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Christmas countdown

Welcome to the December edition...

By the time this arrives I'm sure you'll all be counting down the days to Christmas!

There would normally be loads of events and activities going on but this year's a little different. Why not use the time to find a new book – see page 27 for some ideas - or try some different recipes, like parmesan biscuits on page 44.

For those of you that eat too much over Christmas and who want to help others, why not try the Lions Festive Safari – it's been adapted this year and will feature 3 Festive Safari routes, involving Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath parks: www.knowleanddorridgelions.com

However you spend your time, I wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Zoe

Zoe Reece Tel: 07557 220585

Email: zoe@dorridgedirectory.com www.knowleanddorridgedirectory.com



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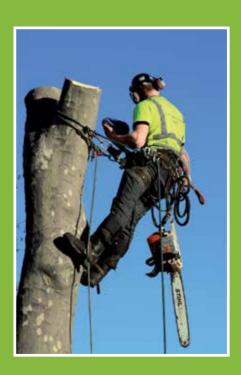




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Now That's What I Call a Terrible Christmas Song...

Forget Cliff Richard and Paul McCartney, I've rounded up the worst of the worst Christmas songs. Why not make a playlist and laugh along?

Nuttin' for Christmas. In the subset of annoying Christmas songs sung by particularly irritating children this 1955 one by a then-6-year-old Barry Gordon is a winner. He sings a grating ditty about all the bad things he did and the snitches who ratted him out. It's meant to be adorable but by the end you're fully in favour of the kid getting nothing for next decade.

The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don't Be Late) by Alvin and the Chipmunks. Just. No.

Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo, from the TV series South Park. This makes the list because it's awful...but it's deliberately awful which makes it kind of awesome...I think, Also, if

you're going to listen to a terrible song from an animated show, this sets the bar.

Same **Old Lang Syne** by Dan Fogelberg. Where do I begin? First, he runs into his old high school crush at the supermarket on Christmas Eve. Basically, he stalks her through produce. She's married, he's a musician. They could just wish each other Merry Christmas and go their separate ways but no, they go for a drink but find the bars closed because people are home with their families (surprise!). So, they buy a six-pack, share it in the car and then DRIVE home. All the wrong things in one song.

Finally, you HAVE to look up the video of the amazing Siouxsie and the Banshees (heroes of my youth) looking bemused and embarrassed to find themselves singing the children's carol **II Est né le Divin Enfant.**So brilliantly bad I had to watch it twice.



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Conspiracy Theories Three of the best from 2020

onspiracy theories have abounded since people sat around a campfire talkina about where the sun went every night, 2020 has been a particularly fine year for conspiracy theories and if you're looking for something to talk about over Christmas dinner look no further than the craziest conspiracy theories of 2020.



The 5G theory

It's biologically impossible for viruses to spread using the electromagnetic spectrum. But that isn't really the point — conspiracy theorists love to link two thinas which at a cursory alance may appear be correlated. However, correlation is not causation. The rapid rollout of 5G networks was taking place at the same time as the pandemic hit. Cue conspiracists, mainly anti-vaccine activists spreading fears about electromagnetic radiation.

The World Health Organization (WHO) points out that viruses cannot travel on mobile networks. and that COVID-19 spread rapidly in many countries that do not have 5G networks. This didn't stop certain celebrities from spreading misinformation among their followers, culminating in mobile phone towers being vandalised.

The Bill Gates theory

Mr. Gates, who became a target of disinformation after he criticized the defunding of the World Health Organization. Conspiracy theorists dragged out a 2015 Ted talk given by Gates, where he discussed the Fbola outbreak and warned of the probability of a future pandemic, and claimed he must have had advance knowledge of the COVID pandemic or even that he caused it.

one variation of this theory, particularly beloved by anti-vaccination activists, is that Gates is plotting to initiate a programme to vaccinate the world's population and use this to implant digital

microchips that will somehow track and control people. As vaccinating much of the world's population may well be the only way to end this pandemic there is clearly a kernel of truth. but once again correlation is not causation.

