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Trick or treat...

Welcome to the October edition...

With all the uncertainty surrounding schools and work, as well as events including Halloween and Christmas, make sure you turn to your local community for support.

Friends and family are more important than ever to assist and support each other. Even if you can't meet up in each other's homes you can still talk, video chat and meet in restaurants... for now anyway.

And local businesses need your support too. Most of them have had a tough time in getting supplies, losing business, and supporting their employees, but they're still going and working hard to keep their customers satisfied.

I hope your October is full of treats...

Zoe

Zoe Reece

Tel: 07557 220585

Email: zoe@dorridgedirectory.com

www.solihullindex.com



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Sleep: Should we worry about quantity or quality?

During Lockdown, my sleep suffered. Like everyone else my anxiety levels rocketed, and I tossed and turned for hours. I dug out my Fitbit which I hadn't worn since the start of Lockdown and began tracking my sleep again. I realised that my sleep score which had previously been 87-92 (good-excellent), was now languishing around 61-64 (bottom end of fair) occasionally dipping into the 50s (poor). No wonder I felt tired and tearful. Something needed to change.

To optimise sleep health, we need to balance how long we sleep with how well we sleep. For years, researchers recommended eight hours of sleep each night as optimal. Now professionals consider sleep quality to be of equal importance in reaping all the benefits of sleep. In fact, sleep quality is probably a better indicator of overall mental health, mood, and energy levels than sleep quantity. Prior to lockdown I'd been a 10:30pm-6am sleeper, Occasionally 11pm-6:30am. Although that was 30 minutes shy of the perfect 8 hours I always woke just before my alarm, feeling rested. During Lockdown bedtimes had become later and later, and although I was 'sleeping' for longer, and not setting the alarm, my sleep was clearly not of the quality I was used to.

Fitness trackers like the Fitbit monitor the quality of our sleep by looking at how much time we spend in the various stages. We cycle through the various stages each night and we each have a unique cycle. During light sleep our body unwinds and relaxes. This is always the first stage of sleep and we spend most of our time asleep in it. It's important to our mental and physical health that we get enough light sleep. Deep sleep typically occurs within the first few hours of sleep. Our breathing is slower, our muscles relax fully and we're harder to wake during this stage. Typically,



we spend about 13% of our night in deep sleep, and this is when our body repairs itself. Deep sleep aids learning, memory, and it supports our immune system. Finally, REM (rapid eye movement) sleep is when we dream. Our heart rate increases, and our breathing becomes more irregular. We also experience a form of paralysis (so we don't start acting out our dreams!). REM sleep is important for mood regulation, learning and memory. It's when our brains process and consolidate our experiences from the day.

A regular bedtime is an important factor in sleep quality. Avoiding stimulants like the blue light from electronic devices, or the caffeine in coffee are also a factor, as is making sure we have enough gentle exercise during the day. I decided to take an hour-long walk every day and moved my bedtime back to 10:30pm. I avoided checking my phone for 30 minutes before bed and didn't drink coffee after 7pm. I noticed improvements almost immediately and within a week my sleep had more-or-less reset to normal. Within a fortnight my sleep score was back up in the 80s and hasn't dropped since.

If you're feeling stressed and tired or are struggling with a low mood it's worth looking at both the quality and quantity of your sleep.

Is Halloween Cancelled?

Trick-or-Treat is either a fun chance to dress-up and claim free sweets from neighbours, or it's an antisocial American travesty which has infiltrated these shores. I happen to fall squarely in the latter camp, my kids, the former. They start planning their outfits in March. I don't want to rain on their scary parades, but what should we do about Halloween in the face of a global pandemic?

It's not certain that any of our neighbours will actually welcome my young visitors (or plague-bearers as I've come to think of them of them since their return to school) to their doorsteps, no matter how cute their costumes or beguiling their manners.

And frankly I'd freak out about them grabbing handfuls of potentially COVID-coated Crunchie bars, so I'm not exactly devastated that I won't have to accompany them door-to-door and smile apologetically as they beg for treats. But neither am I a total killjoy, so I've come up

with some ideas for alternative activities:

Hang a spooky piñata for your children in your own back garden.

Create a haunted house for your kids at home. Let them dress up and be scared in a fun-but-safe way. Create a spooky scavenger hunt inside and out. Leave clues, or a trail of blood, or spiders. Snuggle up and watch a 'scary' movie... something like Monsters Inc or The Corpse Bride (depending on age). Read age-appropriate ghost stories in the dark in front of the fire, or if the weather is favourable, go outside, snuggle under blankets, light pumpkins and toast marshmallows on a camping stove or fire pit. That's the sort of trick-or-treat night I could get behind.

