

News

Investigative reports, consumer stories and the latest gardening trends



From January, Islington's allotmenters face charges of £70 a year for a plot

England's most expensive allotment?

Recent research from the University of Leicester has shown that allotment prices vary hugely around the country. Researchers surveyed 216 English councils and found that while the average plot costs 15p a sq m, rents range from 1p a sq m (in Bolsover) up to 55p a sq m (in Runnymede).

The allotments were created nearly two years ago on the site of an old car park and feature a rainwater-harvesting system. Plotholders say they weren't consulted about the 90% price hike, but most of them are still content to pay the charges. 'Having been on a waiting list for 10 years, I'm lucky

'The plotholders say they weren't consulted about the 90% price hike, but most are still content to pay the charges'

Which? Gardening member Naomi Schillinger (second from left) thinks her allotment site could be the most expensive in the country. Her plot in Islington, London, measures 10 x 2m and will cost her £70 a year from January 2012 – that's £3.50 a sq m.

to have an allotment,' says Naomi, who must give up her plot after another 10 years to make way for someone else on the waiting list. She continues: 'I'm happy to pay £1.34 a week for space to grow my favourite fruit and veg in.'



which?
investigates

Are organic slug pellets really 'safe'?

In our April 2011 issue, we reported that our trial had shown that ferric phosphate slug pellets worked just as well as metaldehyde ones. This appeared to be good news for organic gardeners, as ferric phosphate slug pellets are said to be harmless to wildlife and pets, and are approved for use by organic growers.

We have come across research, however, that suggests that ferric phosphate slug pellets might not be as environmentally friendly as first thought. They contain chelating agents to make the iron in the pellets more soluble and therefore more toxic to slugs. The iron and the chelating agents could represent a risk to wildlife.

Dr Kathy Lewis, head of the Agriculture & Environment Research Unit at the University of Hertfordshire, told us: 'Without chelating agents, the slug pellets would not kill slugs at all. The chelating agent releases the iron molecules, and the slug then essentially dies of iron poisoning. Iron is toxic to many other species, including humans, domestic pets and birds. One of the chelating agents used, called EDTA, is also toxic in its own right. This is particularly relevant as it's highly toxic to earthworms, and that's not good news for gardeners.'

Clive Edwards, professor of entomology and environmental science at The Ohio State University, echoes

Dr Lewis's comments: 'The manufacturers of commercial ferric phosphate molluscicides claim that their effectiveness is due only to ferric phosphate. In fact, there is an enormous body of evidence, including research papers and other documentation, that demonstrates clearly that ferric phosphate, when marketed, is chelated, and in this form it is extremely toxic to earthworms and domestic animals.'

Interestingly, new ferric phosphate pellets that don't contain chelating agents are soon to appear on our shelves, including some from Doff. The German manufacturer has confirmed that these new products do not contain chelating agents, but has declined to share any details of the ingredients that they do contain, apart from ferric phosphate.

So, which slug pellets should you use? Dr Kathy Lewis says: 'My gut feeling is that there isn't much to choose between metaldehyde and ferric phosphate pellets. She points out that manufacturers of both metaldehyde and ferric phosphate pellets say that if they are used according to the instructions, they shouldn't pose a danger.'

So, for the time being, be sure to follow the instructions on packaging correctly; many of us are guilty of spreading pellets too liberally. We'll keep you updated if we hear any more on this issue.

Member trials

In our March issue, we'll be listing all the trials you can get involved with in 2012. However, two of our trial subjects will need sowing soon, so we're including details of them here:

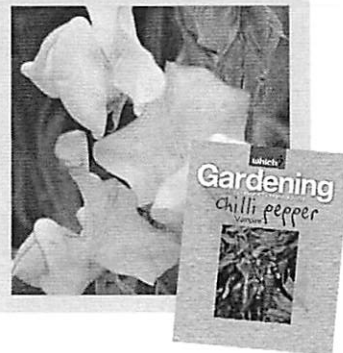
Trial 1: an ornamental chilli

You'll receive five free seeds of a newly bred chilli pepper, with attractive purple-tinged foliage and large, mild fruits that start black and ripen to bright red. We'd like to know what you think of it as a patio or greenhouse plant.

Trial 2: Sweet pea 'Hi Scent'

Does this sweet pea live up to its name? We'd like you to grow it and let us know what you think of its fragrance; the length of the stems for use as a cut flower; its vase life; and how it holds up against powdery mildew.

To take part, email whichgardening@framework.co.uk or call 01708 865541 by 31 January 2012. We'll need details of the trial(s) you'd like to take part in, your name and postal address.



Which? Gardening wins two awards



Which? Gardening recently won two Garden Media Guild awards: News Story of the Year and Garden Publication of the Year. Of the magazine, the judges said: 'Far from simply being a consumer-testing magazine, *Which? Gardening* provides a range of information on garden topics, backed up with excellent photography and a clear, easy-to-follow writing style.'



www.which.co.uk/gardening



Physocarpus 'Little Devil'

Physocarpus 'Little Devil' has been named Best New Plant at the Garden Retail Awards 2011. With an eventual height of 90cm to 120cm, it's perfect for smaller spaces, with rich plum-purple foliage and white-pink, button-like blooms in June. The plant is available to buy from Notcutts (0844 879 4166, www.notcutts.co.uk).