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Letter from the Editor

Hello again and welcome...

Remembering a recent holiday – just four days away – the memories were sharp. I could still taste the delicious food, picture the amazing scenery and recall the interesting places we visited. We did a lot in a short break, and it felt like it lasted for ages.

Yet seven days after we returned home – a whole week later – I could barely remember what I had for breakfast that morning, let alone anything memorable that had happened since I got back. The 'usual' had just merged into a blur.

This is a concern - life is short as it is, and I cannot afford to be taking weeks of it for granted. But neither can I afford to live a permanent holiday, and even if I could, surely that would become the ordinary instead?

What I have realised is that I need to bring some of that holiday mindset into the other weeks of the year. I need to make time for new experiences, meet new people, and have some things to look forward to.

So, here's what I am thinking. I will make more time to go to live music, theatre, exhibitions, and community events, and with Christmas coming up, there is plenty to choose from. The other is starting some home improvement projects. If I put some love into the space where I spend most of my time, this will give me something to plan and to look forward to.

Not quite a holiday, but I am excited all the same!

And the thought I will leave you with this month:-

*"Always plan ahead.
It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark."*

Until next time...

Sheila

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The Village Breeze is a local community magazine and business directory distributed monthly to 8,000 homes and businesses in Appleby Magna, Donisthorpe, Linton, Measham, Moira, Oakthorpe and Overseal.

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Pine or Plastic? The Great Christmas Tree Debate

The modern Christmas tree tradition - bringing a whole, decorated tree indoors - can be traced to 16th-century Germany. In Britain, Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, introduced an early version of the custom at Windsor in 1800. But it was Queen Victoria and Prince Albert who made it truly fashionable, thanks to an 1848 newspaper illustration showing the Royal Family gathered around a fir.

Artificial trees soon followed. In the late 19th century, German makers, concerned about deforestation, crafted them from dyed goose feathers. By the 1930s, "bristle trees" made in the UK and US - using techniques borrowed from toilet brush manufacturing - offered a longer-lasting alternative.

So which is better for you and the planet? Here's a look at the pros and cons.

Why choose real?

A real tree brings natural beauty, the fresh scent of pine, and no need to find storage space for 11 months of the year. Today, most are grown on plantations rather than cut from wild forests, and the British Christmas Tree Growers' Association says up to ten seedlings are planted for every average-size tree harvested.

Buy from a local grower and your carbon footprint is minimal. Disposed of in landfill, a two-metre tree produces around 16 kg of CO₂; if chipped for mulch, only 3.5 kg. By comparison, an artificial tree carries a footprint of around 40 kg. While growing, a real tree absorbs carbon dioxide, releases oxygen, and provides shelter for wildlife. Choose one with roots and reuse it year after year, and the environmental benefits grow even further.

The downsides

A cut tree lasts only a few weeks, even with regular watering. Some varieties shed needles quickly, while the needle-retentive types can be pricey. If you'll be away over the holidays, caring for a real tree will be a challenge. Some people suffer from pine allergies.

Why choose artificial?

For many, convenience wins - no mess, no watering, no annual trip to buy and dispose of a tree. A well-kept artificial tree can last a decade or more - long enough to offset its initial environmental impact and save money. Options range from minimalist to lavish, some pre-lit, and most are flame-retardant, making them a safer choice for households with children or pets.

The downsides

Artificial trees need to be stored, assembled, and dismantled each year. They lack the scent and living presence of a real tree. Most are made from non-biodegradable PVC, often in factories overseas, meaning the transportation adds to their environmental impact.

The bottom line

A freshly cut fir is hard to beat for charm and tradition, and is the greener option in colour and in conscience. But if you prefer the practicality of an artificial tree, ensure that you invest in one that will last - or even better, buy second-hand - and you can still celebrate and minimise your environmental impact.





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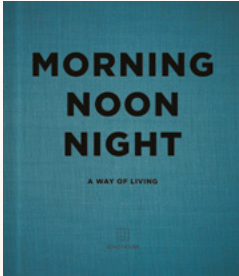
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Life of luxury

We spend a lot of time at home, particularly in winter, so it has to be practical. But there's plenty of inspiration available for making it luxurious too.



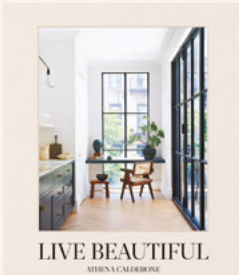
BOOK - Morning, Noon, Night by Soho House UK Ltd

Since opening in London in 1995, Soho House members' club has been a place for creative people to come together. This book invites readers behind the scenes at the houses. Key elements of the Soho House way of living are illustrated and broken down into helpful features, like how to make a tasty vegan breakfast or create the perfect bedroom.



