

# Greening up your gardening

Rethinking the way you tend your garden will reap great environmental benefits and help to strengthen your relationship with the natural world, says **John Walker**

When it comes to more eco-friendly living, insulating your loft, downsizing to a more fuel-efficient car or taking a local, flight-less holiday will all give you a well-deserved shot of the feel-good factor. But I guarantee that this good feeling will lack one vital ingredient: staying power. I mean, who gets a daily kick out of knowing their cosseted loft is saving energy and dropping their carbon footprint a few sizes?

If you want to engage in a truly green, deeply fulfilling activity, one that'll do more than just make you feel better, which 'does good' day in and day out, and can feed you, while being a barrowload of fun, it's time for – you guessed it – some gardening. But not just any old bung-it-in-the-boot gardening will do.

To turn our gardening a deeper, more meaningful shade of green, we must start considering the impact our everyday gardening activities have on the natural world, whether we garden on a window ledge or an allotment. Those imploring us to consume ever more green-fingered paraphernalia, or to chase fads, frequently spin gardening as the 'greenest' of all activities. Yet rubbing away the gardening

greenwash, it's clear that not everything in the garden is as rosy – or indeed as green – as it first seems.

Thinking like an 'eco-gardener' not only guides us towards creating a garden that's beautiful, ecologically sustainable and biologically diverse, it also encourages us to rethink our own relationship with the world around us. Gardening in a more ecologically aware way will get you thinking and growing more but buying less – and I promise you'll get a kick out of it.

What better way to get your brain whirring than by doing some garden eco-fitting? Like retro-fitting a house, this involves updating existing elements and adding new ones that weren't there when the garden was originally made. Eco-gardening's key tenets include recycling garden/household waste through composting, reducing the use of fossil-fuel energy, maximising the harvesting of free and renewable sunshine and rain, creating a thriving garden ecosystem, growing some food organically, avoiding the use of energy-intensive and potentially harmful synthetic pesticides and weedkillers, and choosing truly renewable materials in which to grow plants – such as good quality, peat-free compost.

So have a saunter around your garden and see how eco-fitting can make it more planet-friendly. Retiring any patio heaters and petrol-powered lawnmowers, for example, will cut your fossil-fuel use, reduce pollution and help to ease climate change. And why not also consider installing a lean-to greenhouse against

a sunny wall? There's no need to heat it – warmed by the rays of the non-polluting sun, it'll extend your growing season, letting you raise an even wider range of low-carbon, food-mile-free vegetables. It sounds sexier to me than the one-hit wonder of loft insulation.

With drought currently a problem in many parts of the UK, harvesting as much rainwater as possible is an eco-must-do – using tap water for gardening increases demand for a precious, energy-intensive resource. The carbon emissions from generating that energy, using fossil fuels, contribute to the topsy-turvy weather patterns that actually foster drought. Harvesting rainwater is inherently more climate friendly. You can also boost the moisture-holding capacity of your soil and help to build its carbon store by applying compost made from your organic kitchen and garden waste (with the added benefit of reducing the pressure on landfill).

We've become rather enthralled by high-tech solutions to mounting environmental challenges – think solar photovoltaic panels, for example. So isn't it wonderfully reassuring to know there's a hands-on activity we can all share in, one with real staying power, that gets our fingernails dirty at the same time as making our everyday lives tangibly greener?

– **John Walker is a gardening and environment writer ([www.earthfriendlygardener.net](http://www.earthfriendlygardener.net)) and graduate of the Kew Diploma in Horticulture**

» ***How to Create an Eco Garden* by John Walker is available in Kew shops for £14.99**