I suppose we should also leave a bowl of Quality Street and bottle of hand sanitizer on the doorstep and wave at the hardcore trick-or-treaters from the safety of the upstairs window.

Whatever you decide, have a Happy COVID-safe Halloween



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answers on page 29

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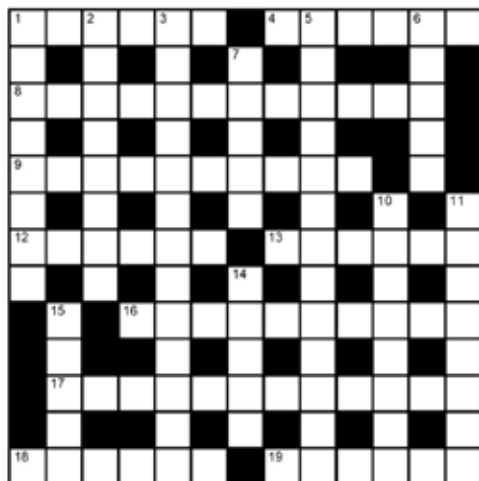
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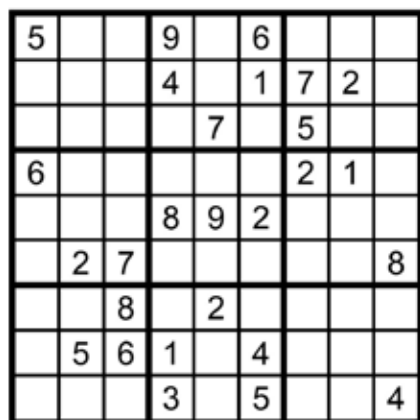
- 1 Smacked (6)
- 4 Riches (6)
- 8 Foundation (12)
- 9 Meticulous (10)
- 12 Wanted (6)
- 13 Like better (6)
- 16 Services (10)
- 17 Advanced society (12)
- 18 Hint (6)
- 19 Revolves (6)

Down

- 1 Purchases (8)
- 2 Contemplated (8)
- 3 Deliberation (13)
- 5 Uncommon (13)
- 6 Male vocalist (5)
- 7 Contention (5)
- 10 Legitimate (8)

- 11 Gifts (8)
- 14 Stiff (5)
- 15 Male relative (5)

answer on page 29



how to play sudoku

It's simple!

Fill in the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1 through to 9 with no repetition. You don't need to be a genius. These puzzles use logic alone. Watch out! Sudoku is highly addictive.

answer on page 29

Cinder Toffee - Part science experiment and part sweet treat.

This is fun for the kids and perfect for Halloween and bonfire night.

Ingredients

165g demerara sugar
165g caster sugar
60ml golden syrup
4 tbsp water
15g butter, diced, plus extra to grease
Pinch of salt
1 tbsp bicarbonate of soda

You will also need a kitchen thermometer

Method

Generously grease an approximately 24cm square tin.

Put the bicarbonate of soda within easy reach of the hob.

Place both sugars, syrup, water, and butter in a deep, heavy-bottomed pan with a pinch of salt. (Make sure it is a deep pan or the 'science bit' will go horribly badly!). Heat gently, stirring, until the sugars and butter have dissolved, then turn up the heat slightly and bring to the boil. Simmer until it reaches 138C turns amber and bubbles - this will take about 10-15 minutes. When the mixture gets to temperature, remove it from the heat and quickly and thoroughly whisk in the bicarb. It will foam and grow alarmingly. The kids will love it!

Pour the foamy mixture into the tin and leave to set. When cold get the kids to smash it into pieces.

Optional: Pour melted chocolate over the shards for the ultimate cinder toffee treat.

Preparation time: 5 minutes

Cooking time: 15-20 minutes (plus cooling)

Serves: Depends how sweet your tooth is!



Get a Flu Vaccine

Some people believe that it's not worth having a flu vaccination. But it's actually one of the most important things you can do for your health and others, especially in the middle of the global coronavirus pandemic.

Health professionals always advise the 'at risk' groups to get vaccinated. People eligible for the free flu jab include: people aged 65 and over; pregnant women; primary school aged children, two and three-year-olds; and people with medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, or heart failure. But most experts are recommending the flu vaccine for almost every demographic this year. Although the flu vaccination does not prevent Coronavirus, both of the viruses have an impact on the respiratory system. A

combination of both viruses, or one after the other, may mean bad news for your health, respiratory health, and overall ability to recover.

