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for the North-East

MAY 2006

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sharon griffiths

“You have to seed it, weed it, water it, roll it and rake it, trim it, edge it, scarify it and mow it

THERE is something so beautiful about the perfect lawn – so smooth, so green so manicured. It cries out for champagne and strawberries, for lazy afternoons enjoying the best of the British summer. Deceptive, isn't it?

Because that perfect lawn, that brilliant green neat and immaculate turf, far from being a symbol of laziness, actually represents hours and hours of work and a quest for perfection that borders on the manic.

You have to seed it, feed it and weed it, water it, roll it and rake it, trim it, edge it, scarify it, and, of course, mow it. Many, many times throughout the summer. And if you've done all that, of course, the last thing you're going to do is to let people walk on it, spoil the stripes, leave marks on it.

Many years ago, a boyfriend casually dropped a cigarette end on his parents' lawn and his father went wild, came swooping out of the house, picked it up, titivated the little burnt patch, cursed his son, the cigarettes and all the giants of Imperial Tobacco. It was an impressive and terrifying performance.

“What would he have done,” I asked, “if you'd set fire to the house.”

“Probably wouldn't have turned a hair,” said my boyfriend, nonchalantly, “He's not obsessed with the house. He is with the lawn.”

Lawns do seem to be a bit of a man thing. Women grow flowers, encourage colour, variety and a sort wild beauty. When we look after lawns, we keep them tidy but still useable and enjoyable.

Men, meanwhile, look upon lawnmowers as weapons of mass destruction. They have declared war and will be happy only when they have beaten Nature into a short and stripy submission, using chemical weapons and quite possibly flame throwers if necessary.

Not in our house. Ever since husband plugged himself into the National Grid while cutting the lawn, he has been more than content to let the grass grow under his feet. The lawn is my domain. It is what you might call a family lawn. When I say I cut the grass, I'm actually lying. What I'm really doing is cutting the moss and the daisies.

And what's wrong with moss and daisies? They are much nicer and more interesting than grass. Once, under the influence of my neighbours, I cleared all the moss from my lawn and do you know what was left? Nothing. Just great bare bald patches of earth. How can that be an improvement?

Then there's the golf course, the cricket pitch and the football field...

After life with two boys, we still – even though they are now in their twenties and left home – have two bald patches on our lawn. One represents the goal line. The goal was formed by the washing line, clothes prop and greenhouse, with the hedge as the net. Yes, risky we know, but it worked. The other bald patch was the crease for endless summer games of cricket, the wicket being an upside down bucket in front of the cherry tree.

Those two patches of grass received so much welly over the years that all life has fled, never to return.

As for the golf course... One summer, Smaller Son, inspired by his grandparents and an old putter, built a crazy golf course in the back garden. Most of it has long gone, but every now and then I will re-discover the foot-catching Fifth Hole or the seventh tee. It adds some interest to the dash to get the washing in.

There are even more holes now. Feeding the birds one morning I discovered that overnight a little trail of molehills had appeared, going from one end of the lawn to the other. The blackbirds loved it – easier access to worms and were having a bumper breakfast. The molehills seem to be in a straight line from those on the green across the road. Have they tunnelled under our house? Will we one day sink through the kitchen floor? Watch this space.

The lawn season has started in earnest now. My retired neighbours spend hours on their lawns, would be appalled by the moles. They have declared death to the dandelion and daisy, scarified the moss to oblivion, used their water ration. The results are wonderful. Their lawns are a delight to the eye, a joy to behold and certainly raise the tone of the neighbourhood.

Some have gone further and have got the professionals in. Little vans chug in and a team people leap out, work frantically for an hour or so and then leave behind them the perfect replica of a billiard table, only at foot level and made of grass.

I admire them. I admire their devotion, the effort, the lushness of their lawns, the straightness of their edges. I particularly admire them while they work away, and I lie lazily, wine glass or coffee cup popped into a convenient hole, on my springy, mossy lawn, admiring the daisies and with the moles for company.

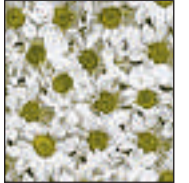
That's what I call really making the most of your lawn.

GREEN, GREEN GRASS OF HOME

WITH the World Cup fast approaching, football fever has officially begun. And even if you couldn't get tickets to Germany this June, you can still bring the match to life in your front room with Harvey Maria's Grass tiles. If football's not your thing, Harvey Maria also offers more feminine designs including Daisies and Gerberas to help you bring the outside in.

The vinyl floor tiles are part of Harvey Maria's Lifestyle range - a fantastic collection of vibrant photo-print tiles. You can also opt for Sand, Bubbles, Stones, Water, Feathers, Corks, and Petals, so you can really let your imagination wander. Their non-slip qualities also make the tiles ideal for bathrooms, they can be used with underfloor heating and they come with a ten year guarantee. Pack of 11 cover approximately one

square metre and cost £39.95. To locate your nearest stockist, call 020 8688 4700 or simply log on to www.harveymaria.co.uk and buy online.



NE window shopping

THE WONDER OF WELLIES

WHETHER you're out walking in the countryside or tending to your garden borders, you need footwear that is waterproof, robust and durable. Tayberry Muddies

neoprene and rubber wellies are hardwearing and stylish, so there's no excuse for curling up inside this spring. Muddies' unique outer lining is wipe clean and they're available in black or green. The Steeping Gardening Shoe costs £29.99, the Trent and Thames mid-calf wellies cost £29.99 and the full-length Trent design is £49.99. The Muddies collection is available from Peter Barratt's Garden Centres in Gosforth and Stockton.



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NE interiors



ABOVE: moodboard with samples of paint, fabrics and wallpaper
RIGHT: white room with a splash of bold colour to create a dramatic effect



Decorating made simple

If you currently feel a bit depressed when you sink into your armchair and survey the sitting room, you're probably suffering from a seasonal affliction called Decorating Dismay. This syndrome strikes without warning when spring's brighter light shines into rooms, cruelly highlighting dust, dirt and other decorative flaws that have been left in the wake of winter.

Making the decision to do something about it can plunge you into a dizzying world of paint with baffling names such as Ball of String or Orchid Desert or have you tussling with your partner over pattern or plain, neutrals or colour.

Alternatively, you may encounter the worst case scenario – the X Files-style phenomenon where tiny samples of wallpaper and fabric morph into disastrous effects after you've bought large, expensive quantities of them.

You're certainly not suffering alone. Celebrity Zoe Ball has also confessed to experiencing the perils and joys of decorating.

"I've had some memorable DIY and decorating disasters. I once decided to paint my bathroom gold after a girlfriend and I had a few drinks... aagh! Another time I tried to hang a curtain rail but every time I used the drill I spun off it. I had to use drawing pins for the curtains in the end."

She and others vulnerable to Decorating Dismay could benefit from a generous dose of wisdom and down-to-earth advice from 'decorating doctor' Giles Kime. His new and beautifully illustrated book, *Homes & Gardens: Decorating*, will reassure the most fearful of decorators. "There's no doubt that when we plan a decorating project, many of us are flummoxed by the huge number of choices on offer," he says. "The possibilities are sometimes so numerous that it seems easier just to create an anonymous scheme – or worse still, to do nothing at all."

Kime, deputy editor of *Homes & Gardens* magazine, has plenty of tricks, tips, and gallons of sound advice – making his book the perfect antidote to Decorating Dismay.

Homes & Gardens: Decorating
 by Giles Kime (Conran Octopus, £25)

If your rooms are looking shabby and you long for a new look this spring, it's definitely time to decorate. GABRIELLE FAGAN finds some inspiration

TOP TIPS

Don't drive yourself crazy by trawling through every paint and fabric on the market – instead look at the broad range of styles on offer – from Country Cottage to Liveable Modern – and decide which appeals to you the most.

Keep pictures, samples or photos of things that inspire you with their colour or style, as they'll help you decide on your scheme. Collect them on a 'mood board' so you can visualise the finished effect.

Consider all the rooms in your home at the same time – including those you don't intend to redecorate – as you might want to change their use, which would affect your decorating scheme. For example, a dining room doubling as a home office or play room would need practical wall and floor coverings.

Remember, the best interior design is not necessarily as stressful as creating something new but simply taking an existing idea and making it your own.

CHOOSING COLOUR

Kime says: "Colour is the tool with which you pull a scheme together. With the help of a couple of colours it is possible to create visual order. "However, it is essential to consider every element in a room as part of a colour scheme – the colour of the furniture and flooring is of equal importance as the fabric and wallpaper."

Neutrals offer a softer alternative to whites



COPING WITH PATTERN

Kime realises that many people shy away from large scale patterns but he says: "A simple scheme in which the dominant colour in a complex print has also been used for the walls can look surprisingly contemporary. An even simpler option is to combine a patterned fabric with pale, neutral wall colours."

Patterns with just two colours – especially those which combine one colour with white – are much easier to use.

Don't necessarily avoid using large scale patterns such as toile de jouy,

graphic pattern and damasks in small rooms. Used well, they can make the space appear larger.