BOOK - British Designers at Home by Jenny Rose-Innes

The book is for anyone curious to find out more about designers, and glean ideas and practical information for their own homes. This engaging and visually enticing book profiles over 20 of the most important names in British design and decoration in their own personal spaces.



BOOK - Live Beautiful by Athena Calderone

The author, the design expert and creator of lifestyle brand EyeSwoon, taps into her network of interior decorators, fashion designers and tastemakers to reveal how carefully crafted interiors come together. She breaks down details of rooms, like textures and patterns, and offers helpful advice on how you can replicate these different elements.

PODCAST - The Luxury Podcast

In each podcast, hosts William Hanson and Jonathan Vernon-Smith tackle an area of life that they think you should upgrade, helping you create the everyday moments of luxury that make life more enjoyable.

TV SERIES - Britain's Most Expensive Houses

This takes a look at some of Britain's most jaw-dropping houses, from grand country estates and coastal retreats to London's most coveted postcodes. The houses are the theme but, of course, the estate agent cast are the entertainment. There are three series of this show and it's free to watch on catch-up on Channel 4 (with adverts unless you subscribe).

YOUTUBE - The Luxury Home Show

With over one million subscribers, this UK-based home show does feature some overseas houses too. There are some videos of huge homes, of course, but as UK property tends to be smaller, there's plenty to watch that would seem more achievable for us. The episodes featuring interior designers offer some great tips.



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Watch this space



Create a chic but useful area for kicking off footwear, doing the laundry or storing kitchen essentials.

When creating a laundry room, boot room or pantry, the key to success is carefully planned design that takes into account your needs, available space and your home's style.

Perfectly practical pantries

If you don't live in an older property with a built-in pantry for storing food and kitchen kit, consider carving off a section of your kitchen, utility or hallway to create one. It can be small but should adjoin your kitchen so that grabbing an ingredient is quick and easy. You'll need a sturdy worktop, shelves above and utensil rails and drawers below.

If a separate room isn't possible, an easy alternative is a free-standing pantry cupboard (vintage or new) in the kitchen.



Make light work of laundry

A washing machine can be moved into a bathroom, landing cupboard with sliding doors, under the stairs, into a dressing room, garage or large cloakroom. This way, drying clothes and laundry paraphernalia can be kept out of sight, and you won't have to listen to the spin cycle when cooking supper.

Budget allowing, it's lovely to hide the washing machine – and tumble dryer, too, if you have one – behind sleek, built-in cabinetry. Add a waterproof worktop, a tiled splashback and a shelf above for detergents and other items. A

tall space for storing the ironing board and hanging clothes is ideal, but you can get away with a rail attached to the bottom of a shelf for shirts. A great addition is a ceiling-mounted drying rack with a pulley.

Shoes, boots and more

Even without a dedicated boot room, you can still create an organised way of storing footwear, coats and umbrellas in your hallway or a utility. If you haven't got moppable flooring, add a washable rug. Consider tongue-and-groove panelling, tiles, tough vinyl wallpaper or a hard-wearing, wipeable paint for the lower portion of the walls.

A row of sturdy hooks is essential for coats. A high shelf above is handy for hats and how about a bench seat with storage of different heights underneath for shoes and boots? Just add a tall basket for umbrellas.





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Relight My Fire

Katherine Wheal's previous experience of firemen, before her recent move, had been at her sister's Hen Night all those years ago. The memory of that fun evening in 1975 – three fit firemen gyrating on the dance floor to Hot Chocolate's latest hit – was still indelibly etched on her mind. But, hey ho! What happens in Nottingham, stays in Nottingham!

After her bitter divorce, Katherine was in no hurry to rush into another relationship. For a few months, she rented a one-bedroomed apartment, and finally managed to scrape together enough money for a deposit on her own place – a nice little semi in a quiet village.

A week after she moved in . . . disaster struck! A bonfire she'd lit at the bottom of the garden to burn some rubbish left by the previous owners, suddenly got out of hand – the flames scorching the grass around her. In panic, she dialled 999. Much to her embarrassment, a fire engine turned up and four burly firemen in full protective gear, jumped out.

Katherine felt herself blush as thoughts came flooding back of that naughty night in Nottingham. Thankfully, the encroaching flames were quickly and expertly extinguished.