The Chinese laboratory theory

This one at least has the benefit of being plausible. The original epicentre of the epidemic. the Chinese city of Wuhan, also hosts a virology institute where researchers have been studying bat coronaviruses for a long time. One of the researchers, Shi Zhengli, a prominent virologist, was sufficiently concerned about the prospect that she spent days combing through lab records to see if anything had gone wrong. She was relieved when genetic sequencing showed that the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus did not match any of the viruses sampled and studied in the Wuhan Institute of Virology by her team.

But the coincidence of China's lead institute studvina bat coronaviruses being in the same city as the origin of the COVID outbreak proved irresistible to conspiracists and the theory has tipped into the mainstream, being reported in the Times, and many other outlets.

Conspiracy theories can take hold quickly. It's important that we don't just pass them on unthinkingly but investigate the facts for ourselves and speak out to combat misinformation, and not just about COVID.

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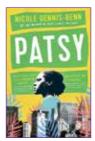
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a good read reviews By Willow Coby

Patsy by Nicole Dennis-Benn

Patsy grew up in an impoverished town in Jamaica and struggles to make ends meet, raising her 5-year-old daughter, Tru. But she has a dream. A dream that lies across the ocean in a city that never sleeps, watched over by Lady Liberty. She isn't the only one. Many have left



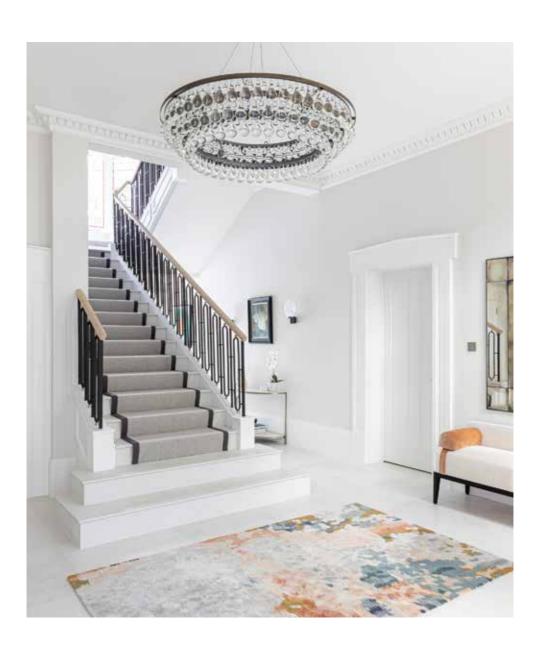
Jamaica for America, sending home details of their new lives. But you can't just leave Jamaica and head to the US. When Patsy is finally granted a visa, it is only a visitor one. And just for her, not Tru. And so, leaving her daughter behind with her previously absent father, she begins her life as an undocumented migrant. It soon becomes clear that life in New York is not what she thought it would be. Dennis-Benn has created an engrossing novel showing the reality of the plight of migrants. Spanning a decade, it switches between Patsy and her new life and Tru's childhood as she grows up without her mother. It says something about her skills as a writer that she has created a central character that is so flawed and vet likeable at the same time. The dialogue switches effortlessly between English and Jamaican Patois, leaving you, the reader, as an inhabitant of the two worlds that Patsy herself occupies. Will she ever be reunited with her daughter and how does a decision taken so long ago affect the two of them as life moves on around them in two vastly different countries?