Small-scale pattern tends to create a more intimate, delicate feel.

The key to successfully using florals – just like any other pattern – is either to ensure that the dominant colour works with others in the scheme, or simply use them to provide a 'splash' of pattern and colour against a neutral backdrop.

Don't be afraid to mix styles – a fabric in a classic style needn't be confined to a traditional scheme – the colour is far more important than the style.



LEFT TO RIGHT: a living room using a bold design against a plain backdrop; brights can look right if they're offset by the right accessories; stencilled wall design in a mixture of aubergine and white, mixed with vintage furniture, fabrics and accessories to create a discreet yet decorative backdrop

and off-whites. They range from creams through to greys and pale browns, but unless you're trying to create a moody, exotic look it's better to avoid neutrals in rooms where there isn't a lot of light.

Hot colours – vibrant reds, yellows, blues and greens – can be an effective way of adding an energetic feel to a room. If you don't want them to dominate, balance them with cool, reflective whites.

Rich colours are those with depth such as browns, aubergines and reds, which are ideal for a masculine or exotic look. In small rooms with little light, they can create a snug, warm atmosphere.

TREND TIPS

Bold geometric patterns reminiscent of retro style are enjoying a revival.

A length of wallpaper mounted in a frame or used in a horizontal panel is a stylish way of using pattern and colour without overwhelming a room.

Glossy, shiny surfaces are essential for today's glamorous rooms – look for silk, viscose, and rayon fabrics and metallic-effect wallpapers. Lacquer, glazed terracotta and varnished wood are also fashionable.

Panelled walls are making a return to trendy homes, whether tongue and groove or in hard woods.



ABOVE: bathroom with wall of squares of plywood, which add texture and colour to one of the walls

ANN Simon, owner of Direct Fabrics in Leadenhall Street, Darlington, says home owners are coming up roses this spring, opting for more flowery ranges.

"Favourite colours are lime green, fuchsia and shades of orange," she says. Direct Fabrics specialises in cushions and curtains and has a made-to-measure and upholstery service.

Just 15 paces away is Nu Interiors, which has been open since January and is owned by Martin and Karen Nichols, who have been in the decorating business for 25 years. They complement their neighbours perfectly, specialising in wallpapers – from large scale patterns for feature walls to more traditional wall coverings – and paints. "Favourite colours for walls are still coffees and creams," says Martin. Nu Interiors also have a new range of conservatory furniture from Bali.



Colour is the tool with which you pull a scheme together but it is essential to consider every element in a room

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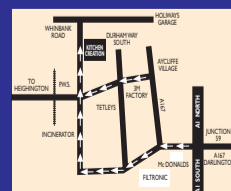


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NE interiors



NEUTRALS RULE: calm colours throughout, with a splash of colour in the guest room



It was value for money that first attracted DJ Lisa Shaw to her home in Consett. Women's Editor SARAH FOSTER has a guided tour



DJ Lisa's outdoor deck

IT'S raining buckets when I arrive at Lisa Shaw's home, on a new estate in Consett's Templetown. I'm greeted by Lisa, who immediately asks me in, but seeing the cream carpet in the living room, I'm not so sure. I offer to take off my shoes, but she won't hear of it, so I step inside, making sure I wipe my feet.

Every weekday you can hear Lisa, who's 29, on Century FM's Breakfast with Scott and Lisa. In 2004, the blonde, blue-eyed presenter married Ian Burdett, a health and fitness manager at David Lloyd Leisure in Gosforth and it was later that year that the couple moved into their current home. Lisa says that following the wedding, she began to get itchy feet.

"We used to live in Hamsterley, about three miles away from here, and we had a lovely house where we'd lived for two years, but I got a bit bored after I'd planned the wedding," she says. "I suggested looking at houses and it all happened really quickly. I went to sixth form college in Consett and I've lived in County Durham for most of my life, so I knew the area."

When Lisa and Ian first saw the house, the whole area was still a building site, yet they fell in love with it straight away.

"I think we just loved the design – all the space and the room in the roof – and the value for money," says Lisa. "For the space we've got, I think we paid a reasonable price."

The house is certainly far from cramped. From the ample living room, in modern

shades of cream and brown, Lisa leads me past the handy loo to the kitchen/dining room. Being open plan, the space feels vast, and with patio doors leading into the garden, it's bathed in light. As she and Ian like entertaining, Lisa says they spend a lot of time here.

Retracing our steps, we climb the stairs to the second floor. On the stairwell walls – and throughout the house – are pictures of Lisa and Ian's wedding. Four rooms branch from the landing: the master bathroom and three bedrooms. The decor throughout is plain and simple, with classic cream the dominant note. For the two bathrooms – the main one and an en-suite – the couple have gone for white and pale blue. With the minimal furniture, the overall look is crisp and clean.

An added bonus of the house is that the attic, so often wasted, has been designed as an extra space. We climb the stairs to it and there's a decent-sized cupboard and what could be a fourth bedroom. As there are just the two of them, Lisa and Ian have made this their office. Even on a dull day, it's amply lit by two skylights, and as well as a desk, there's room for a futon and Ian's rowing machine.

As the house is new, it hasn't needed much work, although the couple have done a bit of decorating. Their main project has been the garden, which looks professionally designed, but Lisa tells me they've done it themselves. "As I work earlies, I have afternoons to myself, and in the summer,



I think we just loved the design – all the space and the room in the roof – and the value for money



COMFORT ZONE: Lisa Shaw at her home in ConsetT

Pictures: DAVID WOOD



WHITE STUFF: the bathroom is bright and functional

it's nice to have a garden to spend time in," she says. "When we moved in, it was just soil, so my husband and his parents kindly undertook the project. We got it all turfed and put in railway sleepers to make flower beds, and the grass part all had to be raised because my husband built a step to the garden. He built a patio and a deck, and it just got finished in time for my big birthday barbecue in June – in fact, we cut a ribbon to open the deck."

So impressed were they with the house that Lisa's sister and brother-in-law bought a similar one in the same area of Templetown. "They moved from Whickham because the prices are so great here," says Lisa.

The only downside is Ian's commute to Gosforth, which can be difficult in rush hour traffic. At least for Lisa, the roads are clear when she goes to work. "I get up at ten past four as the show starts at half past five," she

says. "I tend to get ready in the second bedroom. Because I've been doing earlies on and off since we met, I think my husband has become oblivious to it. He can sleep through the shower and the hairdryer as well."

So what, if anything, does Lisa have planned for the house? "Mostly decorating," she says. "I'm just taking a while to decide because I don't want it to be the same in every room. Wallpaper is quite in at the moment and I keep thinking, 'be adventurous Lisa and put a nice bold wallpaper on that wall', and then I think, 'no'. I'm quite indecisive. I look at things and think, 'would that work?' but I'm very predictable, I always get drawn to the same thing. Fortunately, my husband seems to have the same tastes, so there aren't many arguments."

■ Breakfast with Scott and Lisa is on weekdays on Century 100-102 FM, 5.30-9am



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NE interiors



HUGE RANGE: from traditional to contemporary



When the heat is on

A WARM welcome – literally – is guaranteed for visitors to one of the region's best known and longest established fireplace showrooms. The next thing that strikes you at John Willetts Fireplaces is the choice on offer to anyone thinking of installing a new fireplace, changing to an alternative fuel or simply updating their room.

From hole-in-the-wall to traditional hearth and surround, from inglenook fireplace to a fire that looks more like a TV, the range is immense.

It is difficult to pinpoint a particular trend. As soon as you decide contemporary is the way to go, Anne Willett, partner in the company with her husband John, points out that deep inglenooks with reclaimed beams and stoves are the must-have of the moment.

"We are fitting two or three of these a week," she explains. "They're perfect for barn conversions or old chapels and can be built in brick, stone, slate, anything that the customer wants as each design is bespoke. You can make a feature of the flue if you have plenty of space and the stove can be gas or solid fuel."

It is a modern twist on the traditional that is unlikely to date and can make a large family kitchen cosy and homely.

Another look that is standing the test of time is the hole-in-the-wall fire, with neutral, stone-look surround with flames licking around pebbles in a bowl, driftwood or logs. It's simple, clean and easy to live with. The Palladio from the Platonic range from Legend costs £2,000 for the complete unit of surround, hearth, firebowl and back panel.

Willetts' designer ranges include Gavin Scott, who has even designed a fire to the dimensions where a plasma TV fits perfectly above it, retailing at around £2,000.

Stainless steel has emigrated from the kitchen into living rooms in trims, frets, back panels, fenders and grates, though the upcoming look is for bronze, like Elgin and Hall's Stellar design at £1,483.

"Some people still like antique brass and gold in a living room because they look warm, but bronze is definitely coming through because it's warm as well as contemporary," says Anne.

For the ultimate in modern fires, though, it has to be the Superior flueless fire which looks just like an expensive television and where you view the gas flame behind a black screen. These are 100 per cent efficient, says Anne, and start at £899. They are ideal for a modern home with no chimney and where the feature wall is internal, though there must still be an air vent in an outside wall to allow any fumes to escape.

