that results from composting is “gardener’s gold”, adding weed seeds to a home compost bin could spread the seeds around the garden, as many weed seeds can lay dormant for years and will survive the composting process. Most councils have municipal “hot” composting methods, which kills these seeds in a way that we can’t achieve at home in the typical “cold” composting system. See [here](#) for more information about hot vs. cold composting.

## Some other tips for the week ahead

In the vein of Monty Don on [Gardener’s World](#) (Friday evenings on BBC2 – recommended viewing for all gardeners), here are some other jobs for the week ahead:

**Deadheading:** As the flowers on daffodils and narcissus fade, nip them off but leave the flower stalk. This allows the plants to put energy generated by photosynthesis into fattening the bulb, to produce good flowers next year, rather than using that energy to make seeds (the seed pod is

the swollen bit you see behind the flower). A flower stalk can make more energy than the leaves, which is why you should leave the stalk in place.

**Lawn mowing:** if you have not already mown your lawn for the first time, now is the time to mow your lawn. If the grass is long, cut the lawn with the mower on a higher setting for the first cut(s) and then reduce the blade height gradually until you are cutting it at the desired height. If the weather stays warm, you will want to mow your lawn 1-2 times a week. Think of the all the step count!

Like with the weeds, there's a trend towards rewilding lawns. This might be the year that you let the lawn grow into a meadow and skip on the mowing ritual. If you do that, you might want to buy some [plug plants of Yellow Rattle](#) (*Rhinanthus minor*) and add them to the lawn, as they are parasitic on the grass and will allow other plants to compete with it and flourish.

Additional lawn guidance from Gardeners World: [here](#).

### **Further reading**

**BLOG:** The Awkward Gardener: Dan is another student in my RHS class and his blog that follows him creating a new garden will have you laughing out loud:

<http://awkwardgardener.co.uk/blog>

**ARTICLE:** Better Bankside Guide to Home Gardening:

<https://betterbankside.co.uk/news/a-guide-to-at-home-gardening>

**WEBSITE:** Garden Organic growing advice: <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/growing-advice>

**VIDEO TUTORIALS:** Daisy Creek Farm with Jag Singh:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmXX3ZM81X9SlufsHqvAkrq>

[PODCASTS: \(1\) The RHS Gardening Podcast and \(2\) The Organic Gardening Podcast](#)