

# Life Almanac

May has a different tempo. There's warmth in the air and depth in the greenery. Gardens are established, windows are flung open again, and everything feels more assured than it did a few weeks ago. It's a good month to lift your head and look outward again. To engage. To be curious. To notice what's opening up – culturally, socially, personally – and step into it with confidence.



## Noted & noteworthy

### May's nature marker: Hawthorn's moment

If you notice a faint almond scent on the air, that's hawthorn – and it's one of May's quiet signatures. Entire stretches of countryside turn white almost overnight, as though someone's draped lace along the lanes. Known traditionally as the "May tree", its blossom has long marked this exact point in the year – no longer early spring, not yet summer. It's brief, slightly unruly, and worth catching before it fades.

WORDS: CAROLINE BLIGHT & EMMA COXON. IMAGES: HAY FESTIVAL BY ADAM TATTON REID; VARIOUS CONTRIBUTORS, AND SHUTTERSTOCK.

## What's on: May Almanac

This month is rich with ideas. From the big-hitting brilliance of Hay Festival to the hands-on creativity of London Craft Week and the boundary-pushing energy of Brighton Fringe, May's calendar rewards curiosity. Add in new theatre, smart telly, standout exhibitions and long-awaited film sequels, and there's plenty to get stuck into. Whether you're booking ahead or deciding on a whim, here's where to look first.



### STAR-STUDED TELLY

Elle Fanning and Michelle Pfeiffer lead this new series based on the novel of the same name, which has been brought to screen by David E Kelly (*Big Little Lies*). The heartwarming, comedic family drama follows recent college dropout and aspiring writer Margo (Fanning), the daughter of an ex-Hooter's waitress (Pfeiffer) and ex-pro wrestler (Nick Offerman). She's forced to face the fact money is not obviously in her future as she has a new baby, a mounting pile of bills and a dwindling amount of ways to pay them. Look out for the many superstar cameos including Nicole Kidman, who also produces the show. ***Margo's Got Money Troubles***, 15 April, Apple TV

### Comedy on tour

Award-winning presenter and comedian Craig Ferguson arrives back this side of the pond as part of the European leg of his stand-up tour. Craig is returning to his comedy roots after over a decade presenting the Stateside hit, *Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson*. He's sharing hilarious stories and jokes from across his colourful career and offering witty takes on everyday life in the self-deprecating humour he's best known for. "I've always loved stand-up my whole career and I'd be writing away," he says. "If I wasn't touring, I'd end up hanging around New York comedy clubs, doing it for nothing." ***Craig Ferguson Pants on Fire Tour***, 20 April Dublin, 24 April London, 26 April Glasgow



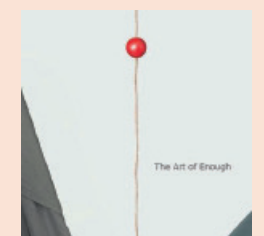
The Hidden 20% Autistic and ADHD entrepreneur Ben Branson pulls neurodiversity out of the shadows and into proper conversation.



Second Act Hosted by award-winning beauty journalist Ateh Jewel, this podcast celebrates women who refuse to fade quietly into midlife with open conversations on everything from style to menopause.



The Art of Enough Artist Jay Sullivan explores what happens when we question the need to "do more" or "be better". Thoughtful, reflective and gently liberating for anyone tired of the constant climb.





PICTURE THIS!

## Art by the sea

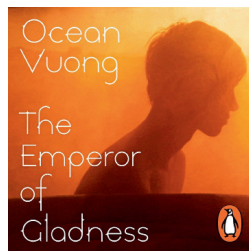
Aleksandra Kasuba fled Lithuania after the Second World War, emigrating to New York, then New Mexico. This new exhibition – her first in the UK – spans six decades of work and explores Kasuba’s artistic journey, from her early paintings and mosaics to her later sculptures and architectural designs. In all her pieces, her love of the natural world shines through with shapes and images inspired by nature, such as shells, rocks, vegetation and marine life. Kasuba also collaborated with artists, engineers and scientists throughout the 1960s to push her work to its limits and this is demonstrated through the fascinating exhibits.

**Aleksandra Kasuba: Shelters for Senses**, 2 May – 4 October, Tate St Ives

### AUDIOBOOK SPOTLIGHT

**The Emperor of Gladness** by Ocean Vuong

When a young man at a crossroads is interrupted by an outspoken elderly widow, an unexpected friendship begins to unfold. What follows is a quietly moving story about second chances, intergenerational connection and finding your footing when life doesn’t look as planned. In audio, it feels intimate and deeply humane. A thoughtful listen about resilience, grace and the power of being seen.



**The Paris Express** by Emma Donoghue  
Paris, 1895. A train bound for the capital carries a cross-section of passengers, including one young woman with a dangerous secret. As their stories begin to intertwine, the journey builds towards something none of them expect. Tense, vivid and wonderfully immersive on audio.

## Intimate portrait

Miriam’s legacy

Miriam Margolyes shares her brutally honest yet joyous reflections on an extraordinary life – and how she felt about her career renaissance in her twilight years. Filmed entirely on BAFTA-winning director Simon Draper’s phone when he accidentally became her sidekick and confidant as they travel the world, it shows the complexities of old age. But more than that it reveals how Miriam’s true legacy isn’t just her incredible body of work, but the lives she’s quietly transformed, beginning with Simon’s.

**Miriam Margolyes Made Me Me**, 17 April, BBC2



### MUST-READS THIS MONTH

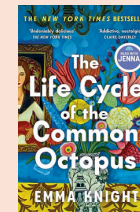
**The City Changes Its Face** by Eimear McBride (Faber & Faber)

McBride’s latest is sharp, sensory and emotionally charged. Set in London, it follows a long-term relationship under strain, capturing the intensity and fragility of intimacy with her unmistakable prose style. Not always comfortable, but utterly compelling.



