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Ready for christmas?

Welcome to the November edition...

By the time this arrives Christmas will only be about 6 weeks away! Check out page 30 to see what local Christmassy events are on.

You've just about got time to make any last-minute changes to your home in time for Christmas so remember to support local businesses as they really value their customers – we have a great collection of local tradespeople and businesses who are local and are looking for your custom.

Here's hoping the pre-Christmas build up isn't too hectic and that you find the time to relax, maybe over a glass of mulled wine and a mince pie!

Until next month...



Zoe Reece
Tel: 07557 220585
Email: zoe@dorridgedirectory.com
www.solihullindex.com



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Fire Pit Fun

Socialising outside for safety in a pandemic is fine during the summer but can it still be done in November?

Try a fire pit! A fire creates a focal point at an outdoor gathering. People love to gather around fire. Add a few rugs, mugs of hot chocolate or mulled wine and some marshmallows for toasting and you have the making of a snuggly evening under the stars. While a wood-burning fire pit can be the perfect backyard addition if you have close neighbours or live in an area with restrictions on wood burning, buy a propane or natural gas model. A fire pit lights up the night in a cosy way that can be complimented with candles in jars or fairy lights. Fancy garden lighting in the world can't compete with the flickering of flames. Don't worry if you have a small garden, a firepit is still an option, and you're closer to the drink cabinet for

refills! Tell friends to come dressed warm and bring a blanket. In Norway, where they entertain outside all year round there is a saying, 'There is no such thing as bad weather, only the wrong clothes!'

SAFETY FIRST:

- Fire pits should be at least 10 feet from your home or other structures.
- Don't place a fire pit beneath a tree or awning.
- Don't put a wood-burning fire pit on a deck. If you want to use your deck choose a gas fire pit which won't send out sparks.
- Educate your kids about fire safety, and always supervise children around an open flame, even when you're sure they know the rules.
- Keep a container of water, a hose, sand, or a fire extinguisher on hand whenever you light up the fire pit.



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Brain Benefits

Over the past few decades neuroscientists have discovered that the grey matter-like structure between our ears is capable of adapting, healing, rewiring and even renewing itself. What's more, we can make changes which positively impact the health of our brain, and science has given us some interesting ways to do this.

Juggling

Various studies found that volunteers who participated in a juggling exercise improved connections in areas of their brains involved in visual and motor activity. Furthermore, the changes were still present several weeks after they stopped. The researchers chose juggling because it's a complex skill, but other complex activities would also work, for example: salsa dancing, life-drawing or learning a musical instrument. The key is that the new skill you choose to learn should be unrelated to what you normally do. It should take you out of your comfort zone. Tasks which involve genuine concentration, such as studying a musical instrument, playing chess, juggling, and dancing, are associated with a lower risk for dementia. Dancing, it turns out is particularly good as it is both physically and mentally challenging. Learning a new language is also good for a brain workout, causing an increase in grey matter in the areas related to the use of language.

Sleep

For those of us who love our beds it's good news; sleep is necessary for brain health. It's not such good news for people who struggle with insomnia and disrupted sleep though. Poor sleep is linked to rapid reductions

Brain health is as important as physical health

in brain volume, so your brain actually shrinks. Areas of the brain dealing with language, balance, maths and decision-making were the most affected. Poor sleep causes protein build-up in the brain, which negatively impacts brain cells. Sleep repairs and restores brain function, so improving sleep habits is important for brain health. Experts suggest between 7–8 hours per night as optimal. If you feel you aren't sleeping well it's important to talk to your doctor as underlying issues such as snoring, or high levels of anxiety, may need to be addressed.

Exercise

It's not only good for your body but it helps memory, motor skills, and learning ability. It doesn't need to be anything fancy; simply running on a treadmill or pedalling a stationary bike for 30 minutes has benefits. Exercise increases heart rate, so more oxygen is pumped to the brain, and it releases beneficial hormones too, improving mood and sleep, while reducing stress levels and anxiety. See why dancing is so brain-friendly? It ticks ALL the boxes.

Mindfulness

It's not just a fad. Science says meditation is beneficial for mental health. Our brains often function on auto-pilot. Being in the moment while going about your day and noticing any tension or preoccupations without judging is effective in combating stress. Meditation rewires your brain, leading to: raised happiness levels, stress reduction, increased concentration, improved working memory, decreased emotional outbursts, and better problem-solving. By taking care of your brain you can increase white and grey matter, improve mental health, and slow down cognitive decline. It's time to be brainy!