'You were lucky,' said one of the firemen, wiping the sweat from his brow. *'Could've been a lot worse, but you were right to call us.'* He introduced himself. *'I only live across the road! Can you believe it – we're neighbours!'*

'Thanks, I'm very grateful to you . . . and the other lads, of course,' she replied, feeling her face reddening again. He was kind of dishy! *'You must pop round sometime for a cup of tea or coffee. If you're lucky, I might even bake you a cake.'*

A few days later, the fireman knocked on the door, and Katherine invited him in. With a mouthful of Victoria sponge, he explained how he had a passion for pyrotechnics.

'As a Fire Officer, part of my job is to supervise the safety at public firework displays,' he explained. *'Site inspections, crowd and traffic control,*

emergency response for incidents like fires or injuries – things like that.'

Wow! She could easily fall for this guy!

Katherine was over the moon when, the following week, he plucked up the courage to ask her out on a date. They soon became inseparable, going for walks together, and visiting pubs, clubs and restaurants in the nearby town. Love was in the air.

Six months went by. In early October, his mobile rang. He was asked to oversee a special event in November. The money raised from the ticket sales would be donated to several deserving local charities.

On the evening of November 5th, they mingled with the excited crowd gathered in a field on the edge of the village. The bonfire towered over thirty metres high – the guy, stuffed with old clothes and newspapers, perched precariously on the top. The fireworks were ready: rockets, Roman candles, Catherine wheels, fountains, flares, confetti cannons . . . all sorts.

The local vicar, Reverend Luke, had been volunteered to ignite the tall stack of old wood and dry branches. Then the fireman stepped forward and lit the blue touchpaper on the first firework, retreating to a safe distance as a strobe rocket zoomed upwards towards the heavens and exploded in a blaze of colour.

He was joined by the love of his life, Katherine.

Silently, arm in arm, they watched the fireworks in awe: the vibrant bursts of light, colour and sound exploded in the night sky, transforming the darkness into a canvas of dazzling effects like glittering flowers, shimmering waterfalls and dancing sparks. Magical!

When it was all over: *'Another success, Guy!'* she whispered, giving him a kiss. *'You're certainly living up to your name!'*

'Yes, well done . . . Fire Officer Fawkes – Guy Fawkes.'

'You can relight my fire any day,' she smiled.

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Full English breakfast hash

This is the ideal brunch dish – cooked in one pot and making the most of ingredients you're likely to have in the fridge.

Detail...

Serves 4; Preparation time 20 minutes; Cooking time 45 minutes

You will need...

- Butter or oil for greasing
- 450g uncooked hash browns, defrosted
- 2 eggs
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 onion, peeled and finely diced
- 2-3 sausages, sliced
- 4 rashers of bacon, diced
- 50g kale, chopped
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 2-3 handfuls of grated Cheddar cheese
- 4 eggs
- 2-3 Opies Pickled Walnuts, thickly sliced

Method...

1. Preheat the oven to 220°C, fan 200°C, gas mark 7. Lightly grease a shallow casserole dish.
2. Carefully break up the hash browns into a bowl using clean hands so they resemble grated cheese. Add the 2 eggs, season to taste and mix in well. Using your hands, line the casserole dish with the mixture, pushing it down using your fingertips to form a large solid 'rosti'-type base. Place in the preheated oven for 20-25 minutes or until golden and crispy.
3. Meanwhile, fry the onion in a little vegetable oil until softened, then add the sausages and diced bacon to the pan. Fry until coloured before adding the kale and cook for a further 5-6 minutes or until the kale has just wilted. When the hash brown base is ready, remove from the oven and spoon the sausage and bacon mixture on top, followed by the diced tomatoes and grated cheese. Finally, crack 4 eggs on top and finish with the pickled walnuts. Place back in the oven for 15 minutes or until the eggs are just cooked and the yolk is still runny.

Opies Pickled Walnuts (390g) are available from most major supermarkets. For more recipe inspiration using the Opies range of products, visit www.bennettopie.com.

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REMEMBER QUALITY IS AS IMPORTANT AS PRICE



Little acorns for the little'uns



If you want to save for your child or grandchild's future, it's important to understand all the options.

Before making any decision about putting aside some money for a child, ask yourself some basic questions. Are you saving for a specific purpose? Do you want to maximize the growth, or is security more important? Are you trying to encourage Junior to save money? How long will it be before they need to access it?

1. Savings accounts

This is perhaps the easiest option. While some banks let children open an account, with younger kids an adult (usually a parent or guardian) must open it 'in trust'. This means they can both pay in and withdraw money – this must be for the child's benefit.

When the child reaches a certain age, commonly 16, they get full control of the money. You might have saved for a particular reason, such as university tuition fees, but you can't force them to spend it this way.

Sometimes these accounts offer generous interest rates, which are usually tax free. If the interest on money put in by a parent exceeds £100 a year, it will count towards the parent's annual tax-free savings allowance.

