

The Experts' tips on surviving – even enjoying – life under lockdown:

Grow herbs

Alice Vincent, urban gardening columnist and author



I genuinely think gardening is what will keep us sane through this. It connects us with the outdoors and the gentle satisfaction of watching things grow brings a unique positivity. If you've no garden, there are plenty of ways to grow indoors.

You'll need a sunny windowsill, inside or out. I always advise beginners to grow herbs. They're easy and delicious – and when supermarket supplies are low they become increasingly worthwhile. The plastic trays that tomatoes and mushrooms come in will do – just make some holes in the bottom for drainage.

Fill with, ideally, peat-free multipurpose compost (most nurseries deliver and will be grateful for the custom). Parsley and basil rub along happily next to one another, but mint's a bit of a thug and better in its own pot. You can also chuck in some salad leaf seeds: pea shoots, rocket and nasturtiums germinate quickly and are tasty at any point in their growing cycle. Sow according to packet instructions: you'll need a fraction of what's in the packet.

Keep the soil moist – an old spray bottle is perfect for this – before and after shoots appear. If you harvest no more than a third of the plant at a time, all should bounce back.

Exercise

Justin Jacobs, manager, Equinox fitness clubs



We are creatures of habit in what we eat, when we work, what TV shows we watch. Right now, all those habits have been shoved out of the window. There's a lot of confusion, but this is an opportunity to create new habits. So what to try? What's your new routine? It may be fluid and can change, but what do you want to try?

There's lots of great online content available.

Equinox's Furthermore platform offers a variety of workouts, but search the web to find a trainer or teacher you like and trust. John Berardi, a nutritionist I work with, is often asked, "What's the best vegetable to eat?" His answer is that it's the vegetable you like and will eat regularly. Exercise is the same.

There is a run on home gym equipment right now, but dumbbells, ropes and other useful products are still available online. Choose what's right for your space. I've just ordered some competition kettlebells because they're something I really enjoy.

There's copious anecdotal and scientific evidence showing how important fitness is for mental health: so during this very stressful time, it's even more important. It also boosts the immune system.

But exercise isn't just about health – it's often a social activity, too. I'm using FaceTime more than ever before because I'm not having regular social contact. Work out with a friend on FaceTime or have an online dance party with your family. Last

night I watched a band I like called Sofi Tukker DJ live on Instagram. That was a new experience. Find something like that and dance for half an hour and your cardio will be done.

Pickling

Jack Monroe, food writer and activist



In times of food scarcity and uncertainty, we have to make do with what we have. I haven't been so much panic-buying – not having a car limits that – but I have been guiltily hoovering up scraps from the reduced cabinet late in the day, to save them being discarded. This week's haul included three boxes of chestnut mushrooms, a withered bunch of wild garlic and a pile of French purple garlic, a little battered around the edges. I will dry the mushrooms, peel and pickle the garlic cloves, and knock the wild garlic with some nuts into a *sauce aillade*. This will keep for a month past the sell-by date that consigned it to the bargain bin in the first place. Preserving food is not going get us too far in a pandemic, admittedly, but pickling what we have now is an investment in future dinners. I am also pickling a slow cooker's worth of dried white beans in oil and vinegar, to use until tinned ones come back into stock.

Sweet-sour cannellini beans

Makes a large jar

400g dried cannellini beans

1/2 a small onion

100g frozen peppers

80ml vinegar – red, white or cider

1 tbsp white sugar

100ml oil (any)

Soak the dried beans overnight and then rinse thoroughly. Drain and rinse your beans, then pop them in a pan of cold water.

Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer. Simmer for 15 minutes then drain thoroughly then return to the pan.

Add the onions and peppers, along with the vinegar, sugar and oil. Thoroughly clean and sterilise a large jar and its lid. Bring the pan to the boil very carefully. Do not take your eyes off it for a moment as you are dealing with hot oil, which poses a fire risk if unattended. As soon as bubbles start to form, remove it from the heat immediately.

Allow to cool for a minute, stirring well, then pour into the sterilised jar, filling it as full as possible. Turn the jar upside down and allow to cool completely before placing in the fridge. Resist sampling them for at least seven days, as the flavour will develop in this time.

In a clean and sterile jar, these can keep for a few months unopened. Once opened, use within a week.

Decorating

Laura de Barra, 'She'-I-Y expert and author



If you want to use this time it to zhuzh up your home, start with paint. Consider the space and think about what mood you want works best. If you want your kitchen to give you a little lift each

morning, go for light, bright tones. Avoid mistakes: that shade that looks gorgeous on the tin (or on Instagram), can look less appealing on walls with less natural light or in a different-sized room, so swatching is key.

Test multiple swatches on every wall. Paint dries to a different shade, so don't be freaked out. Walk away and come back when it's fully dry before considering how it looks. If you'll need two coats, do two coats when you swatch. Pay attention to how the colour is affected by light at the times you use the room most. When it comes to painting a wall, use a brush to "cut in" first. This means painting the corners and edges before anything else – it gives a better finish. Rollers are ideal for large areas and easier on the hands. Make sure you have the correct roller for the surface – check with your paint supplier.

I favour water-based paint – it doesn't trap moisture, it's kinder to the environment and the clean-up is easier. Also, while modern satin and sheen paint finishes are great, consider a matt paint in an older home: it won't bounce light from any dents and imperfections.

Sewing

John-Paul Flintoff, writer and crafter



Ten years ago, to be kinder to the planet, I took up mending clothes. I knee-patched jeans, darned jumpers and, before you could say "treadle-powered Singer sewing machine", I had bought one and started making things from scratch. I shirred

and trousered myself, and with knitting needles I socked and jumpered. I learned crochet so I could make Y-fronts using nettle fibre. (We'll all be wearing nettle when the cotton stops, so plant it now. And relax: the fibre doesn't sting.)

Did people laugh? Well, it was meant to be funny. But not only funny. Like any activity that involves applying your mind to the physical universe, sewing is meditative. It puts you in the here and now.

Gradually I set aside the angst that had got me started and started sewing for pleasure. Hoping others might follow, I let my repairs show themselves off, using thread of contrasting colours to edge holes in a jumper, and to stitch the slogan "Fresh Air Machine" on the back.

I published a book about all this, initially as a limited series of hand-bound books I stitched together, with bits of cereal box and old shirts for the cover. (Better than it sounds.) This, too, was meditative work.

If you want to have a go, try darning something. (Look at YouTube.) Cut something up and use it to patch something else. Learn different stitches (for different effects), and experiment by combining materials. Using embroidery, write your name on your shirt or give it a luxury brand logo: it will make you smile, and might give joy to others.