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We will remember them

Why do we wear a poppy?

Scarlet poppies grow wild all over Western Europe wherever the soil has been disturbed. The battles of the First World War churned up such vast areas of earth that millions of poppies germinated and bloomed, often around the bodies of the fallen soldiers.

A Canadian surgeon called John McRae wrote the poem *In Flanders Fields* in which the poppies symbolise the deaths of those who fought. It is a haunting memorial to those soldiers who have died in any war.

Why do we have a two-minute silence?

It was on the eleventh hour of the eleventh

day of the eleventh month that the guns of World War I fell silent. Four years of fighting and devastation finally ended. The following year ceremonies of remembrance took place on what was known as Armistice Day.

An Australian journalist, Edward George Honey first proposed a respectful silence to remember the dead. He wrote a letter to the *London Evening News* which was brought to the attention of King George V. The king then issued a proclamation which called for a two-minute silence.

These days Armistice Day is known as Remembrance Sunday and is a chance to honour the fallen soldiers of all conflicts.



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Forever Friends

Making friends as an adult

The world is going through uncertain times and friends have never been more important. They provide stability, comfort, and connection. The defining feature of friendship is that it's voluntary. We retain friendships because we want to, not because we have to.

The downside is that friendships often fall by the wayside. Our adult lives are incredibly busy with obligations to work, spouses, children and older parents, and friendships can suffer as a result. We can lose friendships so rapidly that some of us live our lives as adults essentially friendless and this has ramifications for our mental health. Studies suggest that, without friends, we're at higher risk of depression and anxiety, and that the key difference between the happiest and unhappiest people is how socially connected they are.

Making friends as an adult takes deliberate effort, and this can be an issue if you lack confidence socially. Shy people often avoid events where they might have to interact socially. One way to get over this is to assume that people will like you. Studies show that this mindset is actually a self-fulfilling prophecy. People who assume they will be liked share more about themselves, disagree less, and have a more positive attitude, which of course

makes positive social interaction more likely.

As a child friendships seem to happen organically. As an adult we need to let go of this idea and take responsibility rather than waiting passively. We need to show up at event and say 'hello' when we get there. We need to introduce ourselves yourself to other people, and ask for their phone numbers, then follow up and arrange to meet, and we need to go through this initiation process repeatedly. It can be scary but the payoff is worth it. In studies, people with good initiation skills tend to have more and better friendships.

Initiation doesn't turn a person into a friend. Some people are good at connecting but struggle to sustain relationships. Sociologists have long recognised that friendships thrive on continuous interaction. This means choosing activities carefully. It's a good idea to sign up for activities that provide multiple opportunities to connect, such as a language class, a writing course, or a book club a book club. Repeated interactions capitalise on the 'exposure effect', our tendency to like things more, the more familiar they are. So, if we want to make friends, we should commit to showing up somewhere for a few months. At the moment this is even more difficult than usual because of pandemic restrictions, but in fact people are starting to connect more in online groups. Some studies have shown that shy people actually find online interaction easier and that people tend to open up more because they have time to think before posting. These online relationships have the capacity to become lasting friendships in the real world. If your aim is to find local friends to hang out with after the pandemic then its best to find local based groups, even if they are online for now. A quick search of my local area on Facebook threw up groups for crochet, eco-living, gardening, cooking, and a book club.

We all need friends so take a deep breath and say hello first.





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Mindbenders

Can you find the hidden phrases?

FeDrapes

CNaCl

Rachel Joey Chandler
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answers on page 29

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Your Guide To The Canary Islands

The Canary Islands are 7 islands in the Atlantic Ocean where the sun shines year-round, with temperatures averaging 19°C in the winter. As one of the most biodiverse geographical locations in the world, you'll find a wide range of different landscapes; dunes, forests, volcanoes, starry skies and beaches, and the islands all have their own micro-climates ranging from very wet to very dry.

IN THE KNOW

Flight Time: Approximately 4-5 hours from the UK

Currency: Euros

Language: Spanish

Weather: Year-round sun ranging from 19°C - 28°C

Time Difference: GMT
Resort Islands: 7

Tenerife

In Tenerife, anything is possible every day of the year thanks to its climate, natural attributions and tourist infrastructure designed for fun for all the family. It's the island of a thousand experiences and the most popular of the 7 islands. Spend your days relaxing on the beach, hiking Mount Teide, watching a show, walk around the marina or have fun at a theme park. Sit back on a restaurant's terrace and take in the views as you dine on some of the most. Take on Siam Park, Europe's largest water park and the race the family down water slides up to 28 metres high and take in the lush tropical vegetation and

incredible features modelled on Thai architecture.