**The Life Cycle of the Common Octopus** by Emma Knight (Quercus)

At its heart, this is a story about female friendship and the long shadows cast by family secrets. Two lifelong friends find their bond tested as old questions about the past begin to surface, forcing them to reconsider what they thought they knew about love, loyalty and the people who raised them.



**Hooked** by Asako Yuzuki (Fourth Estate)

From the author of the global sensation *Butter*, this darkly compelling novel explores loneliness, food and female obsession. Successful but quietly adrift, Eriko becomes fixated on a carefree housewife whose messy authenticity feels like everything she lacks. Admiration turns into something far more dangerous in this unsettling, sharp and unforgettable read.



## FASHION FORWARD FILM

It’s hard to believe it’s almost two decades since Miranda, Emily, Andy and Nigel took us into the cut-throat world of Runway Magazine. Now Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, Emily Blunt and Stanley Tucci return to the fashionable streets of New York City in the sequel we all feared would never happen! In the past 20 years the tables have very much turned and now Miranda Priestly (Streep) is up against Emily Charlton (Blunt), her former assistant turned rival executive for a luxury brand group, as they compete for advertising revenue all while print media is rapidly declining in sales.

**The Devil Wears Prada 2**, in cinemas from 1 May



RETURN TO RUNWAY

## Thought-provoking theatre

Adapted from the memoir by William Kamkwamba, this uplifting musical tells the true story of William who had the courage to dream in the face of impossible odds. At just 13 years-old, he plans to save his village in drought-stricken Malawi. While no one believes it’s possible, he finds inspiration in scraps of old machinery and a handful of library books. As a windmill begins to take shape, can William harness the power of the wind to bring energy, life and hope to his people? This Royal Shakespeare Company production has a new home following its run at the Swan Theatre in Stratford-Upon-Avon, while Chiwetel Ejiofor, who wrote, directed and starred in the movie of the same name, joins the production team. **The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind**, 25 April – 18 July, @sohoplacelondon



STORY OF HOPE



## Seasonal Spotlight

### Open gardens season

May is peak open garden month. Across towns and villages, private gardens unlock their gates for a weekend, often in aid of local charities, and you're invited in. It's less about show gardens and more about real spaces – clever planting in compact plots, wildly generous borders, kitchen gardens that actually feed a household. You pick up ideas you can use, have conversations you didn't expect, and leave with a slice of cake wrapped in a napkin. It's practical inspiration, community spirit and a genuinely good afternoon out. Check local listings at [ngs.org.uk](https://ngs.org.uk) to see what's open near you.

## Make a day of it – May edition

With the weather opening up opportunity and calling us in from the fringes, May is the perfect time to gather generously and share ideas, inspiration and imagination.

### 1 BRIGHTON FRINGE 1-31 May

England's largest open-access arts festival transforms Brighton into a month-long playground of theatre, comedy, cabaret, music and everything in between. With hundreds of performances in venues ranging from grand theatres to back rooms and pop-up spaces, it's the perfect excuse for a culture-soaked coastal escape. Brave, surprising and often very funny. [brightonfringe.org](https://brightonfringe.org)



### 2 HAY FESTIVAL 21-31 May

Set in the bookshop-lined town of Hay-on-Wye, this world-famous festival gathers writers, thinkers, campaigners and cultural heavyweights for 11 days of conversation and debate. Politics, fiction, science, memoir, comedy, food. It's all here. You can dip in for a day or settle in for the week, notebook at the ready. Expect to leave with a tote bag heavier than you planned. [hayfestival.com](https://hayfestival.com)



### 3 LONDON CRAFT WEEK 11-17 May

This city-wide festival celebrates exceptional craft across multiple sectors and disciplines from around the world. More than 1,000 makers are showcased through events presented by more than 200 partners from 31 countries, all woven into a thoughtfully curated programme of talks, demonstrations and exhibitions. It's a rare chance to explore parts of London you might otherwise walk straight past, from working studios and specialist makers to flagship stores, museums and galleries. Whether your weakness is textiles, jewellery, ceramics, furniture or beautifully engineered design, this is a week that celebrates the imagination and skill behind it all. [londoncraftweek.com](https://londoncraftweek.com)



# This month in history

1 May 1840: The Penny Black

On this date, the world's first postage stamp – the Penny Black – went on sale in Britain. Suddenly, sending a letter became affordable for ordinary people, not just the wealthy. It quietly revolutionised connection. A small square of paper that made it easier to say “I’m thinking of you”.



## The bright side



A week that opens conversations

From 11-17 May, the Mental Health Foundation leads Mental Health Awareness Week across the UK – a national moment encouraging honest conversations about how we’re really doing. Communities, workplaces and local groups host walks, coffee mornings and simple check-ins designed to reduce stigma and remind people they’re not alone. It’s a gentle but powerful reminder that looking after our mental wellbeing isn’t indulgent – it’s essential. Sometimes the bravest thing we can do is start the conversation. [mentalhealth.org.uk](http://mentalhealth.org.uk)

### WORDS OF WISDOM

*‘Instructions for living a life:  
Pay attention. Be astonished.  
Tell about it.’*

Mary Oliver



## Mindful moment

Do one thing properly

May has a way of filling up – lunches, trips, small jobs that somehow multiply. Today, choose one ordinary task and do it properly. Make the bed neatly. Chop the vegetables without rushing. Write a thoughtful text instead of a hurried one. Not because it’s profound – but because finishing something well is quietly satisfying. In a month that can feel busy, there’s real calm in completing one thing with care.