The Boy at the Back of the Class by Onjali Q Rauf

In a similar vein we have a story for children about what it is like to be a stranger in a strange land. The difference here is that Ahmet is not an economic migrant, but a refugee, fleeing civil war in Syria. He arrives one day at the start of term and sits in a chair at the back of the



class and carries a tattered old red backpack. He is quiet and spends break and lunchtime in Seclusion. The 9 and 3/4 year old narrator and their friends don't know why he stays apart and are determined to find out why. When they finally learn of Ahmet's story, they are determined to help him and seek the help of the one person in the country that they know can help: The Queen. A moving story this directly challenges attitudes towards refugees and the children encounter adults who are sympathetic towards his plight, but also those who are not. Simple events show the kindness of strangers (the gift of a pomegranate) and gives hope that this next generation can be the one to bring in a change of attitude and a realisation that we are all one humanity. All too often we are quick to judge – and Rauf uses a very clever technique to bring this to the fore, leaving the reader reevaluating everything they have read with just a few pages to go – rather than accepting. Ahmet's story is sadly not just a story created in an author's imagination but is one that too many children are experiencing – tattered backpack and all.





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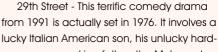
Festive Films you've (probably) never heard of

very year we rely on a handful of our
favourite Christmas movie staples. There's
nothing like getting cosy with a perfect

mug of hot chocolate and immersing ourselves in It's a Wonderful Life, or Elf to set the tone of the season.

Usually Christmas films provide a break from all the frantic festivities, a little welcome downtime. Well in 2020 we've had almost nothing BUT downtime and let's face it we probably

watched most of our festive film playlist back when Halloween was cancelled. But I have three wonderful festive film suggestions you may never have seen in your life, or perhaps you've simply forgotten them. Enjoy.



working father, the Mob, and a lottery ticket. It's an underrated gem. Thank me later.

Meet John Doe - This predates It's a Wonderful Life by a few years but is funnier and equal in its feel-good factor. Introduce your teens to Garry Cooper and watch them swoon.

Brazil - If you like your comedy black and dystopian this is the movie for you. Terry Gilliam's

Brazil is not just a Christmas movie, it's a Christmas movie for the little people; those of us trying to get by in a world gone temporarily more insane than usual without actually succumbing to insanity. Perfect for 2020 then!





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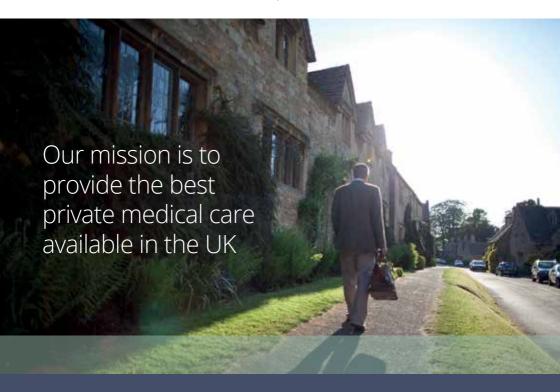
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Keep on moving:

South Warwickshire GP's advice on winter lockdown

uring the first lockdown, the British public saw their daily outing as respite. However, as the days get colder and darker, the idea of sitting munching on snacks while watching

The Crown seems much more appealing.

Yet, with local lockdowns still affecting the entire country, it's more important than ever to find ways to stay active.

As we enter another season of lockdowns, it is understandable that morale is dropping and the desire for personal growth, which gripped the nation in lockdown one, is no longer so appealing.

Therefore, with Christmas upon us, it could be easy to slip into overeating and days spent inside with little or no physical activity. In July, Public Health England said that being overweight increases the risk of experiencing the more severe

symptoms of Covid-19 and in many cases, an increased risk of not surviving it.

So, this winter, we must make a conscious effort to keep physical activity as part of our daily routine, whether it's walking, running or cycling.

If you're worried about your health, please contact your GP for advice.

For more information about Concierge Medical, visit www.conciergemedical. co.uk or search for it on social media.

Dr Caroline Saunders Concierge Medical





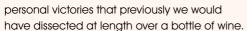
Friendship Fade

quarter of people in Great Britain have no-one they can call a 'best friend' and nearly one-in-eight admit to having no friends at all. As the pandemic continues and interactions with friends become more virtual, even those who have never had to worry about friendships are noticing friendship fade.