Gran Canaria

A small continent where you'll find plenty of experiences to make every day count; golden beaches, incredible landscapes and a city with an infinite number of things to do! Gran Canaria has been honoured with the title of a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO thanks to its volcanic landscapes, extensive pine forests and Macaronesian flora. A perfect family destination with nearly 60km of beaches, the ability to sail out to watch whales, visit its museums or just relax on one of its many beaches. The dunes of Maspalomas change constantly as they are moulded by the winds, and are one of the top attractions for people to explore.

Lanzarote

A mix of black and reddish rocks along with a tranquil atmosphere, make this island feel like a different world! The Timanfaya National Park

delivers spectacular views in the Canary Islands and is well worth a visit. The islands long, sunny days mean people flock from all over Europe for cycling, swimming and most famously, for the watersports. Whether you're a seasoned pro or a beginner, there's plenty of places to head out on the water and brush up on your watersports. Another great way to get to know the island is visit its wineries and try their delicious Malvasia wine, it's that special they have their own Designation of Origin.

Fuerteventura

Discover pristine coastlines and over 150km of white sand beaches where you can watch sunny days go by. Grab a board and head out on the water, or take a stroll through one of its quaint villages and soak up the local culture. Corralejo Natural Park delivers 9km of big beaches and small coves, making it an idyllic retreat for the day. Check out one of the island's cheeseries, and try one of its Designation of Origin Majorero cheeses! Intense wind and waves up to 2metres has created a long tradition of windsurfing and kite surfing on the island.

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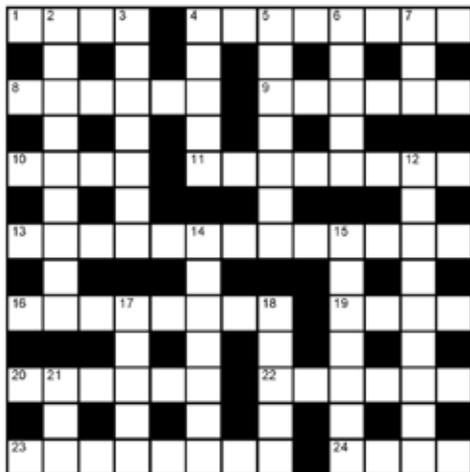
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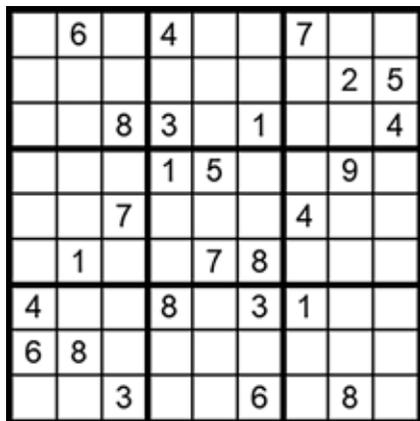
Across

- 1 Fifty percent (4)
- 4 Happened again (8)
- 8 Immobile (6)
- 9 _____ to help out! (3,3)
- 10 Medicine (4)
- 11 Goodies given to guests at the end of birthday celebrations (5,3)
- 13 Unpleasant (13)
- 16 Saviours (8)
- 19 Curse (4)
- 20 Guarantee (6)
- 22 Inclined the head (6)
- 23 Weirdos (8)
- 24 Information (4)

Down

- 2 Can be changed (9)
- 3 Tiredness (7)
- 4 Go over information again (5)
- 5 Bye! (7)
- 6 Attempt again (5)
- 7 Large flightless bird (3)
- 12 Plot of land for growing veg (9)
- 14 Item of warm underwear! (7)
- 15 Steered clear of (7)
- 17 Scale (5)
- 18 Ballads (5)
- 21 Craze (3)

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

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 50 minutes +
10 minutes resting time.

