Keep your COOL

Hot dry spells can be tough on plants. Here's how to help beat the heat



Helichrysum bracteatum



A strawberry tree provides shade



Bee-friendly lavender



Climbing Clematis Jackmanii Purpurea

Sizzling summers

UK heatwaves are set to get longer and hotter, say weather experts at the Met Office. While that's great for those heading to the beach, it's not so much fun for gardeners faced with parched plants and hosepipe bans. High temperatures and scarce water also threatens wildlife, from bees overheating in their furry coats to frogs losing their damp habitats. Here's how to help.

Greening up

While bare soil and paved surfaces ramp up the heat, layers of greenery have a cooling effect. Start with a densely canopied tree, such as liquidambar or the strawberry tree (Arbutus unedo). This will shade the ground and freshen air by releasing water vapour. Thick shrubs and tall herbaceous plants have a similar effect. Got a bare fence or balcony railing? Train a climbing clematis or honeysuckle along it to trap moisture and make a shady haven for birds and insects. For the ultimate heat-buster, add a water feature. Even a small balcony has room for a solar fountain or pond in a pot.

Lawn rescue

Don't despair at the sight of brown, crispy grass. Most lawns are robust and quickly sprout fresh growth after rainfall. In the meantime, give your mower a rest in times of drought – once a fortnight or longer is fine. And don't cut too close, as this can weaken grass. After mowing, leave clippings where they fall to help stop water evaporating.

Scorching picks

Seek out plants that put up with high temperatures and scarce water. Typically, these have

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HOT TIPS

- Protect vulnerable specimens, such as salad leaves or new plantings, with shade netting.
- Revive dried-out pots by soaking them in a bucket of water for a couple of hours, then allow them to drain. Move to a shady spot while the plants recover.
- Recycle grey water (used for washing veggies or the dishes) on beds, lawns and containers.
- Save precious rainfall by installing rain barrels or dipping tanks.







Plant lady's mantle for drought tolerance

silver or grey-green leaves that reflect sunlight, like lavender, catmint (Nepeta cataria) and California fuchsia (Epilobium canum). Another clever way that plants handle drought is to capture moisture in tiny hairs on leaves and stems. Fuzzy faves include lady's mantle (Alchemilla mollis), lamb's ear (Stachys byzantina) and false dittany (Ballota). Window boxes and hanging baskets are liable to dry out quickly. Fill them with drought-busters such as African daisy (Osteospermum), trailing sedums (try the vibrant pink Spot On series) and helichrysum.

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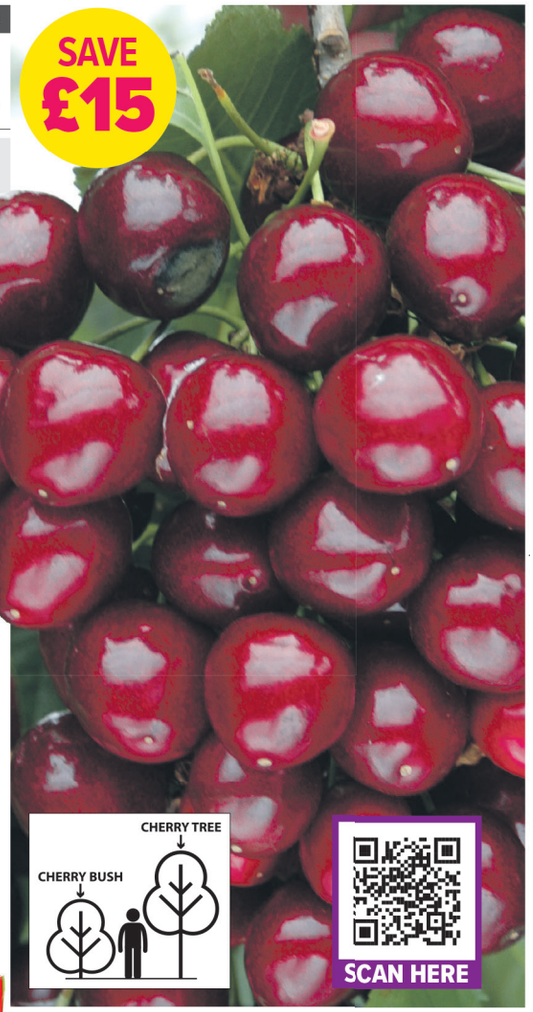
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