With gas prices on the rise, already popular electric fires are predicted to be in greater demand and these too can be inset into a wall. An electric, graphite-look fire with flame-effect coals or pebbles can be a modern, lower cost option at around £460.

Fire surrounds continue to feature straight lines and smooth edges, whether in natural

stone, stone-look resin or wood, with natural oak preferred over darker cherry and mahogany and lighter maple.

One of the major looks proving popular currently is Portuguese limestone which makes for a cool, tactile surround that is neat and therefore suitable for smaller rooms.

"It's lovely to touch because it's so smooth. They are generally very neutral with any shadings in the stone being quite subtle. They can also take any colour fire. If you opt for a versatile fire you can even change the trim and fret to create a different look for a different season," suggests Anne.

John Willetts Fireplaces has been in Spennymoor for 31 years. Originally the company offered kitchens and bathrooms before concentrating and building its reputation on fireplaces.

More recently, though, it has taken a look back to kitchens and is providing a popular service of made to measure granite worktops and splashbacks, with large slabs of the stone imported from Portugal and China.

It already supplies to the major housebuilders in the region including Charles Church, Persimmon, Yuill and George Wimpey.

Anne says: "We offer a full design and fitting service. Our factory can cut the granite to fit, so worktops can incorporate Belfast sinks or undermounted sinks, draining grooves and have bullnose or chamfered edges.

"Granite is very hygienic and hardwearing. It makes a strong statement in a kitchen and because it's a luxury addition, it adds value to a home."

The company is also linking up with local firm PWS to provide a door replacement service, "for if there's nothing wrong with the units themselves but you just want to update the fronts or create a new look," explains Anne.

With this much to tempt you, now is the time to start thinking about how your kitchen could look and how you might want to keep warm this winter.

● **John Willetts Fireplaces, Cambridge Street, Spennymoor, Co Durham, tel: (01388) 817296 and High Street, Wrekenton, Gateshead, tel: 0191-482 5377, or visit www.johnwillettsfireplaces.co.uk**

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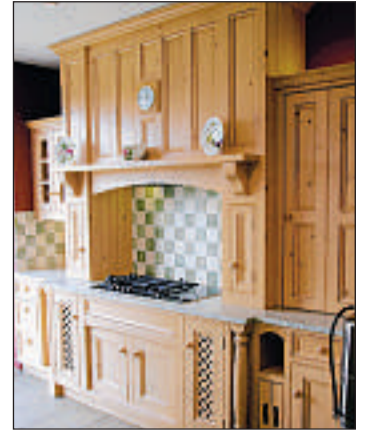
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Some people still like antique brass and gold, but bronze is definitely coming through because it's warm as well as contemporary

Anne Willett

When it comes to new items for the home, too much choice can be as difficult as too little. The team at Court Homemakers promise to make it easier for you

CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN PICTURE: Ian Goodwillie in the Avant kitchen; waxed pine units; Hoxton walnut units and a space saving corner unit



Courting the homemakers

THE kitchen has always been at the centre of the family home, but now it can be the entertainment centre too. Oven, hob, fridge... and a 42 inch plasma TV plus DVD player, coordinating wine rack and comfy sofas for the best seat in the house – if you have the space, the kitchen is becoming the room everyone wants to be in.

It sounds like the perfect recipe for keeping the family occupied while the evening meal is being prepared, and company for the cook too.

“The trend for knocking down walls between kitchens and dining rooms to create large, open plan spaces means that what was the old dining room is getting some use and the larger kitchen is a much more enjoyable environment to be in,” says Ian Goodwillie, co-founder of family-owned Court Homemakers in Portrack Lane, Stockton.

It’s not just the latest in entertainment technology that homeowners want in their kitchen. The trend for clutter-free worktops and clean lines means smart storage is at the top of many wish lists, from pull-out larders and hob shelves to skyline shelving and cupboards with magic corners and turn-motion systems.

Fascias, meanwhile, are sleek and easy to clean with high gloss laminate finishes, while worktops are reflective granite.

Mr Goodwillie says: “It used to be the case that people didn’t even care if their oven had a grill. Now they want to know how fast it grills. It’s pushing up the specification of appliances and kitchens.

“People do see making improvements to their kitchen as an investment. It’s increasing the value of their property and it can be the biggest factor that will sell their home. On top of that, it’s making them happier and giving them the lifestyle they want.”

From the latest monochrome kitchens in white gloss and darkest walnut to built-in breakfast bars, freestanding islands and all-steel units, the choice is immense.

“People are much better informed about what is available but they are still surprised at the choice on offer. It can be daunting,” says Ian, whose voice is well known in the region from the many Court Homemakers radio commercials he and son Frazer have done over the years.

The company tries to simplify the process of choosing by asking customers simple questions to narrow down their preference, whether it is for traditional, modern or super contemporary.

“It’s important to establish their style of cooking, the size of refrigerated storage required, the lifestyle of the kitchen. Then we can help by suggesting the positives and negatives of the choices available and come up with solutions they may not have considered. It takes time, and we give customers time.”

Once the style, fascias and appliances have been selected, Courts Homemakers designs, manufactures and fits all new kitchens, including doing any building work, plumbing, electrical work, joinery, lighting, tiling and so on.

“We take control of the whole job,” says Ian, “because that way we are responsible for everything and make sure things happen when they are supposed to. It also means we can carry out whatever alterations are needed to achieve what the customer wants.

“We are the one-stop shop and it takes away the stress and time of having to find individual trades people. Customers deal only with us from the initial free consultation right through to full completion.”

The same goes for bathrooms, bedrooms and home offices.

All the ranges are available for viewing at the showroom in Portrack Lane. Court Homemakers has been there since 1992 having been established as Court Kitchens by Ian and his wife Ann in Brunswick Street, Stockton, four years earlier.

The quality of the showroom displays and its relaxed atmosphere, together with its knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff, recently won the company a national award for dealer of the year.

Ian adds: “We genuinely care about the showroom and are constantly changing it to keep up with demand and trends. When something new comes out we are always prepared to get it into the showroom so customers know they are seeing the very latest and the best that is on offer.”

■ Court Homemakers, Portrack Lane, Stockton, tel: (01642) 891010, www.courthomemakers.com

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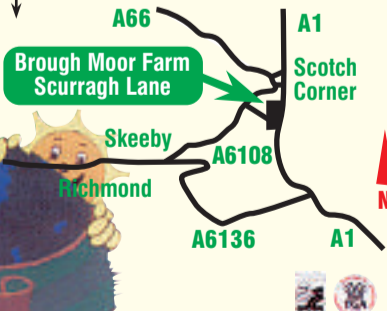
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Trickle treats

It might be hard to imagine now but if the weather forecasters are right, a lot of gardeners could be left high and dry this summer. SANDRA GEERE has some suggestions for beating the drought

IF THERE is one thing that sends a chill down the spine of a productive gardener, it is the mention of the word drought. And though it's hard to believe when the North-East has been rained on heavily in the past weeks, water supplies in the country are low.

In the past week several water companies have announced hosepipe and sprinkler bans and more will certainly follow. Coming at a time when gardeners all over the country are getting kitchen gardens and allotments ready for the new growing season, the news is enough to turn a compost heap.

Fortunately, there are a number of ways that gardeners can beat the drought and still produce a tasty harvest. It just requires a bit of imagination and a watchful eye.

Here are some top tips to cope with what may be the gardener's most challenging growing season for decades.

1 Start saving every possible drop of rainwater now. Buy at least one water butt (your local council or water company may sell them very cheaply) or recycle old plastic dustbins. If you have a shed, fit some guttering and position the butt to catch all the rainfall. Cover the butt with wire mesh so that young birds cannot fall in and drown and to make it safe for children. "Grey water", waste water from washing machines, baths, etc., should not be used on edible crops as it contains detergents, bacteria and salts. It is, however, safe to use on other plants and flowers, providing it is cooled and used fresh.

2 Enrich your soil by digging in plenty of organic matter such as well-rotted horse manure, mushroom compost or home-made compost. This can increase the water-holding

capacity in the top 20cm (six inches) of soil by 25 per cent in the first year and up to 60 per cent in the second year.

3 Keep the weeds down, watch the weather and be ready to respond to events. After a heavy, prolonged downpour, spread thick weed-suppressing, moisture-retaining mulches of organic matter on the surface of the soil. This can hold an inch of rain for every few inches of mulch and can provide a valuable store of moisture.

4 Dig irrigation ditches alongside thirsty crops such as squashes, pumpkins, tomatoes, beans and courgettes. A simple way to get water (and liquid feed) to plant roots is through cut-off plastic drinks bottles. Cut the bottom off the bottle to create a funnel shape and sink this in the soil, wide end upwards next to the plant, then fill with water. A sunken plant pot or length of two or three inch diameter pipe will do just as well.

5 Maintain cooler, moister soil by growing crops closer together. This will create a micro-climate to trap moisture-laden air.