Serves: 4-6



Jambalaya

Ingredients

½ tsp white peppercorns
 ½ tsp black peppercorns
 1 tsp paprika
 1 tsp cayenne (or more if using
 a very mild sausage)
 1 tsp dried thyme
 2 bay leaves
 ½ tsp salt
 2 tbsps neutral oil
 2 smoked pork sausages, ideally
 andouille, but fresh Polish smoked
 sausages, smoked chorizo or Toulouse
 would also do, cut into thick slices
 4 bone-in chicken thighs
 1 onion, finely chopped
 1 red pepper, finely chopped
 1 celery stick, finely chopped
 4 spring onions, chopped, green
 and white parts separated
 3 garlic cloves, crushed
 800ml chicken or pork stock
 1 tsp Tabasco or other hot
 sauce, plus extra to serve
 300g long grain rice
 300g large raw prawns

Method

Turn the heat to high and in a small dry pan toast the peppercorns, paprika and cayenne. Grind them in a pestle and mortar until smooth. Add the thyme, bay leaves and salt then set one side.

Lower the heat to medium and heat the oil in a lidded frying pan. Add the sausage slices and cook until golden. Remove to drain on kitchen paper. Add the chicken and cook until golden brown, remove and place with the sausage.

Add the onion, green pepper, the white parts of the spring onions, and garlic to the pan. Cook until soft and translucent, then stir in the spice mix and cook for another couple of minutes. Return the chicken back into the pan and pour stock and Tabasco over everything.

Lower the heat to allow the mixture to simmer for about 15 minutes until the chicken is tender. Stir in the rice and simmer for a further 10 minutes. Stir everything once then cover with a tight lid, reduce the heat and steam gently for 15 minutes. Remove the chicken. Add the prawns and sausage, stir again, then replace the lid and leave to rest for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, shred the chicken then fold into the rested jambalaya, season to taste with salt and more Tabasco. Garnish with the spring onion greens

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useful numbers

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 Grove Surgery 0121 705 1105
 Northbrook Group Practice 0121 746 5000
 Hobs Moat Medical Centre 0121 742 5211
 Solihull Hospital 0121 424 2000
 Spire Parkway Hospital 0121 704 1451
 Daleswood Health, Solihull 01675 489489

Council

Solihull Council 0121 704 6000

Utilities

Electricity power cut 0800 6783 105
 Gas leak 0800 111 9999
 Severn Trent Water 024 7771 5000
 Severn Trent Water (emergencies) 0800 783 4444

Travel

National Rail Enquiries 03457 48 49 50
 Network West Midlands (buses) 0345 303 6760

LOCAL COUNCILLORS

SOLIHULL / SILHILL

Mike Gough

Tel: 07480 253181
 Michael.gough@solihull.gov.uk

Peter Hogarth MBE

Tel: 0121 705 5455
 phogarth@solihull.gov.uk

Wazma Qais

Tel: 0121 709 3404
 wazma.qais@solihull.gov.uk

ST ALPHEGE

Stuart Davis

Tel: 01564 776293
 sdavis@solihull.gov.uk

Joe Tildesley

Tel: 0121 705 3086
 joetildesley@solihull.gov.uk

Kate Wild

Tel: 07917 550 644
 kawild@solihull.gov.uk

Councillor surgeries these are face-to-face meetings held by councillors for local people to raise issues in their area. Held at The Core Library, Solihull on the first and last Saturday of the month, 10am – 12 noon.

local police contact for Solihull

Solihull police station

Telephone: 0845 113 5000



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21 EH Smith 0121 7013 7100

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6 Bathrooms Galore 0121 783 9966

Car Services13 AP Alloys 07972 852758
20 Crossroads Service Station 01564 703225**Care services**3 Eastcote Park 01564 757405
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1 smarthomes 0121 744 4144

Events

2 Alfresco Style 01926 843555

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24 Proline 0800 956 1315

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Kitchens

9 Dream Doors 0121 744 8974

Plumbing

7 Stephen Smith Plumbing & Heating 01564 200119

Roofing16 C Stevens Roofing 0121 733 1276
18 Prestige Multi-Trades 07886 922280
36 N Bird & Son 0800 195 6946**Travel Agent**

16 Not Just Travel 07565 534524

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

Sudoku Solution
from page 22

H	A	L	F	R	E	C	U	R	R	E	D
L	A	E	H	E	M						
S	T	A	T	I	C	E	A	T	O	U	T
E	I	A	E	R							
D	R	U	G	P	A	R	T	Y	B	A	G
A	U		J								L
O	B	J	E	C	T	I	O	N	A	B	L
L			H								V
R	E	S	C	U	E	R	S		O	A	T
	L	R	O	I	M						
A	F	F	I	R	M		N	O	D	D	E
A	M		A	G	E	N					
O	D	D	B	A	L	L	S		D	A	T

crossword Solution
from page 22**Solution to Mind benders**

1. Iron Curtain
2. Sea salt
3. Circle of friends

mindbenders
from page 16

local events

Please note: in these uncertain times it's worth checking these events are still running before you turn up.