2. Junior ISAs

If you're hoping to save a large amount, a Junior ISA may be the best option. It works like normal ISAs, with a 'cash' option with guaranteed interest rates and a riskier 'stocks and shares' version which

invests the money. A junior ISA doesn't allow any withdrawals until the child turns 18.

In both cases, you can add a maximum of £9,000 a year and any gains are tax free. As with a savings account, the money legally belongs to the child. However, they can only control the account when they turn 16 and withdraw money when they're 18.

3. Junior pensions

The ultimate long-term option is a junior pension. This lets you put in £3,600 a year tax free. At the moment, this can be further boosted with 'tax relief'. This means the government will add 20% to the amount you put in, even if you aren't a taxpayer. (They'll top up by 40%/45% if you're a higher/additional-rate taxpayer.) This extra money counts towards the £3,600 annual limit.

The usual format is a Junior Self-Invested Personal Pension (SIPP). You decide how the money is invested until the child is 18, at which point they take control. Only a parent or guardian can set up a Junior SIPP, though anyone can pay in. The big limitation is that the child can't access the money until they are 55. This is increasing to 57 in 2028 and will almost certainly continue rising.

4. Premium Bonds

Grandparents can buy Premium Bonds for children but must name a parent or guardian to hold the bond until the child turns 16. There's no interest and an average holder won't garner enough prizes to outpace inflation; the 'value' is the excitement of a possible big win.

What makes a good Estate Agent?

In an age where efficiency is prioritised over the personal touch, estate agents are facing an identity crisis. As more agencies turn to outsourcing and AI, do people still buy from people?

Regrettably, for many decades Estate Agents have sat on the popularity scale somewhere only slightly above the traffic warden. But all agencies are not the same!

What a good estate agent should be:

Responsive

Do they answer the phone? If you leave a voicemail or email, do they come back to you promptly? Do they give you realistic timescales for follow-ups and stick to them? Do they offer viewings at times that suit?

Truthful

Anyone can come into your home and tell you it's on a par with Buckingham Palace. A good agent will give you a realistic valuation to sell your property in a reasonable amount of time, without numerous reductions and will be clear about the pros and cons of the current market. They should manage your expectations from the outset.

Genuinely warm, interested and caring
Do you actually like them?! Are

they a likeable person who is interested in your requirements and not just a salesperson who'll promise anything to get the commission? Having an agent who you can trust and becomes more like a friend is the number one positive mentioned in feedback.

Transparent and straightforward

Are their fees reasonable and easy to understand? Are they happy to provide the information up front? Are they vague about pricing or wanting to tie you into unnecessary services or timescales?

Motivated

How are their Google reviews? Have they won awards? Have they known the local market for many years? Do they have

a presence on the High Street with accessible opening hours?

With you right the way through the process

Can they give independent mortgage advice? Do they have a sales progressor and how often will you be updated? Can they recommend a conveyancer? Do they have access to Surveyors/EPC providers/an auction house?

Always get three valuations when considering selling your property. Don't just choose based on figures; choose who you can trust to steer you right through the process. People are still the most important part of house-selling!

By Lee Marshall-Rose
Cadley Caldwell Estate Agents



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Volkswagen California

Is the Volkswagen California still the camper van king? Jack Evans finds out.

WHAT IS IT?

With a lineage tracing back to the 1960s, the Volkswagen California is one of the best-known names in camper vans. But as time has moved on, it has become more feature packed. This latest generation has more creature comforts than ever.

WHAT'S NEW?

The previous model shared its underpinnings with the hardy Transporter panel van. This new California has more in common with the Multivan, which is on the same MQB platform as cars like the Golf. The idea is that the new California should offer a more car-like driving experience with improved refinement and handling.

WHAT'S UNDER THE BONNET?

'Our' California comes with a 2.0-litre turbocharged diesel engine linked to a seven-speed DSG automatic gearbox, sending a modest 148bhp to the front wheels. Zero to 60mph will take just over 12 seconds but you've got 360Nm of torque. VW claims you should get up to 41.5mpg combined.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DRIVE?

With the new platform, you'd expect the California to feel more car-like than ever. It does, with a decent level of road holding through the bends but there's quite a lot of noise when you're moving quickly and road imperfections upset the ride. However, remember you're carrying a full kitchen and bed suite with you.

HOW DOES IT LOOK?

Volkswagen has done well to evolve the look without changing things too much. You can still get the split-colour design, though we were fond of our all-blue test van.

WHAT'S IT LIKE INSIDE?