Health professionals suggest that this year we should have our shots as early as September. Even though typical flu season begins in October and peaks between December and February, the changes brought on by COVID-19 mean that it's important to get organised early because you will probably need a formal appointment, even at a pharmacy.

Winter is a particularly busy time for GPs and hospitals. Vaccinating to protect against flu could help reduce the risk of the NHS becoming overwhelmed with cases of both flu and COVID-19. Cut your risk of respiratory infection. Get a flu vaccine.

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5	7	2	9	3	6	4	8	1
8	6	3	4	5	1	7	2	9
9	1	4	2	7	8	5	3	6
6	8	9	5	4	7	2	1	3
1	3	5	8	9	2	6	4	7
4	2	7	6	1	3	9	5	8
3	4	8	7	2	9	1	6	5
7	5	6	1	8	4	3	9	2
2	9	1	3	6	5	8	7	4

Sudoku Solution
from page 22

S	T	R	U	C	K	W	E	A	L	T	H
H	E	O	I	X	E						
O	R	G	A	N	I	S	A	T	I	O	N
P	A	S	S	R	O						
P	A	R	T	I	C	U	L	A	R		
I	D	D	E	O	O	P					
N	E	E	D	E	D	P	R	E	F	E	R
G	D	R	R	D	F	E					
U	F	A	C	I	L	I	T	I	E	S	
N	T	G	N	C	E						
C	I	V	I	L	I	Z	A	T	I	O	N
L	O	D	R	A	T						
R	E	M	I	N	D	C	Y	C	L	E	S

crossword Solution
from page 22

**Solution to Mind benders**

1. Frankenstein
2. 28 Days Later
3. IT

mindbenders
from page 16

Love Thy Tailor

Most people think tailors are for rich gentlemen who frequent Saville Row, but tailoring is not as expensive as you might think, and it will

save you money in the long run because if you love an item of clothing you're far less likely to replace it. At the low-price end are simple fixes such as hemming a dress or trousers; at the more expensive end will be adjusting the shoulders of a jacket.

Tailoring opens up possibilities because it allows you to buy high-quality second-hand items, or designer items on the sale rack, knowing you can get the fit altered. Most importantly it helps your clothes look better than they did when you bought them. A slight change in fit can make a huge difference. Unless you habitually buy 'bespoke', clothing is sized in a 'good enough' way to fit most people well enough. Tailoring is the difference between an item that fits 'well enough' and one that fits perfectly.

Simple Hemming - You can get skirts, trousers, jeans, dresses, and too-long shirts hemmed. When you get rid of the excess fabric at the base, you get clean lines for a sleek look. Wash new jeans before you take them in though as they nearly always shrink a little in the wash.



Shortening Shoulder Straps - The way the shoulders fit is crucial to making an item look nice overall. If the shoulder straps on a shirt or dress won't stay up, get them shortened. Anything sleeveless, or with straps is typically easy to alter.

Zip Replacement - Buy exactly what you want from the haberdashery section of a fabric store and ask the tailor to replace it.

Taking in - The straight seams that run down the sides of shirts and dresses are easy to take in. A common alteration to blouses and dress shirts is darting, a process where extra seams are placed in the back or sides of a shirt to remove baggy fabric. If you find that you frequently have to size up a blouse to fit your chest properly - leaving extra fabric around your waist - darting is an inexpensive way to reshape the garment.

Sleeves also tend to have straight seams running down their lengths, which a tailor can easily take in. The same works for trousers that are too loose in the leg. There is a limit though: if something is several sizes too big the alterations will throw the proportions out of balance, but a size or two is doable.

When shopping:

- Clothing sizing for women is so variable as to be useless. Try things on, find the best fit, then have them tailored.
- Buy clothes that fit the biggest or widest part of your body, and then have them tailored down
- If you are between sizes, size up and tailor down.
- Ask for a recommendation. Social media is a great tool. If you admire the way a friend dresses, they may well have a tailor and will be flattered that you asked. High-end and designer shops may be able to recommend tailors too.