6 Water plants early in the morning or late at night to reduce evaporation. A good soaking once a week is better than frequent light watering which only encourages roots to grow near the surface of the soil. These quickly dry out, placing the plants under unnecessary stress.

7 Seeds can be sown in dry soil but watering the drill beforehand will get them off to a better start. When transplanting, remember that a pint of water below ground is worth a gallon on the top, so water the hole before planting.



6 Seeds can be sown in dry soil but watering the drill beforehand will get them off to a better start

8 Maximise available moisture by only watering at the base of the plant. Always give priority to plants with forming fruit or tubers followed by tomatoes, courgettes, beans and leafy green vegetables. Fruit trees and herbs can usually cope with drought conditions.

9 Syphons are a great idea for watering containers. Use a large container as a reservoir of water and position it higher than the pot you want watered. Lead a wick made from wet, rolled-up cloth from the reservoir down to the soil or compost. This will ensure a regulated supply of water to the plants. Syphons move water automatically and several butts with syphons can be linked. One sited beside a down-pipe can fill several more sited at strategic points around a plot. When one empties, the others fill it up again.

10 Consider growing drought resistant varieties of vegetables. The Royal Horticultural Society recommend carrots, French beans, beetroot, chard, sweetcorn and pumpkins. Try beetroot Red Ace, Swiss chard Bright Lights, sweetcorn Conqueror.

SEEDS The Organic Gardening Catalogue 0845 130-1304 www.OrganicCatalogue.com; Thompson & Morgan 01473 688821 www.thompson-morgan.com; Seeds of Italy 02084275020 www.seedsofitaly.com
IRRIGATION Recycle works 01254 820088 www.rainmate.co.uk; irrigation systems (01243) 575708 www.rainrobots.co.uk; garden systems 0845 1181253 www.gardensystems.co.uk

Don't forget the gardener

HAVING taken such good care of the plants don't forget the gardener. When the sun is beating down make sure that you take sensible precautions. Enjoy plenty to drink (though no alcohol please), wear a hat and use a high factor sunscreen. If this summer is a scorcher, as predicted, then crops should ripen well. This will be a great bonus for me as my house will not need to be filled with green tomatoes until December!

SAVING WATER IN THE HOME

WHETHER or not Britain is heading for a drought this summer, it could be a good time for us all to take a step back and examine just how much water we waste during our everyday lives. Zip, a company which has just launched a new type of tap which helps eliminate waste, has the following tips.

- The average family uses their washing machine five times a week, and a single washing machine cycle uses up to 100 litres of water. That's 26,000 litres per year. Only use the washing machine or dishwasher when you have a full load – a full load uses less water than two half loads.
- **Take showers, rather than baths and in the space of a week you'll save enough water for 1,000 cups of tea.**
- A third of an average family's daily water use – the equivalent of two baths of water – is flushed down the toilet. Try putting a water displacement device in your cisterns to reduce the amount of water released each time you flush.
- **A running tap can use up to nine litres a minute. Use a bowl to wash dishes and vegetables; don't leave the tap running whilst brushing your teeth.**
- A dripping tap can lose up to 90 litres of water every day, whilst a rapid stream of drips may waste up to 32,000 litres of water in a year. Ensure

that leaking taps are fixed as early as possible.

- **A sprinkler can use as much water in an hour as a family of four does in 48 hours. Use a watering can instead of a sprinkler, as it is more accurate.**
- Washing a mug under a running tap uses about a litre of water – six mugs use about the same as an entire bowl of washing up. Don't wash your dishes until you have enough for an entire bowl.
- **Installing a water meter can help save you water as it allows you to monitor how much you use.**
- A water butt in your garden can collect rainwater that can be used on your plants and lawns, so go out and buy one.

Zip's HydroTap – the first kitchen appliance of its kind in the UK – delivers both freshly filtered chilled and boiling water, from the same tap, at the touch of a button.



The HydroTap can help you to save water, as you only use what you need with absolutely no waste – no need to keep boiling the kettle over and over again. For further information visit www.zipdesignerrange.co.uk or call (01362) 852222.

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It will soon be seal breeding season along the North-East coast, but beware if you see a baby seal on the beach. Would-be rescuers can be their worst enemy, as RUTH CAMPBELL discovers

Seal appeal

LITTLE Orphan Annie is a ten-week-old grey seal pup. Weak and pumped full of life-saving drugs after being found, badly injured, stranded on a beach, she can barely lift her head. Her big, dark, pleading, watery eyes seem to say: "Help me".

And how could anyone resist? The little eight-year-old boy who found her, bleeding from the neck with swollen, infected flippers, at Filey, North Yorkshire, insisted on sitting with her for three hours until staff from the Sea Life Centre at nearby Scarborough were able to come and rescue her.

There are about 100,000 grey seals and 28,000 common seals in Britain, with several hundreds of them regularly sighted along the Yorkshire coast and a colony of around 1,000 established at Seal Sands near Middlesbrough.

Annie is one of about 15 grey and common seals washed up every year along this stretch of coast and saved from certain death by the Sea Life Centre.

Most have been abandoned or separated from their mothers, often during storms. Some are injured but many more have to be rescued from human interference. Sadly, what many well-meaning members of the public don't realise is that their attempts to help pups can actually cause more problems.

Lyndsey Crawford, who runs the seal rescue programme at Scarborough, says: "Seals actually spend about 80 per cent of their lives on dry land. If people leave a stranded pup alone, it will probably go out with the next tide and be fine.

"But when people interfere – and just think about how big and ugly and scary we must look to them – the pups get scared and distressed, leading to them becoming dehydrated and ill. A mother may not accept her pup back if people have touched it, jeopardising its chances of survival."

Lyndsey, 27, who trained as an engineer but became interested in marine conservation when working in Australia, is keen to help educate the public: "We actually get people bringing them here in their cars. Someone even rang us from Leeds once saying they had brought the seal home. It was in their porch and they wanted to know what to do with it."

But, cute as they look, seals can be vicious, especially when scared. In October last year, a South African woman's nose was bitten off by a seal she was trying to help back to the water.

Seals can also carry infections like salmonella, hepatitis B, distemper and seal finger, where the area around a seal bite turns black. Some pups have been brought into the Sea Life Centre, which opened in 1991, after getting into a fight with a cu-

rious dog. "The dog always comes off worse," says Lyndsey.

The eight-year-old boy who helped rescue Annie, whom he named, did the right thing. He stayed at a safe distance, informed the rescue services and warned other members of the public to stay well away.

Once Sea Life staff had wrapped Annie in towels, they carefully placed her in a kennel and brought her back to the centre. When young seal pups are first rescued, they often have to be fed every four hours, even through the night, just like a new-born baby, with a rehydration solution and special milk before being gradually weaned onto whole fish.

Common complaints – hypoglycaemia, malnourishment, dehydration and hypothermia – are due to separation from the mother's milk and warmth. Because pups can be quite vicious, feeding and taking temperatures can be difficult. The critical period is the first 72 hours

If Lyndsey and her staff can keep the animal stable, the survival rate is close to 100 per cent. "We do lose some seals and it is very upsetting, every single one of them," says Lyndsey.

"Common seals can live for 20 years and grey seals for 40 years. If we find them at around eight weeks old, after their mothers have abandoned them, they deserve a second chance."

When I speak to Lyndsey a few days after our visit, Annie has made a remarkable recovery and progressed from the hospital isolation unit into the large pool where she has to compete with older seals for food: "She is vicious now, fighting back and trying to bite and nip us on the legs. That's what I like to see. It means she can't be feeling that bad.

"She's learning to socialise and fight for fish. If I send her out to a colony of 3,000, seals she needs to be able to stand up for herself," says Lyndsey.

Annie has joined permanent residents Bruno, a 20 stone fully grown male born in captivity, and nine-year-old Mando, who came here from a sister site in Hunstanton.

There are four other young grey seals being rehabilitated here now, including wide-grinned Julia Roberts, who was rescued from Holbeck Beach near Scarborough in the middle of January.

"She is in here for no reason other than people pestered her and she became dehydrated," says Lyndsey. "She was repeatedly hauling herself out of the water because she was tired. When this happens, they can drown."

Hogmany, rescued at New Year, is darting and weaving about in the water. Twelve-week-old Shirley Temple, found near Hull, is screeching on the rocks. And big bottomed Sharon Stone

will soon join them from the quarantine pool.

Like something out of a Disney children's movie, they are all individual, quirky characters: "Bruno likes blonde-haired women – he will do a flipper shake and let them give him a kiss – but he's not too fond of brunettes," says Lyndsey. "They are very intelligent and inquisitive and capable of emotion – like dogs that live in water really."

For the younger seals, human interaction is kept to a minimum to ensure they retain their wild instincts as in a few months they will be ready for release.

"It is important we don't imprint ourselves too much on them. We also stress seals out with fishing nets in the main pool, so they learn to avoid them," says Lyndsey. Although seals are protected by the Seal Conservation Act, fishermen can lawfully kill them to prevent damage to fishing equipment. "Last year I know of three who were shot. Two were rehabilitated seals, with my tags on," says Lyndsey.