The good news is that all versions are packed with features. For the first time, both sides come with a sliding door. Entry-level Beach vans get a mini-kitchen which slides out of the rear, while models from Coast and above get a fully-fitted summer kitchen inside. You'll find USB-C charging points nearly everywhere.

All versions have a pop-up roof, with those from Coast and above electro-hydraulically operated. There's an additional bed up there. We're fans of the control panel to the side of the cabin which gives quick access to information such as water and power levels.

WHAT'S THE SPEC LIKE?

You'll pay £68,481 for the Beach. However, we expect most buyers will opt for the £70,681 Coast. Its kitchen has an outdoor folding table and there's Climatronic three-zone air conditioning.

At the top sits the Ocean with 18-inch alloy wheels, upgraded LED Matrix headlights, power-latching sliding doors and heated front seats. But, at just over £77,000, it takes the California's price into a different zone.

VERDICT

There are only small boosts in refinement over the previous van-based model but, fortunately, the cabin has been so well thought out that any ride inadequacies are likely to be an afterthought once you've set up camp.



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Georgia on my mind?

Over the last decade, Georgia has shot from hidden gem to the most visited country in the South Caucasus. It's easy to see why; from lush green valleys, vineyards and traditional villages to snow-capped mountains, this country nestled between the Black Sea and the Greater Caucasus Mountains manages to pack in a staggering variety of landscapes across its relatively small landmass. To top it off, Georgia's hospitality is world famous, so expect to be warmly welcomed.

Tempted? Here's a breakdown of the top things to do while you're there.

SPEND TIME IN TBILISI

Georgia's beguiling capital (*pictured top*) enjoys a dramatic valley setting. It also has a 'hipster' edge, making it the South Caucasus' most cosmopolitan city.

Learn about the city's architecture on a tour of Tbilisi's picturesque Old Town and take the cable car to the Sololaki ridge, where you'll find the Narikala Fortress and Mother of Georgia monument. Then, when evening draws in, relax in Tbilisi's bars and restaurants.

VENTURE INTO THE CAUCASUS MOUNTAINS

The Caucasus Mountains are extraordinary when approached from any direction but most will agree that the Svaneti region boasts some of the best scenery. It's here you'll find Shkhara, Georgia's highest peak, towering over the village of Ushguli. Hiking opportunities range from short afternoon strolls to two-week expeditions.

Georgia's Kazbegi region (now called Stepantsminda) offers easier access from Tbilisi. Many come here to hike to Gergeti Glacier on Mount Kazbegi and to photograph the iconic silhouette of the hilltop church of Tsminda Sameba against the glacier.



KICK BACK ON THE BEACHES OF BATUMI

Batumi is Georgia's second largest city, set on the Black Sea coast. It's more glitzy than Tbilisi but has a charming Old Town too.

Thanks to its beachfront

location, Batumi is particularly popular during summer, when locals congregate for cocktails, sunshine and the vibrant nightlife. Stroll the seemingly endless seaside boulevards and visit the Botanical Gardens on a cliff above the Black Sea. If your sights are set on sun, sea and being sedentary, the best beaches can be found to the south of the city, between Batumi and the Turkish border.

TOUR THE WINERIES OF KAKHETI

Georgia boasts an 8,000-year history of winemaking and



Georgia's Kakheti region is the heart of its thriving wine culture. Picturesque Signaghi is perhaps the best place to base yourself – just a two-hour drive from Tbilisi. With its terracotta roofs, cobbled streets and laidback vibe, this pretty town has a distinctly Italian feel. Take a tour around

its traditional wineries and walk the incredibly well-preserved city walls. Then, as the sun sets, settle in at one of Signaghi's many wine bars to sample the best wines in the region.



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Do you need a pet-nup?

Who gets the dog? Who keeps the cat?

Custody battles over pets are becoming more common, but a bit of planning could help avoid heartache.

A battle over a beloved pet when a relationship ends not only adds extra stress at an already unhappy time but can also be a very costly matter if it goes to court – and that does happen. In fact, with the explosion in pet ownership in the wake of the pandemic, lawyers are reporting that legal actions over pets are becoming more prevalent. A ‘pet-nup’ can help prevent that.

Cats and dogs are the most commonly fought-over pets, according to animal welfare charity, Blue Cross. Then come horses, rabbits and guinea pigs. And it’s not only the owners who suffer – Blue Cross takes in four pets a week following a relationship breakdown.

PET-NUPS EXPLAINED

A pet-nup – or pet-nuptial agreement – is similar to a pre-nuptial agreement, which is a legal document drawn up before a couple marry. It spells out how finances will be divided should they break up.