Sunday lunch with Santa

Sundays from 29 November - 20 December

Hogarth's Hotel, Dorridge

Meet and greet with Santa and enjoy a 3-course meal. Sittings at 12pm, 1:30pm and 3pm. Children will eat smaller portions of the main menu or an alternative menu is available on request. £30 adults, £22 children under 10. Call 01564 779988 to book.

Soihull's Jingle Bell Jog

13 December

Solihull Town Centre

Spread plenty of festive cheer this December by donning a Santa suit and completing the Jingle Bell Jog - a 2.5km fun run through Solihull town centre. Run, walk, dance, jog or jingle your way around the course and don't worry about the training, this festive run is about dressing up and coming together with friends and family. For more information call 0121 285 1370.

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Christmas Vintage, Craft and Gift Fayre

13 December, 1-4pm

Arden Hotel, Coventry Road, Bickenhill, Solihull

Live music & entertainment all afternoon! Old time dancing with our vintage singer - no partner required! RezaFarrell will be taking you back in time with Christmas classics through the decades, vintage fashion, retro items, craft & gift stalls, antiques, handmade items, unique Christmas gifts, books & toys, Christmas decorations, beauty treatments & holistic therapies, psychic readings, and so much more! www.ardenhotel.co.uk

Solihull Festive Feast

18 -22 December

Mel Square, Solihull

Shoppers will be treated to flavours from around the world with a wide range of hot foods to sample and cold items to take home for that Christmas pantry to share with their nearest and dearest. When you think of Christmas, think of Solihull this festive season as the town centre embraces the festive feel in the run-up to the big day.



a good read

reviews By Willow Coby

Me Before You

by Jojo Moyes

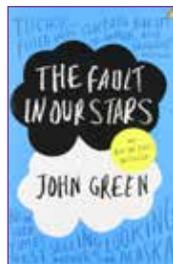
26-year-old Lou Clark still lives with her parents in the quiet market town she grew up in. Almost deserted in the winter the town's one draw is an old castle and when we meet Lou, she works in the local tea shop serving the coach loads of tourists who come to visit. With a quirky dress sense Lou never really feels as if she fits in and as a teenager longed to travel the world. However, circumstances meant that she could never bring herself to leave. After losing her job she reluctantly takes a job caring for Will, a young quadriplegic man injured in a motorcycle accident several years earlier. She is told the job is just for 6 months and despite a rough start she decides to stick it out and soon an unlikely bond develops between Lou and Will. A romantic novel this also deals with the sensitive issue of disability and the descriptions of Will's day to day life are well-written with brutal honesty and little sensationalism. Things take a darker turn when Lou learns the reason why her contract is only to be for 6 months and she sets out to bring Will new experiences and remind him of the simple joys of life: not easy for a wheelchair bound man whose ideal way to pass the time before his accident was skydiving or climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. As a reader you are drawn into the lives of these characters and the development of their relationship is believable. In the hands of the wrong writer this plot line could turn out to be very twee and cliché but Moyes does not fall into this trap. The resulting novel is engaging, difficult to put down and will lead you to appreciate the small wonders of life.



The Fault in Our Stars

by John Green

Continuing with the theme of personal relationships in the face of illness comes *The Fault in Our Stars* the hugely successful teen novel exploring the impact of teenage cancer on the lives of two individuals. 16-year-old Hazel has cancer and is, reluctantly, convinced by her parents to attend a support group for others in her situation. Amongst the other patients there is Augustus, a 17-year-old boy who lost a leg to cancer. The two begin talking and agree to read each other's favourite books. Hazel's book is a novel by a Dutch writer about a young girl with cancer: Hazel sees many parallels to her own life here. Augustus is angry after reading the book and discovering that it doesn't have a nicely wrapped up ending. There is no conclusion, no neat package, no ending: happy or otherwise. Of course, life has an ending, but it often isn't happy or neatly wrapped up. Hazel becomes aware of her fears about getting close to others. She is afraid that when she dies it will hurt them, and this naturally affects her relationship with Augustus. This moving novel deals with issues that most of its teen readers won't have yet faced in their lives. As a teenager you often feel immortal. You feel as if life is stretching out ahead of you and death is the furthest from your mind. Hazel and Augustus, along with the other young people at the support group view life differently. There is no expectation that everyone will make it to the next meeting. No one is immortal. With a huge teenage following and a successful movie adaptation this novel stays with you long after the closing paragraph.