Lyndsey will be taking the pups out to sea around the end of the month, before common seals start breeding, and more abandoned pups need rescuing: "Releasing them back into the wild, alive and healthy, that is my goal."

AS there isn't an established breeding colony near Scarborough, she prefers to relocate them at places like Donna Nook in Lincolnshire where there are around 3,000 seals: "In a colony, the big seals will send out scouts and see what is there – sometimes they accept them, sometimes not."

The British Divers Marine Life Rescue and the associated Marine Mammal Medics, famous for their attempted rescue of the whale trapped in the Thames recently, often help Lyndsey collect and release seals. She also works closely with the RSPCA.

She has started an adopt-a-seal-pup scheme to help raise money towards the £2,000 it costs for each seal rehabilitation. Lyndsey would also like to fund a series of seal information signs on beaches.

"People have a soft spot for seals. They can be comical and playful and they do pull your heart strings. But we have to remember they are wild animals."

If anyone discovers a seal, Lyndsey stresses they shouldn't touch it. "Watch from a safe distance in order not to frighten it. If concerned, ring the RSPCA or Sea Life Centre," she says.

Those eyes may appear to be saying "Help me". But they're actually more likely to be pleading "Leave me alone".

● Sea Life Centre (01723) 373414.
RSPCA 0345-888 999



Rescued seal is prepared for release at the Sea Life Centre



SEAL RESCUE: Lyndsey Crawford

SEAL FACTS

YOU can tell a seal's age by counting the growth rings round the roots of the back teeth.

The oldest recorded seal in the world came from Shetland – a grizzled old female who lived to the ripe age of 46.

Seal urine smells like bacon.

In its lifetime, a seal can travel hundreds of thousands of miles. It can dive up to 1,700m and hold its breath for more than 90 minutes.

In Shetland, legend has it seals, or "selkies", come ashore transformed into beautiful people, having cast off their skins, causing many an islander to fall in love and go to sea with them.

The grey seal is the world's third rarest seal species. Two thirds of them live within our waters. Britain is home to five per cent of the world's common seal population.

Grey seals live in harems of one bull and up to ten cows.

Grey seals give birth to pups late in the year, around October. They are born with white furry coats, which they shed after about three weeks, and cannot swim particularly well to begin with.

A female's milk contains up to 60 per cent fat, so pups grow quickly – about

2kg a day – and gain a thick layer of blubber – up to 6.5cm – to keep them warm at sea.

Common seals, also known as harbour or spotted seals, usually give birth to pups in June, having shed their white furry coats before birth. They swim well from birth, with mothers abandoning them at about 4-6 weeks.

The common seal is quite small, growing up to two metres long. The grey seal can grow enormous, up to three metres and weighing 350kg.

The grey seal has a larger head with high muzzle. Its scientific name comes from the Greek meaning "hook-nosed sea pig". The common seal's low dog-like muzzle, with rounded head and distinct forehead, gives it a more appealing and expressive appearance.

f
People have a soft spot for seals but we have to remember they are wild animals

WIN FAMILY TICKETS TO SEE THE SEALS

IF you would like to see these adorable mammals in real life, there are five family tickets to Scarborough Sea Life Centre and Marine Sanctuary up for grabs. All you have to do is tell us how long a seal can hold its breath under water. Send your answers on a postcard or the back of an envelope to Seal Sanctuary Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington DL1 1NF. The closing date is May 20 and usual newspaper competition rules apply.

Scarborough Sea Life Centre houses thousands of fascinating sea creatures as well as the seal, otter and sea turtle sanctuaries. Follow the brown tourist signs towards Scalby Mills and the Sea Life Centre's distinctive pyramids can be found overlooking Scarborough's North Bay.

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me and my wardrobe



Hobbs choice

Karen Peacock, 37, is the manager of Hobbs, on the first floor of Binns in Darlington

Describe your look
I have what I would think of as a creative, nostalgic look. I've been to art school and I've always worked with clothes. I always like to be different.

What's your favourite item of clothing?
I love a suit I have from Hobbs. It's black and it gives you an hourglass shape. It has a short, fitted jacket that's nipped in at the waist and the skirt hugs your hips and your bottom, then flares out. It has a really fantastic, 40s appeal to it.

What's the most you've ever spent on an item of clothing?
It's more accessories that I spend a lot of money on. My most expensive item is a £600 Todds bag. It was a must-have buy, and my husband was very obliging! There are also my Marc Jacobs shoes, which were £250.

What's your worst buy?
I don't really have one. I used to work as the manager of a design room and got a lot of

free things. I never wore a lot of the things I acquired.

What are your favourite shops?
Hobbs. What I love about it is that the collection is designed to form a capsule wardrobe, so even though you're paying a little bit more for items, you're getting a little bit more out of the package. I also love Mulberry.

Which celebrity's style do you admire and why?
I would never aspire to be like somebody.



CLOCK-WISE FROM ABOVE: Hobbs top and Calvin Klein jeans; Hobbs floral pattern dress and pink shoes; Hobbs suit, teamed with Marc Jacobs shoes

Pictures: ANDY LAMB

NE Magazine's style experts, Judie McCourt and Allison McKay, take to the social honeypots of the region in search of style and individuality



McCourt & McKay



JENNIFER WOOD

NE out on the town

JENNIFER WOOD

Jennifer wore a cute dress from Mango. Being a shoe fan, she prefers to shop at Office and for clothes she can usually find something suitable at Topshop.

For a good night dancing to her favourite House music Jennifer heads to the Empire in Middlesbrough and for chilling she listens to indie music, the Kaiser Chiefs and Arctic Monkeys.

Jennifer looks after her lovely locks by never over-using hair straighteners and protecting hair with a Nicky Clarke conditioning spray. Her skin is slightly sensitive so she uses hypo-allergenic products like Simple.



CHRIS PENMAN

CHRIS PENMAN

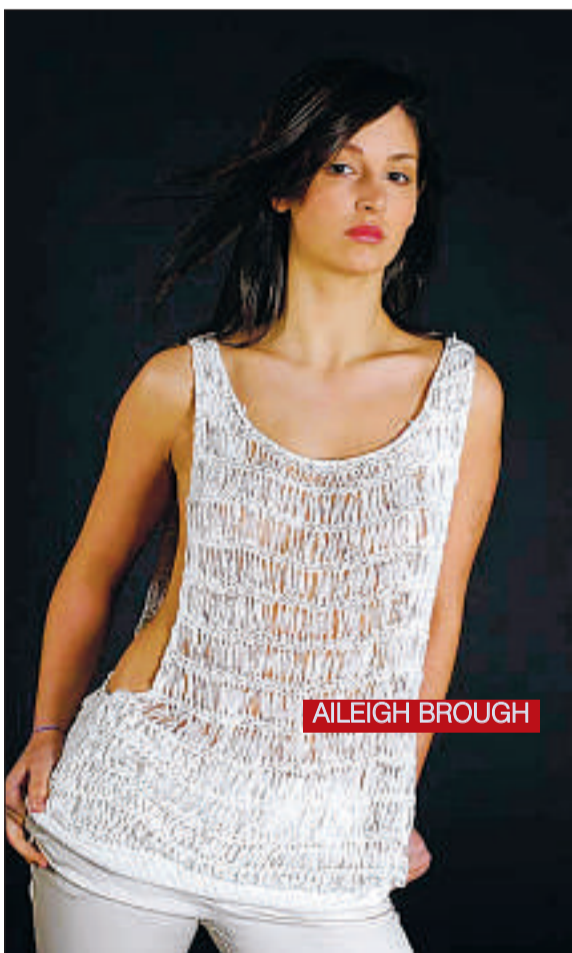
CHRIS PENMAN is a fan of skate clothing and he particularly likes Urban Chaos in Duke Street, Darlington. For the shoot he wore a top from TopMan and jeans by WESC company, and his shoes were Adidas Shelto's from New York. Chris likes original R&B and soul – artists such as Jackie Wilson – and British hip-hop. As well as putting in a few hours behind the bar in the Atlantic Club, Chris also socialises there as that is where his friends go.

THE Forum music centre on Borough Road, Darlington, turned its live music room into a photography studio for a shoot with NE Representation's new models and artistes. Keith Moss, a local photographer with credits from Vogue magazine, fashion stylists Laura B and Stacey, and make-up artist Vicky managed to transform 13 potential models into catwalk queens. So where do models like to shop and how do they take care of their image?

CLAIRE EMBLETON

Claire, 24, wore linen trousers from Mango and a top from Next. Usually, she likes Topshop, River Island and Diesel jeans. Claire takes care of her skin by using Liz Earle cleansing and moisturising products and eating healthily. When she needs to shed a few pounds Claire finds the WeightWatchers points system easy to follow although she believes in allowing herself treats at the weekends.

Claire spends a lot of time in London, but when she is at home in Newcastle she visits The Apartment and Bar Beyond for the funky House and R&B.