We like to think that our friendships are based on shared interests and personality traits, but mostly they are based on proximity, consistency, and communication.

We're all feeling jaded and lacking in

energy right now.
It's no surprise we're
struggling to summon
the motivation to
interact with others.
Friendships falter
during sustained
periods of radio
silence and at the
moment we lack
the new and shared
experiences, the
arievances and



In addition, we all have vastly different pandemic experiences. Some of us are working from quiet well-ordered homes; others are jobless, struggling financially, or trying to arrange near impossible childcare for who kids may be quarantining due to school outbreaks. Some may even have lost family members. These differences put a strain on the closest friendships, and it can feel as though we're drifting apart. However, with a bit of effort we can reconnect.

Many friendships are based around a hobby. Craft sessions and book clubs moved

Maintaining friendships when you can't meet up is tough.

easily online, but sport and music groups are more difficult to transfer...choirs don't really work online, and you certainly can't play badminton remotely. It's good to try to get together socially though. Try an online quiz or watch a film together. You already have one interest in common so there will probably be other connections, and repeated interactions prime us to be friends with one another.

It can feel risky to reach out, but scientists have proven that people who initiate interactions are less likely to be lonely over time, and they're more likely to be satisfied in

their relationships. Many people assume that if their friend doesn't initiate then they're not interested, but everybody's afraid of rejection. We tend to underestimate how much someone we have interacted with likes us, especially if we're self-critical. It's called 'The liking gap'. Also, we tend to think that we have

to think that we have to be cool, fascinating, or smart, but if you treat others well and make them feel valued, they are more likely to want to be friends.

If someone doesn't respond, don't be despondent; they might suffer with social anxiety, or be overwhelmed with work, or struggling with other problems in their lives. Think of reaching out like exercising a muscle; the more you do it the more likely you'll make and maintain friendships.

Put video chats in your diary, in the same way you would schedule a dinner date. Face time is the closest thing we have to real life face-to-face connections right now. It's not perfect but it will help keep friendships strong.

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The Top 5 Things To Do In Dubai

A city that needs to be seen to be believed, Dubai is a playground for those from young, to young at heart. It's full of record-breaking architecture, shopping malls with a whole world inside them, and adrenaline-fuelled days out. But what are the must-do activities?

Sky Diving

If you're an adventureseeker, then this is a must for you. Supervised by trained professionals, you'll tandem skydive through the clouds from 13,000 feet and take in the incredible sights. You'll get to see the emirate from an entirely different perspective, plus you can even opt to take home a video of it all!



The Dubai Fountain

If you've ever been to The Bellagio fountain in Las Vegas, then you'll understand how a fountain can be incredibly emotional! Located in Downtown, the Dubai Fountain is the tallest performing fountain in the world (there's a trend here) and immerses you in a captivating water, music and light experience. The illuminated water dances



in time to a range of melodies, propelling up to 22,000 gallons of water as high as 140m! The Dubai Fountain

Ski

Skiing in Dubai, who would have thought it?! Alas, you can in fact ski in the desert! It's actually located inside the Mall of the Emirates. You can play with penguins, build a snowman, roll down the hills, ride the Twin Track Bobsled or explore the snow cavern. To carve up the slope, simply catch a chairlift or ride a frozen zip-line to the top of the hill where you can snowplough to your heart's content.

Palm Jumeirah

This man-made phenomenon is home to high-end hotels such as Waldorf Astoria, One&Only, and Atlantis, The Palm to name a few! Jump on the monorail and head to one of the out-of-this-world dining

options such as Nobu or try one of the restaurants built over the water, the experiences are truly never-ending.

Buri Khalifa

It might be the tallest building in the world, but it's also so much more. Head to floors 124 and 125 to enjoy unique 260-degree views, or for some skyhigh dining book at Atmosphere Restaurant on the 122nd floor, or The Lounge for high tea among the clouds. You'll also find a 5* hotel designed by Giorgio Armani, a luxury spa and fitness club, and an impressive art gallery.

