



Fragrant flowers

Add an extra sensory dimension to your garden using the power of perfumed plants. **Adrienne Wyper** gives a guided tour and, overleaf, advises on tidying up your tools for winter.

Pleasant plant smells have been proven to boost wellbeing, cut stress and aid relaxation. Everyday smells such as tomato or geranium leaves can take us back to where we first smelt them and who we were with. That's because our sense of smell is deeply connected to memory, which can be particularly helpful for those with dementia.

Scent also enhances the enjoyment of a garden for people who are partially sighted or blind. Sniffing the air to identify a scent, and its source, also encourages us to slow down and pause – to 'stop and smell the roses'.

Position is key

There's no point in burying a prettily perfumed plant at the back of a border; it needs to be nearer your nose. Think hanging baskets at head height, window boxes that you walk past, raised beds, overhanging clumps to brush past on a path.

If you grow scented specimens in a pot, you can enjoy them when they're at their perfumed prime by moving them beside a bench or on a table or windowsill. Choosing sheltered spots will ensure you contain the scent where you can appreciate it.

Even between paving stones or in a gravel path, mat-forming herbs such as camomile, Corsican mint or creeping thymes will release a rising scent when you walk on them.

We all have our favourites, but some of the sweetest scents undeniably come from jasmine, honeysuckle, lavender, roses, nicotiana (tobacco plant), sweet peas and pinks.

Jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*) has intensely perfumed small white flowers from July to October. A strong climbing plant, it is ideal for training up trellises, walls, fences or sheds.


A cottage garden classic climber, sweet peas (*Lathyrus odoratus*) grow in every shade from pure white to almost black, but the violet and magenta 'Matucana' is generally agreed to have the strongest scent.

Lavender can divide olfactory opinion: some love the smell, some hate it. But if you fall into the first group, you'll love how the scent of the spiky purplish flowers is exuded by the silvery leaves all year round.

Roses are probably the world's most cultivated plant, and they're classified into five groups:

- Old – the classic scent that springs to mind when you think of a rose
- Tea – with notes of violet and, yes, tea leaves
- Fruity
- Musk – with spicy, clove overtones
- Myrrh – with aniseedy aromas similar to sweet cicely (*Myrrhis odorata*), not the resin we associate with one of the three kings.

Some plants become aromatically active in the evening, because they're



pollinated by moths. These include night-scented stock (*Matthiola longipetala*), spicy pinks (*Dianthus*), waxy-petalled gardenia and some tobacco plant (*Nicotiana*).

On chilly, dull days, a burst of fragrance is especially cheering. Winter wonders include the creamy yellow bell-shaped blooms of wintersweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*) with a spicy scent or yellow-tufted witch hazel (*Hamamelis x intermedia*). The 'Dawn' variety (*Viburnum x bodnantense*) has fragrant clusters of rose, pink or blush white blooms that can continue from October through to March. Daphne's small pink and

“Christmas box produces tufty white flowers in winter that fill the air with honey

purplish-pink flowers fill winter gardens with the sweetest scent.

Sweet box or Christmas box (*Sarcococca*) is unassuming for most of the year but in winter it produces tufty white flowers that fill the air with a honey-like sweetness.

In early spring, bulbs including hyacinths and narcissi are an olfactory treat, both indoors and out.

Don't forget foliage

Of course, all the classic culinary herbs, such as parsley, basil and thyme, are grown for their aromatic properties, and are lovely to brush a hand through in passing, even if you're not picking any for the kitchen.

For variety, try more unusual types, such as lemon, orange or caraway thyme, as well as the wide variety of mints – as well as peppermint and spearmint there are eau de cologne, chocolate, pineapple, ginger and grapefruit. Woody aromatic herbs such as rosemary and sage will also survive the winter.

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) has citrus-scented leaves, and tiny white flowers in late summer. As an enthusiastic self-seeder, it will root from a cutting in a glass of water.

Scented pelargonium leaves also give off intense fragrances at the slightest touch – including rose, lemon, mint and cinnamon – even though their pale pink or lilac flowers aren't scented.

Trees, too...

Magnolias and lilac trees are as impressive for their spring fragrance as for their showy flowers. And the common name of summer-flowering *Philadelphus* – mock orange – explains the appeal of that shrub too.

Trees' leaves have a lot to offer – look out for the antiseptic-smelling silvery leaves of the evergreen eucalyptus, or the katsura (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*), whose heart-shaped leaves turn yellow, orange and pink in the autumn and smell of toffee.

At this time of year, as we head into the quietest season in the garden, it is the perfect time to take a deep breath and make plans to introduce the sweet smell of success into your outside space. ☺

In an ideal world, we'd clean our tools every time we used them. But even if you're not that meticulous, now's the time to give them a thorough overhaul.

Taking care of your gardening equipment makes a lot of sense. It saves you money, as it helps your tools last longer and function better. And cleaning tools and pots reduces the risk of spreading plant diseases in clinging compost.

Take the opportunity before you wind down for winter to tidy all your plant-related paraphernalia wherever you keep it, be it in a shed, a toolbox or a shelf under the stairs.

Untangle balls of string, close and organise seed packets (or perhaps you have envelopes scrawled with plant names), seal any half-used boxes or tubs of fertiliser, and wash any used plant markers.

Take the opportunity to clean your gloves, too, washing those that can go in the machine or damp-wiping those made of leather or non-washable material and leaving out to dry.

How to clean tools

Brush the dirt off hand tools such as trowels and forks, using water for stubborn muddy patches. Dry the metal parts to prevent rust, and the wooden handles to stop them from swelling and splitting.

Apply a thin layer of oil to the metal to prevent rust. Modern tools made of stainless steel don't need oil, but it will do no harm to add some if you're not sure. You should also buff

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the wooden handles with a cloth and beeswax polish.

Cutting tools such as secateurs or loppers can retain the sap from stems and branches, which can harbour disease. Clean this off with an abrasive scourer, then wash them with a clean cloth, and dry.

Also make use of this time to

sharpen the blades. And check any loops used for hanging them up and replace if necessary.

How to clean pots

Terracotta pots may need a soak in warm, soapy water to loosen caked-on dirt. Scrub all pots and seed trays with a brush or scourer, then rinse and leave to dry before storing.

Cracked or broken terracotta pots can be recycled as crocks to cover drainage holes in pots, or as plant markers or to retain moisture in containers. And if you have more pots than you're ever likely to need, why not offer them to schools, city farms or community growing initiatives?

If the pots aren't black plastic, your local authority may take them with the household recycling. Black plastic is undetectable to plastic-sorting recycling technology, however, so needs to go in the waste bin.

Now, with all that work done, you can settle into winter, knowing that when spring comes, you'll be all set to get back into the garden. 🌱

Look after your gardening gear

It's a good time to maintain your pots, tools and gardening supplies ready for next season.