AILEIGH BROUGH

AILEIGH BROUGH

Aileigh wore a stunning side-split top from Mango. She likes the vintage look and Urban Outfitters are a great source for a varied range. She also likes Topshop for their up-to-date styles and pricing.

When socialising Aileigh pops into her local, the River Lounge in Yarm, where she loves the chilled-out atmosphere, cool R&B music and stylish decor, as well as the food served in the upstairs restaurant.

Aileigh eats natural yoghurt every morning and applies Channel Bronzer to assist a healthy glow. She has beautiful thick hair and she manages to keep it tame and well groomed with Tigi Bed Head products.



CLAIRE EMBLETON

Judie McCourt is a lunchtime presenter for Century FM and Allison McKay is the Creative Director of NE Representation, supplying models, photographers, hair, make-up, stylists, film extras and locations. (01325) 488385



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TIPS FOR CHOOSING A CARE HOME

■ **Think and plan ahead.** For many families, their first thoughts about care for an elderly relative come when there is a crisis, ie, they go into hospital after a fall which results in them needing additional care.

■ Visit homes that you think may be suitable. There is a lot of stigma over what homes are like but it's often based on myth. Again, visit before reaching crisis point so you already have an idea of what your preferred options might be. By planning ahead you are also more likely to get a place in the home you want.

■ **Make their surroundings as familiar as possible.** Dress their room with personal items to make them feel at home.

■ **Be realistic about cost.** High quality, full time care does not come cheap. Good homes have to pay nursing staff NHS rates and have stringent regulations and standards to meet. As with most things, you get what you pay for. Consider the cost of living in a hotel on a full-board basis.

■ Communication is key. Care home owner Simon Loveridge says: "Many people do not want an elderly relative or loved one to go into a care home. In the first few weeks Gratia spends as much time talking with relatives as we do residents. It's about understanding and

adapting. Your lifestyle may not make it practical to look after an elderly person at home."

■ **Put your relative's needs first.** Take time to discuss with care professionals to work out what are your relative's specific needs. Modern care offers plenty of choice to meet individual needs. It is important that these needs are identified, albeit they may change over time.

■ Remember, ill elderly people can recover. Going into a home does not automatically mean they will not be able to return home once they have recovered.



SECOND FAMILY: nursing assistants talk to residents at Ashleigh House

A home from home

A lot of us will come to a point in our lives, or the lives of our parents, when a care home becomes a necessity. We check out two in the North-East to see what they have to offer

WHEN an elderly person moves into a care home, the staff and fellow residents become their second family.

Creating a family atmosphere is at the heart of what Lynn Tarling, manager of Ashleigh House, and her team aim to achieve at the home in Harrogate Hill, Darlington.

"We involve residents in everything that goes on in the home so they have input in their surroundings. We try to make it a home from home. We're quite close knit and everyone who works here really cares about the residents," explains Lynn.

"Staff turnover is very low which is much better for the residents as they get to know us and we get to understand their ways and preferences. We don't even bring in agency staff because it's not fair to the residents. There's a lot of commitment towards making living here as comfortable as possible."

That includes meeting each person's special dietary requirements and providing a range of activities designed to keep residents occupied, amused and entertained.

Activities organiser Karen Coad has devised a full programme of interests ranging from baking to bingo, aromatherapy to

reminiscence sessions and nostalgia videos.

Entertainers are invited into the home and a hairdresser and chiropodist make regular visits.

The highlight of the year is the annual holiday, usually to a seaside resort like Blackpool or Scarborough, for those residents who are fit enough to travel.

Once summer arrives, the home's large garden will be opened. Karen hopes to develop it this year with a patio, greenhouse, herb garden and raised beds so the residents can do some gardening of their own. The home also has a courtyard and conservatory.

The activities on offer are available for people who visit the home for day care or respite care, neither of which are generally on offer at other homes.

"It's important sometimes to give families who look after elderly relatives at home a little bit of breathing space and we're always happy to provide care for all or part of a day," Lynn explains.

The home was recently bought by Care & Investment Holdings Ltd. A programme of re-decoration, which has seen many rooms and communal areas already brought up to date with calm and muted decor, will continue.

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**Ashleigh House, 460 North Road, Darlington
Tel 01325 382847**





SOCIABLE: Margaret Pearson, left. Above: Kim Hegney, a nursing assistant at Gratia Care village in Scorton, talks to Helen Davison, of Aldbrough St John

f *There is no reason why people with dementia can't get involved in social activities*

FOR more than a century, there has been a tradition of care in the North Yorkshire village of Scorton. Continuing the heritage today is Gratia Care but in a way that is much more in line with modern nursing than the conventional care provided by a former private hospital and old people's home.

Managing director Simon Loveridge says: "The care industry is evolving and in the last ten years alone aspirations and standards have increased greatly. There is a better understanding of the complex range of needs that people have and as a result, the levels of training have increased. People have recognised that the future is to build modern facilities where people can continue to enjoy a full and varied life."

Gratia Care bought the former St John of God hospital three years ago. Just last month its newly built 60-bed care home opened, providing purpose-built, en suite accommodation for residents who previously lived in the former hospital.

Residents are placed into four groups of 15 rooms with each group having its own lounge and dining room so friendships can develop. In addition to the residential care for elderly and general nursing care, Gratia also offers specialist Alzheimer's care, which often is not available elsewhere.

"Dementia is increasing because people are living longer. It's something we all have to face. But there is no reason why people with dementia can't get involved in social activities. It's about interaction and understanding their needs and aspirations, as well as the aspirations of their families."

"We have exceeded the minimum requirements for national care standards and the building itself has been shortlisted for a design award. But it's mainly about quality of care for people who have nursing needs or some level of dementia," says Simon.

Meanwhile, the main Victorian building is part way through a complete renovation. It will eventually provide assisted suite-based living for residents who can look after themselves most of the time but need some support close at hand.

It also provides residential care for elderly

mentally ill people, general nursing care and specialist Alzheimer's care, often not available elsewhere because of the high level of support that is needed.

A second new-build project will offer 24 apartments to rent or to buy leasehold for elderly people living independently but with access to the social side of the care village complex.

The emphasis is very much on the benefits of providing a varied social life for residents, which includes a coffee shop, cinema, flower shop, library and plenty of occupational therapy activities both for residents and adults who need extra support who make day visits from Richmond, Northallerton and Darlington.

"We encourage people to have as normal a life as possible, including trips out for residents and activities involving people from the community," says Simon.



ATMOSPHERE: domestic Steph Cunningham shares a joke with a Gratia Care resident

G RATIA CARE Ltd

Gratia Care Ltd is delighted to announce the opening of a brand new purposely designed care home, which provides specialist nursing and dementia care in the outstanding location of Scorton, one of the prettiest villages in north Yorkshire

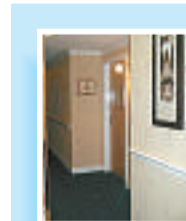
This new care home forms part of the existing Abbey Care Village, and boasts a standard of accommodation and care which more than exceeds expectations.

Set in delightful landscaped gardens, the new facility also offers the benefits of existing on-site amenities such as a restaurant, coffee shop and cinema suite providing a stimulating social life for those who wish.

All accommodation is in beautifully appointed single rooms with en-suite facilities, providing every comfort and a homely and private living space. All rooms have points for satellite television and are fitted with individual phone lines to help residents keep in touch with their loved ones.

The Abbey Care Home has been designed to be a real home from home with intimate residents' lounges and separate dining facilities throughout the building which encourage social interaction in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

Our experienced and qualified staff are trained to provide care and support without compromising the individuals choice and beliefs and aim to maximise their independence. Residents are treated with respect and dignity; we take into account their ability, interest and preferences, focusing on their quality of life.



To find out more about the Abbey Care Home or Gratia Care Ltd and our availability, please telephone us on 01748 813300 or write to us at:

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Friday 9th June
Boogie the night away to the sounds of our resident DJ. Fancy dress optional
Two Course Hot and Cold Buffet £12.00 per person

Latino Loaded
Saturday 8th July
A tribute to Ricky Martin & Enrique Iglesias. Fancy dress optional
Two Course Hot and Cold Buffet £20.00 per person

Schools Out Disco
Friday 21st July
St Trinians evening for the good, bad and ugly! Dust off your school uniform and stay out past curfew. Detention if late!
Two Course Hot and Cold Buffet £12.00 per person

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Saturday 22nd July
Europe's no 1 Elvis tribute show, featuring Paul Priestley & th 19 piece E.P. band
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70's & 80's Disco
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Two Course Hot and Cold Buffet £12.00 per person

Grease is the Word
Saturday 9th September
Were you born to Hand jive? Well you're the one that I want. Fancy dress optional - T Birds and Pink Ladies welcome
Two Course Hot and Cold Buffet £20.00 per person

The Rat Pack Show
Saturday 30th September
As seen on TV, sold out in theatres and hotels world wide. The award winning tribute show to Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jnr
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gadget man




SCREEN TOUCH: the Sony DSC N1

Point and shoot

As the summer season approaches, it might be time to update your camera. We pick six of the best compacts on the market

● Don't miss Burton's Bytes - game reviews in The Northern Echo every Friday

CONTINUALLY packing more features into compact cameras is the only way that the manufacturers can stave off the ever-present pressure from mobile handset manufacturers whose handset snappers are increasing in resolution and in shot quality too.