In law, pets are classed as chattels – or personal property – and a court will consider them as it might a car or jewellery, focusing on who bought them or paid for their upkeep rather than their welfare. A pet-nup, while not legally binding, is nonetheless a powerful document and will be considered by a court when it makes a decision on the future of a companion animal.

A pet-nup would typically cover:

- Pet custody, ownership and how often the other person will see the pet
- Care arrangements
- Medical care decisions and vets bills
- Insurance payments
- Maintenance
- Food
- Other day care and breeding expenses

SHOULD YOU GET ONE?

No one likes to think their relationship will come to an end but if you believe in future-proofing, then it could be worth drawing up an agreement which covers your pet. After all, we think of them as family. There have been distressing instances where people have been separated from a beloved animal for long periods because of protracted legal wrangles. You might also see it as being in the best interests of your pet. Ultimately, a tug-of-love will affect you, your ex and your pet. Whether or not you would go to court, a pet-nup could stand you in good stead, as it will offer clarity from the outset. Both you and your partner will have thought about, agreed and signed it.

HOW TO GET A PET-NUP

Many family solicitors now offer legal advice on pet-nups and can draw up one for you. Blue Cross has a free pet-nup document you can download at www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-nup. It also offers a less detailed deed of agreement document that sets out who will take ownership in the event of a break-up.

More, more, more...

INTERNET INTEL

Wi-Fi 7 promises wireless heaven.

There's a new version of the Wi-Fi standard that we use to connect our various devices to the internet and to each other. However, you don't need to rush out and buy it just yet: the first Wi-Fi 7 routers and hubs are very expensive and most of your hardware can't take advantage of their higher speeds and bigger capacity. For example, the latest Apple laptops currently have Wi-Fi 6E. Unless you're really unhappy with your home Wi-Fi speed and coverage, it's worth waiting to upgrade until prices come down and more devices have Wi-Fi 7 connectivity built in.



CANNY CONSUMERS

How to avoid being fooled on Black Friday.

November means Black Friday, the annual week – or even longer – of big bargains. But many deals aren't quite what they seem.

For example, with televisions, the discounted price is typically compared to the manufacturer's recommended retail price and in some cases that was only charged for a brief time – and often quite a long time ago. This means the actual saving is much less than advertised.

Be a canny consumer by checking the price history of the products sold on Amazon at www.camelcamelcamel.com and comparing prices across multiple retailers at www.pricespy.co.uk and www.pricerunner.com.



BIGGER PICTURE

TV tech takes another leap forward.

Samsung has unveiled a new kind of television that promises exceptional brightness and colour accuracy. There are only two problems with it: it's only available as a massive 115-inch model, and that model costs around £24,000. The good news, however, is that the price will quickly plummet and it'll start coming in much smaller sizes too, although it'll still be a high-end option for some time.

The technology is called Micro RGB and it uses very small LEDs to create its images, delivering a very bright, crisp and clear picture.





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It's a funny thing...

For someone who never intended to be a comedian, Sara Pascoe really is having the last laugh.

Born in Essex, Sara Pascoe has showbusiness in her blood – her dad Derek was lead vocalist in 1970s pop group, *Flintlock*.

As a student at Havering Sixth Form College, Sara admits she didn't study as hard as she could have, missing out on a place at Cambridge University to study philosophy. After a gap year and a job as a backing singer and dancer for entertainer Pete Conway (Robbie Williams' dad), she returned to education. It was while doing an English degree at the University of Sussex that Sara became involved in drama groups and, after graduating, worked as an actor.

CIRCUITOUS ROUTE

Sara had never intended to become a comic. *"I used to think comedy was for idiots,"* she said. *"I didn't know I wanted to be a comedian until I'd done it for about three months."*

Sara, now 44, began her stand-up career in 2007 and the following year she won runner-up at the *Funny Women* awards, and went on to perform her sell-out show, *'Sara Pascoe vs Her Ego'* at the Edinburgh Fringe Comedy Festival in 2010.

A trailblazer in women's comedy, she has appeared in some of the nation's classic comedy shows and become a recurring panellist on programmes such as *'Have I Got News for You'*, *'Would I Lie to You?'*, *'Mock the Week'* and *'8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown'*.

'The Great British Sewing Bee' (series 11 episodes available on BBC iPlayer) and *'Comedians Giving Lectures'* lifted Sara's profile and gave her a fresh perspective on her life in stand-up. *"In Sewing Bee, I occasionally write jokes for the links but you're doing a joke for eight people who are really thinking about sewing; they're not thinking about your pun on the wrap dress,"* Sara explained.

In addition, she has written books, including *'Animal: The Autobiography of a Female Body'*, *'Weirdo'* and *'Sex Power Money'* – a reflection on relationships.