Rhubarb rhubarb

Rhubarb is a reasonably easy trouble-free plant to grow. It is also a handsome plant, with large leaves and striking red stems, and who doesn't love a rhubarb crumble?

The trick is to choose the right spot. Ideally it needs to be planted in full sun but if your garden is very sheltered it will tolerate partial shade. Don't plant it anywhere where it might be in the way, disturbed, or need to be moved from. Rhubarb has an extensive root system and prefers to stay put, for at least a decade, so give careful thought to the spot.

Rhubarb dislikes wet soil, so make sure it's well-drained. Dig in plenty of organic matter a month or so before planting. It's generally easier and more productive to grow rhubarb from crowns (divided plants) rather than seed, and from now until Christmas is the perfect time to plant.

Dig a hole a little wider than the rhubarb crown in your prepared ground. Plant so that the growing tip is about an inch /2.5 cm below the surface. Firm the soil well around the roots to removed air pockets. Water well and mulch with organic matter, avoiding the growing tip.

During the growing season keep the area around the plant free of weeds and give an occasional good soaking in prolonged dry periods. Remove any flower heads that appear in the spring. Flowering will weaken the stems. If the crown rots, your soil was too wet, but following all the advice I've given earlier should prevent this happening! Harvest time is May until July, but rhubarb is a long-term investment so don't harvest it during the first year. It needs that full first year of growth to establish a strong root system. Second year leave at least five strong stems when you harvest. After that you can leave three or four stems each time. You should get 2-3 crops per season.



Remove only the largest stems when picking and wait till the leaves have fully opened. Pull gently from the base with a slight twist. The leaves are poisonous but can be safely composted.

Once your rhubarb is established you might want to try a forced crop for sweeter more tender stems. Rhubarb is forced by growing it in the absence of light in a microclimate slightly warmer than the outside temperature. You can start forcing in January for best results. Remove dead leaves and weeds from around the crown and add a layer of straw or shredded paper to warm the emerging shoots and to protect them from frost. Then cover the crown with an upturned dustbin or large crock pot to cut out all the light. The rhubarb should be ready for harvesting 8 weeks later.

Happy gardening.

The Coding Conundrum

How to get kids learning to code

When my son Lee started secondary school this year, the subject he was most looking forward to studying was computer science. He wants to learn to code and create his own programs. But a few weeks in and he was starting to lose enthusiasm.

The problem is that he hasn't yet touched a computer, only partly because of COVID safety procedures. They learn about programming and how computers work, but it's all on paper without a single line of code. I looked at his syllabus and frankly it's not going to get much better for several months!

Computer science courses at school talk about computers much more than they talk about programming. Kids desperate to code become frustrated and switch off from the subject. Fewer children in the UK are now progressing to become computer programmers. That's unfortunate when it's one of the most sought after skills in today's workforce.

There is a shortage of specialist computer science teachers. Most computer programmers work in industry, where salaries are higher. So children are taught by non-specialists who mostly do not have a software engineering background. Hence the syllabus becomes weighted to teaching general computing rather than coding.

How do we turn kids on to coding?

Most want to create the next top selling computer games, or a killer app for their

phone. How do we harness that and create the next generation of coders?

Learning is currently going through big changes thanks to the pandemic. We can't rely on having kids in a classroom with their teacher for the whole of a term at the moment because of various year groups or members of a bubble needing to self-isolate. But online learning opens up an almost infinite number of options for students. Web sites like Udemy or Coursera offer high-quality, well-taught courses in a vast range of topics.

For Lee I found a Udemy course, tailored to his age range that taught coding through designing and building games (I've included

the web address below). It teaches Python, the same programming language that he'll use at school, and indeed the one most schools use. All the lessons are video, so there's no reading long documents. Coding starts as soon as the programming software (which is free!) is installed. He can go at his own pace, take lessons

whenever he wants, and replay explanations as many times as he wants until he fully understands. Personal help is just a few clicks away. Send a message and an answer comes back in about a day or so from the actual tutor. It's just like having a private computer science teacher at a fraction of the cost - less than the cost of a single tutor session in fact!

So how's he doing?

The enthusiasm is back. He's blasting through the lessons and loving it. At this rate he'll finish the course this term which will take him to GCSE coding standard in just a few months. After that the sky's the limit.





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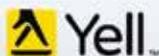
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