

# Ring the changes: my top tips for 2016

How will your garden grow in the coming season? Here are 10 ideas that started out as experiments but which have now become tried and tested favourites. Try them yourself for a Happy New Gardening Year!



**Bunny Guinness**

**M**y garden is like an outdoor laboratory. I am forever trying different plants, new ways of building things and making maintenance more efficient. This past year I discovered a fair few products and plants that I will definitely use in future. I'd like to share them with you...

## The cutting edge

A few years ago we did a garden at Chelsea to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Boat Race (see right). The course was depicted in paving slabs with "The Start", "Finish" and landmarks cut out of the stone using a water cutter linked to a computer with our graphics. We then filled in the lettering with brass. Aqua Dynamics Ltd (aqua-dynamics.co.uk) will cut any design you require. You could engrave a paving slab with a date, a name or a simple pattern and fill it with slate or similar. It costs from around £400 per slab. So many possibilities.

## Help is at hand

I like good gear, especially hand and footwear. Joe's gloves (joes-

garden.com) are a revelation. The Protective One (bright orange) is tough and waterproof, yet fine enough to work in. There are also the Dexterous One (pink), the best-selling Essential One (lime) and the All Seasons One (red - below), which is warmer. From £6.99, £1 more for the last-mentioned.

Working alongside a forester the other week, I admired her snazzy boots: leather, waterproof, comfortable, warm and breathable - ideal for her line of work. The Gateley Leather Country Boot (gallop equestrian.com) costs £79.99. The side laces ensure a snug fit, while a side zip enables a quick exit. Although sold for equestrian use they are multipurpose, perfect for gardening and dog walking.



MMGI/MARIANNE MAJERUS; GAP PHOTOS



## Seed capital

Seed saving is a great way to cut down costs. *From Seed to Seed* is a collection of four clever, fascinating DVDs (£38 at seedfilm.org, a not-for-profit concern) that answers questions about breeding,

pollination and more. It is pitched at professionals and amateurs alike to spread the message about the importance of seed saving. If you are thinking of starting a seed swap, this would be a good beginning.



have a rotting straw bale to add to my borders afterwards.

#### See off those slugs

**5** The damp weather this year has been a great joy for slugs and snails. I have added a new-but-old weapon to my armoury: home-made garlic spray. I know a serious hosta grower who swears by it. Take one whole bulb of garlic, crush and add to 1½ pints of water and boil vigorously for 10 minutes. Cool for 10 minutes (best done outside – it's smelly) then sieve and decant. Keep in the fridge. When needed add two tablespoons to a one-gallon watering can, fill with water and apply.

#### Sitting comfortably

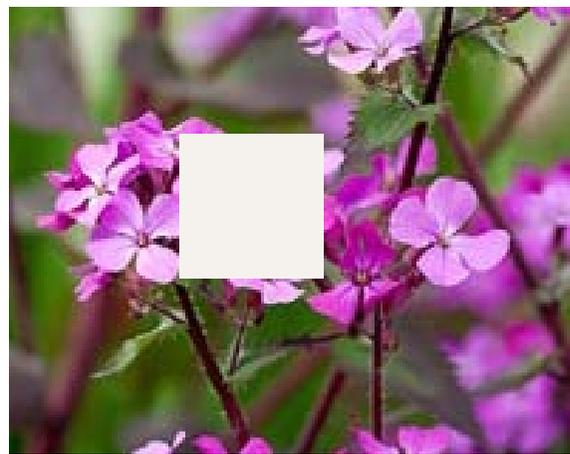
**6** With the division between indoor and outdoor becoming ever more seamless I was intrigued by a new range from outdoor furniture specialist Coco Wolf (£1,240-£9,350). The pieces look like regular armchairs and sofas but they are designed to live outside, unaffected by moss or mould.



more at home on a smart urban roof terrace (cocowolf.co.uk).

#### Grow your own

**7** I was shocked to read that Carnegie Mellon University researchers in Pittsburgh found that commercially grown lettuce, cucumber, aubergines and celery are all far worse than pork and chicken in terms of energy costs, water use and emissions, with lettuce more than three times as bad as bacon. So if you want to save the planet, grow your own. You will benefit from better flavour and more nutrients.



*Lunaria annua* 'Chedglow', above; outdoor armchair, left, instant weather for stone, below

#### Purple patch

**8** My favourite new plant is the purple-leaf honesty *Lunaria annua* 'Chedglow' (left), an exquisite biennial with flowers in dark purple. The leaves start purple-spotted but the spots coalesce to a dark purple (avonbulbs.co.uk).

#### Golden oldie

**9** Liquid Weather (2.5 litres, £49) is a product for ageing stone, brick, tiles, paving and so on. It is made from microfine soot mixed with a carrier so it penetrates the stone. I have found it brilliant for matching in new materials. It does not wear off and allows the material to continue to weather naturally. You can dilute it for a paler look. No more rubbing on of moss, leaves and the like (liquidweather.co.uk).

#### Playing gooseberry

**10** My favourite new fruits are *Physalis* 'Little Buddha' and 'Peter's Best' from Lubera (lubera.co.uk). Cape gooseberries are usually fairly tart, so I dip them in white chocolate to make after-dinner treats. These two varieties are prolific (a good 100 large fruit per plant), extremely tasty and sweeter than the norm and easy to grow. They are tender, so mine are overwintering in a frost-free greenhouse and I have taken cuttings, too.

#### Straw poll winner

**4** This year I grew some tomatoes in straw bales. They were a big success, ripening earlier and cropping better than their counterparts in pots. I will repeat the experiment. It is also a bonus to

Set in stone: Bunny's Chelsea Boat Race garden with specially designed paving