Prices of compact digital cameras have fallen dramatically over the last 12 months yet the build quality of these units is stunning.

They produce images that can be printed with extreme clarity as a postcard or A4 sheet size without any loss of detail. Even A3 prints are good enough to hang on the wall.

Here's our pick of the best digital compacts out there right now.

ZIPPY ZOOM

BenQ E600 around £125.49 from www.digitalkind.co.uk

This six megapixel camera has a 3x optical zoom using a sliding lens design which means it can zoom in and out of the subject quicker than a cheetah on a motorbike. Possibly the slimmest 6MP camera on the market, the BenQ has an oversized 2.5 inch LCD viewing screen and is child's play to operate.



GO PRO

Ricoh GR Digital £699 see www.ricoh.co.uk/cameras

The price tag is probably enough to tell you this is not for dabblers in digital photography but firmly aimed at advanced amateurs. It's an impressive 8.1 megapixels in resolution and the pack comes with a wide conversion lens, external viewfinder, lens hood and adapter, camera case and neck strap. You get amazing results from this compact camera.




COLOURFUL COLLECTION

Casio EX S600 £206 from www.pixmania.com

Available in a range of colour finishes for the fashion-conscious,

this camera has as much function as it does form. There's a six megapixel resolution to produce excellent shots and a smart feature which compensates for photographers with the shakes.



TOUCH THIS


Sony DSC N1 £343 from www.johnlewis.com

This "first" from Sony sees many of the buttons at the back of a digital camera become redundant as much of the camera control is done by touching the huge three inch LCD screen at the rear. That aside, the camera utilises a top-class Carl Zeiss lens with 3x optical and 6x digital zoom.

CLEAR OF CABLE

Canon Ixus Wireless £299.87 from www.dixons.co.uk

Avoid any further cases of cable-rage with this smart solution for transferring images from camera to PC without the use of connective cables. Using the latest Wi-Fi technology, images can be sent straight to your computer one by one, or you can set the feature to continuous and they'll transport themselves automatically.



UNDERWATER USE

Pentax Optio WPI £199.89 from www.pcworld.co.uk

A six megapixel snapper that's happier than most others to spend time under the water, perfect for the holidays. It's resistant up to 1.5 metres for periods no longer than 30 minutes and produces very decent reproductions of your Jacques Cousteau moments.





DOUBLE ACT: Jill Tait, left, and Ann Pullan, bottom

www.absolute-image.co.uk

■ Absolute Image, St Nicholas Chambers, Amen Corner, Newcastle NE1 1PE. 0191-260 5222



Having your fill

When your face begins to sag and creams seem to make no difference, there is another option. JENNY NEEDHAM reports

DERMAL fillers are fast becoming the treatment of choice for the over 35s, an age when the facial crevices really begin to deepen and moisturising creams no longer seem enough. Less drastic than plastic surgery – and less expensive – they can be administered in the time it takes to brew a cup of coffee, and though no one would claim they are painless, the effects are obvious and instant.

One new clinic which offers the full range of dermal fillers and skin peels is Absolute Image in St Nicholas Chambers, Newcastle. The business, in a spacious first floor suite with huge picture windows overlooking the cathedral of St Nicholas, is run by Ann Pullan and Jill Tait. The pair worked together at another major cosmetic surgery group in the North-East for 20 years before deciding to branch out on their own. Jill is the sole injector at the moment, while Ann manages the business side of things, but they are looking to expand and take on more staff.

Jill, 42, is married and lives in Alnwick and has a 14-year-old daughter. "Like most teenagers, she frowns a lot, so she may need treatments in the future," laughs Jill. Ann, 58, lives closer to the business on Newcastle's fashionable Quayside.

The waiting area at Absolute Image is like someone's sitting room with gas fire, leather sofas, fluffy cushions and glossy mags. And there, in between the women's interest magazines, is Top Gear, suggesting that it's not only women who are interested in the treatments offered here.

In fact, far from having the odd chap straying in, the proportion of male clients is now 25 per cent. "Things have changed a lot. Some even come in before their partners and recommend us to the women afterwards," says Ann. "We had a lovely Irish lad in last week who said he was a high-flyer and needed to look the part, but lacked confidence because of his looks. After the treatment, his confidence soared." There is no doubt that the dermal filler market is booming but there has been some concern about the fact that regulations have been lax. Laws are changing, though, so that in future these sorts of treatments will only be available at registered premises. "Unlike a lot of people who offer fillers, such as hair salons and even dentist surgeries, we are 100 per cent committed to these treatments. It's our speciality," says Jill, whose background as a nurse should give confidence to clients that she knows exactly what she is doing. "It is also very creative and that only comes with practice, with looking at a face and knowing where to inject and what fillers to use," she adds.

Different fillers suit different parts of the face –

some work on a deeper level, and some last longer than others. There's Botox, which is probably the one most people have heard of, and is excellent for erasing frown lines, there's Restylane, Perlane, Teosyal and Absolute Image's latest filler Sculptra, which works in the lower layers of the skin and is perfect for restoring the contours of an ageing, sagging face. The neck and even hands can also be treated.

The client base at Absolute Image includes people from age 20 upwards, which seems very young, but Jill explains. "A lot of youngsters just want to jump on the bandwagon but if we felt there would be no benefit, then we wouldn't go ahead. Some younger people come in, though, because they have bad acne scarring, which we can treat with skin peels. Older women need treatments for different reasons. They lose the plumpness in their faces and become hollow-cheeked. We can plump them out again.

An awful lot of clients are from the 40-50 year age group. "A lot of people work very hard, which often reflects in their faces, but now the work wrinkles can be ironed out in a lunch hour. You might need to have more initially, but treatments can be as little as £150," says Ann. "It might seem a lot but if you compare it with what people spend on drinks, clothes etc. over nine months, it puts it into perspective."

Most of their clients book in, they say, because of word-of-mouth.

At 47 my own skin is beginning to sag and deep lines have appeared from my nose to the corners of my mouth, particularly on the left, which Jill says is probably due to having a preference for sleeping on that side. There are plenty of crows' feet to go at too, but she decides to plump up the naso-labial area using Perlane. Four or five injections each side later – eye-watering, to be sure, but the pain stops immediately the needle is withdrawn – and the lines have vanished. My skin is red but by the time I'm going out that evening there's nothing to be seen except a vast improvement in that area of my face.

And that, really, is the appeal of dermal fillers – they are instant and not too drastic. Friends will notice that you look different, a little younger, but not be able to put their finger on why.



BEAUTY companies are increasingly offering salon-style treatments that you can do at home. Even Marks & Spencer has jumped on the bandwagon with its own home micro-dermabrasion kit, following in the footsteps of a host of cosmetics giants who are moving treatments from the salons to the supermarket shelf.

A quick scan of the aisles and beauty counters of high streets stores reveals everything you need to equip yourself for home lowlights, highlights, teeth whitening, skin peels and micro-dermabrasion.

These products do have a place, say the experts, but it is important to treat them with care and read the instructions properly. Don't think, for instance, that using a skin peel for twice as long, will produce twice the results: it is more likely to end in disaster.

A fan of face scrubs, I decided to try something a little more intensive – the Skin Doctors Cosmeceuticals PowerBration treatment, which includes intensive micro-dermabrasion crystals to exfoliate deeply; a handset to direct the crystals evenly over the face, a 24-hour skin resurfacing cream



to nourish the skin, and Glow, a guide to skincare.

First you are advised to do a patch test 24 hours before the full treatment. Then you cleanse thoroughly, attach the foam applicator to the handset, dot the crystals/cream on face, and massage it into the face for up to five minutes per area. Afterwards you dust off the remaining crystals with a dry towel, rinse, dry and apply the resurfacing cream. It really is easy and the massage sensation is quite relaxing

and is probably quite good for skin on its own. The skin positively glows after the treatment though it is important to remember that new skin will be more sensitive to sunlight and that protective cream must be applied. Skin Doctors

recommend no more than two treatments in a week.

● **PowerBration, £54.95, is available from larger Boots stores and department stores. For stockists and mail order call Skin Doctors on 0845 408 2998 or go to www.skindoctors.co.uk**

Jenny Needham

● **COLLAGENICS North-East, based in Darlington, has just added to its comprehensive dermal filler and skin peel treatments a new product called Restylane LIPP, which is specifically designed for use in lip enhancement procedures. To book call (01325) 367 367.**

Bryan McCourt, who runs the North-East franchise of Collagenics, won Franchisee of the Year at the company's national awards. He is pictured right with Ruth Roddam, of Saks Hair & Beauty Darlington, who picked up the regional Collagenics Clinic of the Year award.



