



Into the garden

February's Bright Flickers of Hope

Cold days may be hanging on with stubborn enthusiasm, but February is when the garden starts hinting that it hasn't forgotten us. Light stretches a little further, bulbs stir and the soil – though still sulky – begins to thaw just enough for gardening daydreams to feel justified.

Dates for Your Diary

Snowdrop celebrations across the UK – All Month

From Lincolnshire's Easton Walled Gardens to Painswick Rococo Garden, February is snowdrop-spotting season. Woodland walks, heritage displays, and plenty of tea rooms offering the moral support required after yet another "accidental" bulb purchase.

Seedy Sunday, Brighton – 1 February

The UK's biggest seed-swap event. Come for the heritage varieties, stay for the talks, and leave with pockets full of possibilities. bhfood.org.uk

Hole Park Garden, Kent – 1 February

The Snowdrop & Spring Fair at Hole Park Garden is a gentle nudge toward the new season, with specialist nurseries, early blooms and plenty of plant temptations. Set in beautiful parkland, it's an inviting February wander for anyone craving colour. A cosy café seals the deal – perfect for warming up after a spot of snowdrop scouting. holepark.com

Old lore reminder

'If February gives a warm day, spring will hesitate later.'
A gentle nudge not to get carried away when one sunny afternoon tries to fool you.



Did you know?

- Hellebores were once believed to ward off evil spirits. These days they mainly ward off winter gloom.
- Snowdrops produce a natural antifreeze – no wonder they look so pleased with themselves in frost.
- Blackbirds often start singing again this month, rehearsing before spring's full chorus kicks in.



ALAN'S ALMANAC: FEBRUARY IN THE GARDEN & ALLOTMENT

Meet Alan Coxon: food and heritage expert, curator of projects from *Roaming the Paths* to *Alan's Almanac*, and now *Platinum's* very own gardening voice. With a passion for the land and a gift for unearthing timeless wisdom, Alan will be our guide through the gardening year – sharing know-how, inspiration and a few winks of humour along the way. Find out more at roaming-the-paths.co.uk and alans-almanac.co.uk.



ALAN'S TOP TIP

'Save the birds – and your plumbing. Never pour leftover cooking fat down the sink; instead, warm it slightly, stir in some oats and let it set. You'll create a high-energy snack that garden birds adore, and your drains will thank you.'

BOOK OF THE MONTH

The Green Sketching Handbook: Relax, Unwind and Reconnect with Nature by Dr Ali Foxon (£14.99, Pan Macmillan)

A gentle, uplifting guide that encourages you to slow down, look closely, and truly see your surroundings. Ali Foxon believes sketching isn't about producing masterpieces – it's about sharpening your senses and reconnecting with nature in the most human, immediate way possible.

Why it's perfect for February? With daylight stretching its legs and early shoots appearing, February is an ideal month to take a notebook outdoors and capture the promise of the season. Foxon's approach removes all pressure: no fancy kit, no artistic pedigree required. Just curiosity, a pencil and five minutes of peace. It's mindfulness in motion – and a brilliant way to notice those tiny details that quietly announce spring.



February is when the garden starts to stir beneath the surface. There's still more promise than performance, but don't be lulled by the quiet – the jobs you tackle now set the whole season in motion. Think of it as giving your garden a gentle nudge before spring properly stretches its legs.

● **Time to sow.** If the soil is firm enough not to swallow your wellies, you can get cracking with onions, broad beans, peas and summer cabbage outdoors. A cloche or bit of for the soil – not glamorous, but very effective for early risers.

● **Get in the greenhouse.** A heated greenhouse (or a windowsill that thinks it's one) is ideal for starting tomatoes, peppers, cauliflower and early bedding. No heat? No problem. Stick to hardy heroes like lettuce and the trusty "hungry gap" greens – they don't mind a chilly start.

● **Check overwintering plants.** Give your tender perennials a once-over, removing anything dead or diseased – and yes, bin it, don't compost. On milder days, crack open the vents. A little fresh air perks up plants much like it does people in late winter.

● **Chit potatoes.** Line up your seed potatoes in a light, cool spot and let them grow short, sturdy sprouts. Think of it as pre-season training for spuds – all the strength they'll need when planting time arrives next month.

● **Mulch, mulch, mulch.** A generous blanket of well-rotted compost around shrubs, perennials

and fruit bushes will lock in moisture and nourish the soil. A light sprinkle of bonemeal adds a slow-release pick-me-up. Consider it breakfast in bed for your plants.

● **Finish the winter jobs.** If there's digging left to do, now's your moment. No-dig beds simply need a fresh layer of compost. Give tools and the greenhouse a quick spruce – future you will be very grateful when spring comes barrelling in.

● **Remember the wildlife.** Nature's cupboard is pretty bare right now. Offer birds something worthwhile: sunflower hearts, suet, peanuts, millet or mealworms. They'll ignore cheap filler mixes anyway, so you may as well give them the good stuff and avoid the mess.

● **Look for the little flourishes.** Keep an eye out for snowdrops and those first daffodils shouldering their way into the light. Even if a late snowfall flattens them, don't fret – once it melts, they'll bounce back with enviable enthusiasm.