MUM'S THE WORD

Sara is back on the road with her new show, *'I Am a Strange Gloop'*, touring the UK and Ireland until the end of March 2026. It's her own take on motherhood.

Married to fellow comedian Steen Raskopoulos since 2020 – and thanks to IVF – Sara is now *"completely flattened and eroded by having two children [sons Theodore and Albie] in as many years in my forties"*. She is determined to normalise IVF for women through her comedy shows. Of the rigours of being on the road, Sara has said: *"It can be tiring but when you're in the dressing room before a show and you hear the hubbub of a busy room, you feel very lucky that people will come and see you at all, never mind in their hundreds or thousands."*

For full details of the *'Sara Pascoe: I Am a Strange Gloop'* tour, visit www.sarapascoe.co.uk/sara-on-tour.

Image: The Great British Sewing Bee S11. © BBC/Love Productions 2025/Neil Sherwood



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A Hidden Gem in the Countryside





Nuts about November

There are many positive things happening outside in autumn. Harvesting edibles, including carrots, kale, leeks, spinach and Brussels sprouts, continues, depending on the weather and the region. It's the season for swedes, turnips and pumpkins. Even beetroot does well if you stagger your planting times. There are some late pears and apples to be enjoyed, and foraging will bag you some berries, including sloes and rosehips.

The days are short now. One of the best ways to tackle November is to make the most of the hours of light, because we have a long way to go until the balance tilts in the opposite direction.

Rooting for autumn

It's the very best month in which to plant trees. The bare-root season has begun, which brings down the cost of buying both trees and shrubs. Plant them during November so their roots can start to establish before the really cold weather sets in. They will be ready to romp away in spring.

While many people plant fruit trees, only a few think of nuts. Four types can be grown in the UK: walnuts, hazelnuts, sweet chestnuts and almonds, although the

latter need special care, including a protected site and frost-free winters. Most gardens can only cope with a smaller tree variety and there are dwarf cultivars ideally suited for this purpose.

Hazel trees (shown left)

Hazelnuts are probably the easiest of all the nut trees but you will need at least two for pollination purposes. It's best not to plant them in soil that has been too heavily enriched, as this can cause them to put on a lot of foliage growth in favour of fruit.

There is some confusion over different types of hazelnuts. The wild tree is *Corylus avellana* and this produces hazelnuts – squirrels often get to them before humans! These were used to cultivate larger nuts which are known as cobnuts, famously grown successfully in Kent. Filberts are



larger still and they were cultivated from a non-native variety of hazel tree called *Corylus americana*.

Unless you have a very large garden, you would be wise to buy a *Corylus avellana* cultivar, because the native tree can grow up to 12 metres tall, with a spread of up to 8 metres. The nuts are ready to harvest from late August when the husks turn yellow.

Walnut trees (shown below)

The common walnut is *Juglans regia* and this large tree can reach 30 metres tall. Some cultivars are self-fertile and smaller. A popular tree is *Juglans regia* 'Broadview', which is more compact and should reach only up to 8 metres tall. The nuts can be harvested from late August through to November, once the green hulls begin to turn darker and eventually crack open. They can be eaten raw, dried in a low oven or pickled.



Sweet chestnut trees (shown bottom of previous page)

Not to be confused with the conker-producing horse chestnut, *Castanea sativa* – or Spanish chestnut – is another large tree, reaching a height of up to 35 metres. The nuts are used in chestnut stuffing and for roasting. There are smaller cultivars such as C. 'Marron de Lyon', which produce fruit at a younger age. The spiky cases have many prickles and it's best to wait until they fall to the ground at harvest time. You'll need sturdy gloves!

Almond trees (main picture)

Almonds are a type of *Prunus* and therefore related to cherries, plums and apricots. Native to North Africa and the Mediterranean, they're not ideally suited to the UK climate but it is possible to plant them in a warm, protected space where they will not only produce beautiful blossom in March, but green fruit by the end of May. Cultivars such as 'Ingrid' work better in the UK climate. The fleshy covering on the fruit gradually dries and eventually splits to reveal the almond seed, encased in a shell.

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Megan will help us understand how the house is used by visitors and patients to benefit from meeting others and socialising.