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Festive Fun in the Time of COVID!

How on Earth can we celebrate in the midst of all this?

t's been a weird old year. We'd all be forgiven for feeling more flat than festive. What we need are some simple ways to find fun in the time of COVID. The pandemic will mean Christmas won't look like it usually does, but with a bit of thought and creativity it's still possible to celebrate even if we have to spend Christmas away from friends and family:

Prioritize - Which traditions matter most to you? Which are easiest to maintain?

You can still set up the Christmas decorations, make special foods and watch your favourite films. Pantomimes and trips to the ballet are not possible though so use the family time to set up a games evening with prizes and lots of shouting. You can play charades with friends and family either outside or via video link. My kids love Nintendo Just Dance, and find it hilarious when my husband and I join in. Kids mostly want you...in silly festive mode. So put your phone away, just like you would at the theatre, and get stuck in.

Decorate a tree outside - This is the year to deck out your decking, and pretty your patio. Adorn an outdoor tree with LED lights and shatterproof ornaments. Use twist ties or florist's wire to secure the ornaments so they stay put even in the wind. Then invite a few friends round for a socially distanced switch on, complete with mulled wine.

Make memories - Create an advent calendar with festive activities for each day. The activities don't have to be elaborate; it could just be drinking hot chocolates with marshmallows together, wearing Santa hats, or watching Elf, or taking silly festive photos



Start a new tradition - How about a Secret Santa gift exchange outside round a firepit with toasted marshmallows? Or outdoor games on the decking with blankets and hot chocolate? There might be an outdoor cinema near you showing Christmas films. Go with friends, take blankets and flasks, and have a socially distanced outdoor film night!

Spread some joy - If 2020 has taught us anything, it's how much the people in our lives actually mean to us, so spread happiness where you can. Write down how much the people you love mean to you and send it out to them. Make Christmas cookies and leave some with your friends and neighbours. Drop off some treats at a local nursing home, hospital, or fire department to brighten the lives of the people there.

Different can be special - You probably don't remember exactly what happens at Christmas from year to year, but when something out of the ordinary occurs, it sticks in your memory...Christmas disasters often make the best dinner party stories in the years that follow. 2020 has the capacity to give us all enough stories for decades!

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local events

Please note: in these uncertain times it's worth checking these events are still running before you turn up.

Sunday lunch with Santa

Sundays from
29 November - 20 December
Hogarth's Hotel, Dorridge
Meet and greet with Santa
and enjoy a 3-course meal.
Sittings at 12pm, 1:30pm
and 3pm. Children will eat
smaller portions of the main

menu or an alternative menu

adults, £22 children under 10.

is available on request. £30

Call 01564 779988 to book.

Soihull's Jingle Bell Joa

13 December Solihull Town Centre

Spread plenty of festive cheer this December by donning a Santa suit and completing the Jingle Bell Jog - a 2.5km fun run through Solihull town centre. Run, walk, dance, jog or jingle your way around the course and don't worry about the training, this festive run is about dressing up and coming together with friends and family. For more information call 0121 285 1370.

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Christmas Vintage, Craft and Gift Fayre

13 December, 1-4pm Arden Hotel, Coventry Road, Bickenhill, Solihull

Live music & entertainment all afternoon! Old time dancing with our vintage singer – no partner required! RezaFarrell will be taking you back in time with Christmas classics through the decades, vintage fashion, retro items, craft & gift stalls, antiques, handmade items, unique Christmas gifts, books & toys, Christmas decorations, beauty treatments & holistic therapies, psychic readings, and so much more! www.ardenhotel.co.uk

Solihull Festive Feast

18 -22 December Mel Square, Solihull

Shoppers will be treated to flavours from around the world with a wide range of hot foods to sample and cold items to take home for that Christmas pantry to share with their nearest and dearest. When you think of Christmas, think of Solihull this festive season as the town centre embraces the festive feel in the run-up to the big day.