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NE motoring

Honda boasts the Power of Dreams, but as IAN LAMMING finds out, those dreams are not necessarily the sole preserve of the young



THE FIREBLADE: simply supersonic

When the biker boy grows up

IT'S official, I'm getting old. How do I know? Well read on and you will see why. Before me stand two very different motorcycles, both Hondas but at far-flung ends of the spectrum.

Exhibit A, the Fireblade, the extreme end of the sports market and the icon of all race replicas. It was the Fireblade that rewrote the motorcycle handbook. Before that, powerful bikes were huge monoliths with scorching straight line speed but rubber legs which wobbled around every bend, if you managed to get around at all.

Fireblade changed all that, weighing in at 600cc proportions but packing true superbike wallop. It flew down the road and continued on rails around every curve.

Resplendent in typical Honda red and black livery and weighing just 176kg, the 2006 incarnation boasts a humungous 170bhp. With that sort of power to weight ratio you can imagine the performance. Actually you can't. Ride one and you will see what I mean; it is simply supersonic.

It is lovely. Every detail can't fail to have owners dreaming that they are MotoGP ace Nicky Hayden. It oozes class, it demands respect, it shouts performance.

The four cylinder 998cc motor emits a warning growl at low revs and a banshee wail at high. The state-of-the-art frame and suspension keeps all the power beautifully in check through the bends but is amazingly comfortable over the bumps in a way sports bikes generally aren't. And when you need to scrub off speed, the brakes are as breath-taking as the performance.

It all sounds great, doesn't it? And don't worry, it is. But when you enter your mid-life crisis years body parts aren't quite as supple as they once were and if I were to haggle for a good deal on a Fireblade, I'd be looking for the dealer to throw in an osteopath.

Fireblade ain't no tourer. As superbikes go, it is probably the most comfortable but this is a relative term. The bars are a stretch, the seat and footpegs are high and the fairing doesn't deflect much wind. Your nose is down, while your bum floats up in the air somewhere.

A quick flit around the block and one action photoshoot later, and that's more than enough for me and the nape of my neck, left hip and groin are begging for mercy.

Age catches up with us all... But when I next jump on a mini-Pan (that's the Deauville by the way, a scaled-down version of Honda's Pan European tourer) things start to look up.

Going from sexy superbike to tedious tourer should leave my self-esteem in tatters. It doesn't, though, because the relief of riding

something armchair comfortable is immense. I don't think I have ever ridden a bike so supremely comfy. You could ride it forever, or at least until the fuel ran out. And relieving yourself of the discomfort of hypersports riding allows you to concentrate once more on your motorcycling - which is what it's all about.

Okay, you'll get little respect from the sports-bike fraternity, but who cares? What you will get is the extreme enjoyment of a very capable and flexible bike. On the 'Blade, I grimace, on the Deauville, I smile. And when I'm approached in the street by two non-biking colleagues, I'm amazed at how impressed they are with the bike.

Time waits for no man and the Deauville has to work for its money as I head off to another job. How pleased am I when the lockable integral panniers swallow my camera bag, then most of my bike gear as I troop off to do another feature. For the first time I realise that a bike can be a useful, fun and a real-life means of transport rather than just a sunny day toy. What a revelation.

The new 700cc V-win engine is a peach, offering aural delight and a decent amount of torque. The handling is surprisingly good, the big Deauville is amazingly flickable through the bends and will tip clean off its tyres if need be.

Honda really is an incredible firm. Born out of the need to race, it recognises that biking individuals have different wants and needs. The Fireblade and Deauville in most respects appear poles apart and yet they share the same excellent dynamics, purpose and qualities.

Both are superb in their own fields and should be sampled by all manner of riders whether your preference is for speed or sight-seeing, or whether you are young or... erm... not so young after all.

■ Tests bikes provided by White Brothers of Darlington



THE DEAUVILLE: comfortable and fun



NE connections



Swanning around

JENNY NEEDHAM pays a flying visit to the market town of Pickering in North Yorkshire in search of rest and relaxation

If you take the picturesque North Yorkshire Moors Railway south from Gros-mont to the busy market town of Pickering, there's real magic at the end of the line. As the train chugs along the route followed by trainee wizards on their way back to Hogwarts in the Harry Potter movies, and sighs to a halt in the town, visitors alight at a beautifully restored station and instantly come under the spell of the past.

Railway buffs can marvel at the finest working collection of steam locomotives anywhere, while those whose interests stretch back further in the mists of time can head for a history fix at Pickering Castle.

This 13th century castle and royal hunting lodge was originally built in earth and timber by William the Conqueror to suppress rebellious Northerners. A fine example of motte-and-bailey with original keep towers and walls still standing, it has superb views of the surrounding countryside. It was originally set amongst one of the largest forests in the country and used by a succession of medieval kings as hunting lodge, holiday home and even a stud farm.

Another short stroll takes you to the centre of Pickering, where the weary visitor can rest in total comfort at The White Swan Inn, which is also packed to the beams with history. Sitting in the characterful bar, supping a well-kept pint of Yorkshire ale, you can imagine the dusty, bone-shaken travellers of the 16th century alighting from their carriages at this former coaching inn in sore need of vittels, refreshment and rest. The comfort that today's guests enjoy would have astounded them.

The modern-day White Swan has been owned by the Buchanan family for 20 years and is now under the stewardship of Victor and Marion Buchanan. They have done a superb job of retaining the character of the



building while meeting the needs of the 21st century traveller.

At one end of the inn you can sink into squishy sofas and tapestry wing-chairs by a roaring fire; at the other end are the newly converted stable blocks which now house nine stunning contemporary rooms. Colours are muted, Yorkstone floors – with under-floor heating – are covered in cosy rugs, bathrooms have comfortable, double-ended baths and wet-room style showers, and bedrooms boast wall-mounted multi-channel LCD TVs. The linen is crisp, the pillows – thank heaven – are soft as soft, and the tea-making equipment comes with good-sized mugs instead of the ubiquitous stinky little cups hotels usually plump for. Rooms in the main part of the hotel are more traditional.

Outside the contemporary suite is a new club room, with honesty bar, open fire, leather sofas and pool table, which guests can enjoy and which can be hired for private parties.

The White Swan was originally built as a four-room cottage, then extended and pressed into service as a coaching inn for the York to Whitby stagecoach. Smugglers moving salt from Whitby to York also used it and

the remains of an aerial walkway used for a quick getaway when the excise men sprung a visit are still visible.

The building has been open for business as an inn since the 16th century, with two notable exceptions: for a brief spell it served as the town's Court House and during the last war it was pressed into service as Pickering Garrison's NCO Mess.

It's doubtful, though, that the servicemen had such inventive and delicious food on offer to them as today's lucky guests. Local ingredients – eggs and chickens from Thirsk, meat from Ginger Pig at Levisham – are coaxied into beautifully presented dishes such as seared Harome pigeon breast with red wine risotto (£6.95); slow-cooked Ginger Pig belly pork with red cabbage, mustard mash and apple sauce (£14.95), and pot-roasted Levisham mutton with root vegetables, chateau potatoes and rosemary gravy (£15.95). The wine list at the White Swan is extensive and the food utterly, belt-tighteningly moreish.

If you've still got room for a sweet, choices at £5.50 include poached rhubarb on toasted brioche with rhubarb ice cream, or rich chocolate cake with clotted cream and choco-

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late sauce. Pickles, chutneys and ketchups are home made and are available to buy.

The White Swan redefines the notion of "cosiness": there are open fires everywhere – in the bar, lounge, club bar and the dining room, all flagstones and flickering candles and the perfect venue for a romantic meal.

A stroll round town will help to ease the calorific load. Pickering is a busy little market town with an antiques centre – open seven days a week – a cute little cinema, and a nice interiors shops. There's even a place where traditional rocking horses are made.

For those who prefer horses in the flesh, Pickering is at the centre of the North's horseracing country and lots of racing parties make their way to the inn. The Ebor Festival in York sees well-heeled Londoners trotting up the A1 for parties and punts, but Ripon, Thirsk, Wetherby and Catterick are all just a short canter away. The White Swan is happy to make up hampers for racegoers and runs raced-themed weekend packages.

When the betting and carousing are over, of course, many racegoers will probably go back home with lighter wallets and tighter waistbands. But at least they'll have the satisfaction of knowing that their time hasn't been wasted and that when it comes to fine dining, good wines, atmosphere and a warm welcome, the White Swan Inn is probably as near as you'll get to a dead cert.

■ **The White Swan Inn**, Market Place, Pickering YO18 7AA www.white-swan.co.uk; enquiries@white-swan.co.uk. Bed and breakfast from £129 for a double. (01751) 472288

■ **Pickering Castle**, April to Sept 30, daily 10am to 6pm www.english-heritage.org.uk/yorkshire (01751) 474989; **North Yorkshire Moors Railway**, Grosmont to Pickering, March to November. (01751) 472508; **Pickering Tourist Information Centre** (01751) 474219.

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