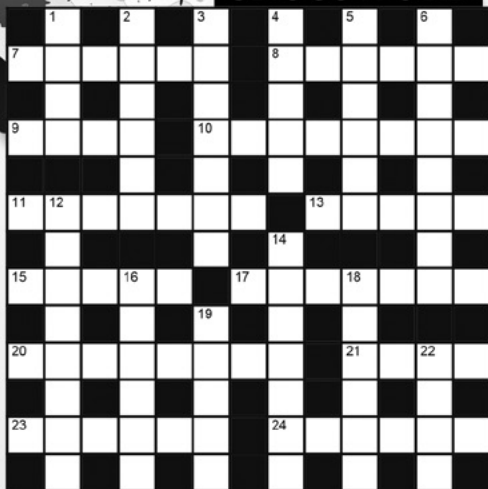
We welcome members and those looking to find out about Ashby u3a alike, so do please come along to hear Megan and share time, tea, coffee and biscuits at our regular venue at the: Congregational Church, Kilwardby Street, Ashby LE65 2FQ on **Tuesday 25th November**, doors open at 1.30pm, for a 2pm start.

For more information visit: ashbyu3a.co.uk
email: members@ashbyu3a.co.uk
Facebook: facebook.com/Ashbyu3a

Coffee BREAK



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 7 Type of fruit (6)
- 8 Opulence (6)
- 9 Touch (4)
- 10 Start (8)
- 11 Modified (7)
- 13 Impede (5)
- 15 Remove from home (5)
- 17 Water closets (7)
- 20 Calculation (8)
- 21 Horrid (4)
- 23 Male relatives (6)
- 24 Snub (6)

DOWN cont.,

- 6 Piece of jewellery (8)
- 12 Splitting (8)
- 14 Advisory group (7)
- 16 Cold (6)
- 18 Caring (6)
- 19 Slightly drunk (5)
- 22 Lie in wait (4)

DOWN

- 1 Manufactured (4)
- 2 Horse's fastest pace (6)
- 3 Observed (7)
- 4 Chubby (5)
- 5 Specialist (6)

Each letter in this puzzle is represented by a number between 1 and 26. The codes for three letters are shown. As you find the letters enter them in the box below.

CODEWORD

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24
25	26		

SUDOKU

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



CROSSWORD...

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

SUDOKU...



ANSWERS...

26	21	15	4	7	14		21	22	19	19	20	15
15		8		2		25		21		13		19
19	17	15	11	8	1	1		6	14	22	7	19
8		21		7		11		15		7		20
7	15	9	7	10		12	20	10	26	7	21	19
18				19		1			3			9
	20	10	9	7	21	21	22	8	9	7	18	
15		15				9		15				5
12	1	21	11	22	14	15		10	1	6	14	7
21		21		10		6		25		21		20
15	6	1	22	9		14	7	15	10	20	10	26
20		5		20		23		24		18		17
18	15	19	17	7	18		21	7	16	7	25	9

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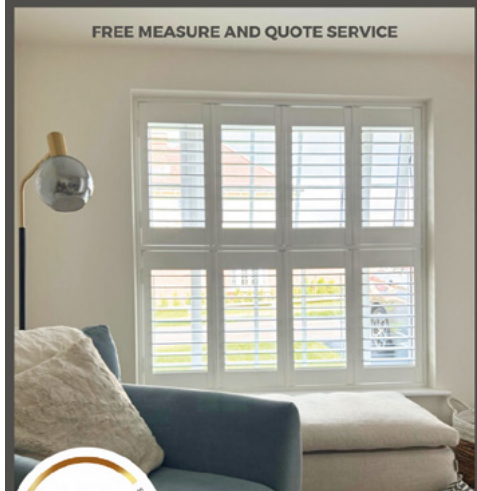
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CHILDREN'S PUZZLE PAGE

SPOT THE 5 DIFFERENCES



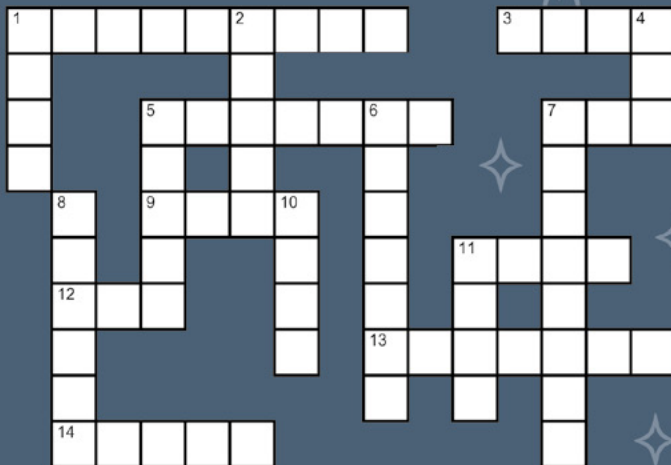
What's the best salad to serve on Bonfire Night?
Rocket!

What's a firework's favourite food?
Bangers and mash.

What do you get when you cross a dinosaur with a firework?
Dinomite.

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FIZZ
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GLOW
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