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Parmesan Biscuits

Ingredients

100g cold unsalted butter, cut into chunks 100g plain flour, plus extra for flouring pinch salt pinch cayenne pepper 1 heaped tsp mustard powder 50g finely grated mature cheddar 50g finely grated parmesan, or similar

vegetarian hard cheese, plus a little extra

1 egg, beaten

Method

Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4. Place the butter and flour into a bowl of a food processor with the salt, cayenne,

mustard powder, and cheeses. Rub the fat into the flour mixture then gradually bring the mixture together to form a dough. Don't add egg or water. Wrap the dough in cling film and leave to chill in the fridge for at least 30 minutes.

Lightly flour a work surface and gently roll out the pastry to about 1cm thick. Cut out the biscuits using festive cutters. Lay them out on a greased baking tray about 2cm apart. You might need two trays.

Brush the surface of each biscuit with the beaten egg and sprinkle over a little finely grated parmesan. Bake for 10 minutes, or until they are golden-brown. They smell heavenly!

Remove from the oven and carefully lift the biscuits off the tray using a palette knife, then place on a rack to cool. They make lovely gifts and will keep well in a sealed container for a few days.

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crossword

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 10 10 11 12 12 13 16 17 14 15 18 19 21 22 23 23 24 25 27

Down

- Worldwide (6)
- 2 Type of musical scale (5)
- 3 2.54cm. (4)
- 5 Precipitation (8)
- 6 Fantastic (7)

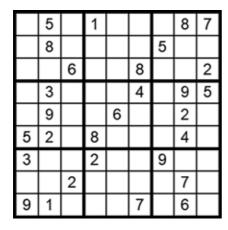
- 7 Appear, loom (6)
- 8 Ordinary (5)
- 13 Celestial (8)
- 15 Beacon (7)
- 17 Parts of a play (6)

clues

Across

- 1 Ploy (6)
- 4 Unknowable, occult (6)
- 9 Disapproves (7)
- 10 Angry (5)
- 11 Land measure (4)
- 12 Perplexing (8)
- 14 Dwarf planet (5)
- 16 Mournful poem (5)
- 20 Scorn (8)
- 21 Fencing sword (4)
- 24 Female relative (5)
- 25 Pills (7)
- 26 Unmarried (6)
- 27 Precious (6)
 - 18 Catches sight of (5)
 - 19 Creatures (6)
 - 22 Fragment (5)
 - 23 Woodwind instrument (4)

answer on page 53



how to play SUCOKU

It's simple!

Fill in the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1 through to 9 with no repetition.
You don't need to be a genius. These puzzles use logic alone. Watch out!
Sudoku is highly addictive.

answer on page 53

Hard-working ivy

The Holly and the Ivy, When they are both full grown, Of all the trees that are in the wood, The Holly bears the crown.

olly is much coveted festive greenery but what about ivy, or Hedera to give it the botanical name? It makes up the trio of festive plants, the other being mistletoe, and frankly it's usually seen as a bit of a poor relation, misunderstood and mostly unloved.

Yet ivy is a great workhorse in the garden. It's evergreen, it attracts wildlife and is excellent on those north-facing walls and fences where nothing else seems to grow. It's not just a dark green cloak either; there are many cultivars with different leaf shapes and variegated foliage. The variegated varieties are great in those areas that catch just a little sunlight during part of the day as they suddenly seem to illuminate a usually dull spot.

lvy is great for disguising an ugly wall, a bare fence, or an old tree stump. It's a reliable and self-clinging climber if you choose the right variety and remember to prune it correctly. The young climbing stems are slender and flexible



with small aerial roots that fix the shoot to a surface. Adult stems are thicker, self-supporting and do not have roots. Unlike mistletoe ivy isn't parasitic so won't harm trees but be careful about letting it grow on the walls of your house as it will damage weak mortar and pebbledash. If growing on a property it needs to be clipped back in spring and summer, so it doesn't do any damage to structure underneath. Don't let it get into gutters because it will clog them then infiltrate under tiles or slates.

lvy is excellent ground cover. It will scramble over areas of poor soil and brighten the ground between shrubs during the dark winter months. Persian ivy, Hedera colchica 'Dentata Variegata', is lovely because of its large, yellow-edged leaves. Hedera canariensis 'Gloire de Marengo' is also good. Its red stems and large leaves with splashes of yellow looks rather splendid. If you need an area covered quickly try Hedera Hibernica, which is a vigorous native ivy.