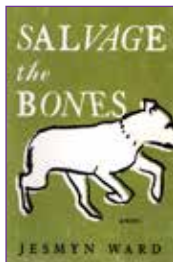
a good read

reviews By Willow Coby

Salvage the Bones

by Jesmyn Ward

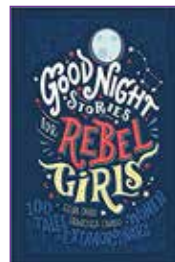
It was a storm that made headlines around the world. In August 2005 Katrina hit the Louisiana coast causing great loss of life and destruction to New Orleans and the surrounding area. This award-winning novel, set over a period of 12 days, tells the story of the Batiste family who live in the fictional town of Bois Sauvage. Esch is 15 years old and lives with her three brothers and their father. Isolated from the rest of the small town due to the location of their house, they live in extreme poverty, with a largely absent father who, seven years after the death of his wife, still relies on drink to get through the day. So, with the news of a category 5 storm is about to hit they begin to prepare what they can and stockpile a small amount of food. Each chapter is one day in the build up to the storm. Randall, the eldest is trying to do what he can to hold his family together. Skeetah is preoccupied with his pit-bull fighting dog, China, who has just given birth to puppies. Junior, the youngest, is trying to hold his own against his older brothers. And Esch has just discovered that she is pregnant. A captivating story with engaging characters, immerses you in their world, illustrated by a touch of Greek mythology thanks to a book that Esch (the narrator) is reading for school. The penultimate chapter will have your heart racing but ultimately this is the story of family love that survives despite the poverty and deprivation.



Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls

by Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo

Not a traditional novel here but definitely worth a read. This incredibly popular book (which has sparked a second volume) presents the stories of 100 amazing women who have made contributions to society. It is aimed at telling girls that they can achieve anything that they put their mind to and that their gender should not hold them back. It challenges female stereotypes and inspires girls to aim high in their career choices. Each story is told on a single page, along with an illustration of the woman and this simple format gives a fantastic introduction to their lives. From mathematicians like Ada Lovelace (who actually built a machine and wrote the first computer programme back in the 19th century) to authors like the Bronte Sisters who defied the expectations of their patriarchal society. There are also tales of astronomers, activists, lawyers, chefs, naturalists, journalists, motocross racers, and even a tattoo artist. Following the huge success of this book a version aimed at boys has also been written: Stories for Boys Who Dare to be Different which also challenges male stereotypes which say that you have to be tough in order to succeed.



Beautiful Berberis

Berberis thunbergii are deciduous shrubs which look particularly fabulous at this time year, producing highly coloured leaves, and often berries which last well into winter. These berries are actually edible and rich in vitamin C, though because they are very acidic, they are not widely consumed by people. They are an important food for many small birds though. They get their other name of 'barberry bush' because of their vicious spines. This makes them useful as an impenetrable barrier hedge and may be another reason why the berries aren't harvested much!

Like the colourful Japanese Maple, they originate from Eastern Asia. Berberis vary in colour according to the cultivar and variety. The common Berberis thunbergii have green leaves in spring and summer which turn rich burgundy in autumn. If you'd like the purple colour all year round choose Berberis thunbergii f. atropurpurea, which has purple leaves in spring that turn rich mahogany in autumn. Though Berberis are generally grown for their autumn colour, they are a hard-working shrub, and produce a mass of tiny yellow flowers in spring, providing interest at either end of the year.

There is a Berberis for most gardens: They can grow to a maximum height and spread of 1.5m, but there are now dwarf forms which grow to just 50cm, try 'Tiny Gold' or 'Lutin Rouge'. They grow best in full sun but also tolerate partial shade. They do well in most soil types, and even do well in drought, but will thrive particularly well in well drained moist soil. Their easy-going nature extends to aftercare, as they are generally pest-free and require little attention, other than a trim to tidy them up periodically. If you don't have much space or mainly grow in containers on a balcony 'Lutin Rouge' does very well in a pot.



Mid-September to October, and mid-March to April are the best times to plant so now is the perfect time. Dig a hole double the width of the root ball. Sprinkle in a handful of blood, fish and bone and work into the ground. Place the plant into the hole, fill in with soil around the root ball and firm the soil down gently but firmly, finish by watering well. They will appreciate being mulched with well-rotted organic matter in late spring, but they aren't fussy; grass cuttings will do fine.

My absolute favourite is Berberis thunbergii f. atropurpurea 'Admiration'. This lovely plant has extremely attractive orange-red foliage, edged with yellow, and forms an attractive mound shape. Its masses of small yellow flowers in the spring followed by purple-crimson berries in autumn make it the most perfect Berberis in my opinion.

Happy gardening.

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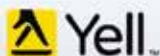
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