



Green fingered folk

In our latest report on the Which? family, we help them to make the most of their garden

With spring on the way, the Which? family want to make more of their garden but are a little overwhelmed and don't know where to begin. Darren and Toni Jones also want to encourage their children, Sam (5) and Harriet (3), to spend more time in the garden.

With the help of our sister magazine, *Gardening Which?*, we were able to show the Joneses where to start. They discovered that, armed with a few plants and tools, it doesn't take much to revolutionise the way you use your patch of outdoors.

Gardening Which? helped the family decide what to plant where, and came up with some new ways to attract and enjoy garden wildlife. Some easy-to-care-for plants helped to get the kids excited about growing and eating their own fruit, and we also took along a few Best Buys for Darren and Toni to try before they buy – including some lawn mowers.

For some other really simple ideas on how you can get more out of your garden, see 'How you can do it', opposite.



CREATING A FRUIT GARDEN

Encourage your kids to eat more fruit by getting them to grow their own

Growing fruit is one of the easiest ways to get a regular supply of food from your garden.

We chose a selection of fruit that we thought would be a hit with kids Sam and Harriet, as well as with the adults.

We bought a potted apple tree, and bought bare-root (not in a pot) blackcurrants, raspberries and strawberries – quality is usually best this way, and they're cheaper, too.

A couple of hours of planting should supply the family with fresh fruit from early summer right into winter. And an annual feed and prune is all that these plants need to keep them going for many years to come.

Strawberries We bought ten plants of two varieties. 'Honeoye' will produce fruit between May and June, and a



variety such as 'Symphony' will extend the season into July.

Raspberries Summer-fruiting raspberries require support, so we chose the self-supporting, autumn-fruiting 'Autumn Bliss', planting ten canes in two rows. The first fruit should start to ripen in August and keep going until the first frosts.



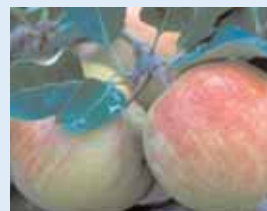
Darren teaches Sam to get stuck in, and the whole family plant blackcurrants and raspberries

Blackcurrants A single blackcurrant bush can produce around 5kg of fruit each year – enough for a few pies and puddings. We got three bushes of 'Ben Sarek'; these will be ripe in mid-July.

Apples An apple tree's rootstock determines how big your tree gets – we went for a dwarfing rootstock (also known

as M26), as we didn't want the tree to take over the garden.

We chose the 'Falstaff' variety of apple – it produces crisp, red-flushed juicy fruit around October, which will store until December.



GO WILD

Attracting wildlife to your garden

We know people are keen to attract more wildlife into their gardens – 80 per cent of *Gardening Which?* readers regularly feed garden birds. But if you're not careful, squirrels will steal the birds' tasty titbits.

help to test nine different squirrel-proof bird feeders this spring. We asked the Joneses to try the **Gardman Squirrel Proof Nut Feeder** (around £15, available online) and early reports are positive. 'The squirrels have given up trying,' Darren told us. 'I've been so impressed I ordered three more for the rest of my family.'

You can also use technology to watch wildlife. Last year, *Gardening Which?* tested bird box cameras – a bird box with an internal camera that can be connected to your TV or computer to watch live footage of



Harriet demonstrates a squirrel-proof feeder

nesting birds. Darren and Toni use the Best Buy **Gardenature Kit 1A-30m-IR** (£109 from Gardenature 01473 327775; www.gardenature.co.uk) to watch coal tits nesting in their water pump. 'The bird box camera works brilliantly and the picture is very clear,' Toni said. 'The kids love it.'

A bird box camera will help you keep an eye on feathered friends



Keep food out of reach to deter furry pests

There's a plethora of feeders that claim to resist even the most determined squirrels, and *Gardening Which?* has enlisted its readers'



Getting toolled up

Darren and Toni were keen to try out a leaf blower/vac and need a new mower



The current Best Buy blower/vac is the **Flymo Garden Vac 2200W Turbo** (£60, available online). Darren and Toni tried it on wet grass and gravel. First impressions from Darren were good: 'It's light and easy to operate – the blower's more useful than the vac.' But he wasn't sure it would be quicker than simply raking and collecting leaves. They could also use a mower to pick up leaves on the lawn.

The Joneses' mower is on its last legs, so we got them to try the Best Buy petrol-driven **Honda Izy HRG 415PD** (£240, www.gardenmachinetools.co.uk; 05600 768879) and the battery-driven Best Buy **Bosch Rotak 37Li** (£270, www.axminster.co.uk; 0800 371822) – its charge lasts long enough to cut a 450 sq m lawn.

Darren was impressed with how easily the Honda mower started, and how quiet and manoeuvrable the Bosch was. But overall, the couple preferred the Honda. 'It's better for my size garden,' Darren said. 'But I'd probably buy the next size up as it'd mean fewer trips to empty it.'



How you can do it

Get planting now to make the most of your garden

Once you've set up a fruit garden, the next step is to go for some veg. Potatoes and carrots grown in a pot are simple and rewarding. For something more tricky, try mangetout or sweetcorn. Broccoli and cauliflower are even more of a challenge.

To encourage wildlife, attract more insects – they are a food source for lots of animals. Colourful flowers attract pollinating insects, and a patch of long grass will provide shelter. A native hedgerow or tree can be home to hundreds

of different species of insect.

Not sure which tools to buy? Here are some essential Best Buys: **Back-friendly spade** Wilkinson Sword Power Digging Spade 601570W (£25). **Gloves** Jayco Gold Leaf Tough Touch (£23). **Secateurs** Spear & Jackson Razorsharp Bypass Secateurs (£18). **Shredder** Bosch AXT Rapid 2200 (£160). **Thermometer with probe** Maplin Digital In/Outdoor Thermometer L73AH (£10). All Best Buys are available online.

For more growing tips, see 'Grow your own veg,' *Which?*, February 2007, p22.



FAMILY UPDATE

The latest family news

- Five-year-old Sam fastidiously switches off lights, thanks to the family's new energy monitor (see 'Family values', *Which?*, February 2008, p33).
- Toni's marathon training is going well. She now runs 29 miles a week and is about to compete in a half-marathon.
- Next month: our experts go shopping with the family and give them essential buying advice.

THE GOOD LIFE

Gardening Which? offer

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