Hedera helix is the other native ivy and this one has numerous cultivars including Goldheart, which has yellow-centred leaves, Green Ripple, with frilly edged leaves and 'Buttercup' which is bright yellow.

If you love to support the wildlife in your garden, then ivy is a terrific plant. During autumn and early winter adult ivies produce small greenish-yellow flowers. These are especially rich in nectar so attract bees, butterflies, hoverflies, and other insects, providing them with a place to overwinter. Birds like thrushes, blackbirds and robins enjoy the purple black berries which ripen from late winter to mid-spring, providing a much-needed winter food source.

I hope I've made a good case for growing ivy in your garden. Holly might bear the crown, but I reckon ivy deserves a tiara at the very least! Happy gardening and Merry Christmas,



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Robin Redbreast

How the robin came to symbolise Christmas

hink of winter in the garden and you'll most likely think of a robin.

Think of Christmas cards and you'll probably think of the same.

Why do robins have such a strong association with winter?

There is actually an increase in robin numbers during the winter months. They migrate from Scandinavia, Russia and Europe swelling the ranks of our resident robins when the days become too cold and food becomes scarce in their own countries.

There are several legends relating robins to winter and Christmas in particular.

The first legend hails from Victorian times, when the tradition of sending Christmas cards started. Royal Mail postmen of the time wore bright red uniforms, which earned them the nickname of 'robin' or 'redbreast'. Victorian artists usually illustrated Christmas cards with pictures relating to the delivery of letters, such as post-boxes and postmen. Eventually artists began to play on this word association and postman 'robin' was exchanged for the familiar little brown and red bird, who began to appear in illustrations, sometimes delivering the letters. Middle class Victorians loved all things sentimental and charming, so the trend caught on and continues to this day, with the robin adorning everything from wrapping paper to Christmas jumpers.

Even before the Victorian era, robins had a strong association with the traditional Christmas story and Christianity. In one tale, it is said that when Mary was giving birth to baby Jesus in the stable, she noticed the fire Joseph had lit was in danger of going out. Suddenly, a small brown bird appeared and started flapping its wings in front of the fire, fanning



the embers, and causing it to roar back to life. As the bird flew around tending to the fire, a stray ember made its way towards the tiny creature, scorching its breast bright red. Mary declared that the red breast was a sign of the bird's kind heart, which would be passed on to its descendants to wear proudly ever after.

There are also Celtic-based tales which link the robin with wintertime. One tells of the feud between the wren, known as the Holly King of Winter, and the robin who was known as the Oak King of Summer. The Holly King was driven away by the Oak King on the Winter Solstice, and the robin took his rightful place. However, on the Summer Solstice, the Holly King gets to take his revenge, and the wren replaces the robin. This story repeats every year and represents the changing of the seasons. It was probably told by way of explaining why we see more robins during the winter months.

Whatever the truth, the robin is a beautiful cheery symbol of this time of year, and if you can spare a little food, particularly meal worms, and some water, he will reward you by visiting your garden daily.

Happy Christmas.

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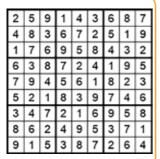
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Suduko Solution

from page 48



crossword Solution

from page 48

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01564 33 5577 (24 hour)

Serving all surrounding areas

If Knowle is difficult to get to, home visits can be arranged or we can arrange to use any of the Bastock family funeral homes in Olton, Shirley or Yardley.



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