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GARDENING LETTERS

MARTINE DAVIS, owner of the Balcombe Street Window Box Company in London, answers your questions.



Send your questions for our panel of gardening experts to: Garden Questions, The Lady, 39-40 Bedford Street, London WC2E 9ER or email letters@lady.co.uk

BOX IN A BOX

I would like a window box that will create a bit of privacy. My living room faces the street and I don't want passers-by to be able to peer in. Can you suggest something?

Anne Turnbull, Shropshire

You should try a screening window box, which is a window box that is filled with an evergreen plant that is fairly tall but looks attractive at the same time. You could try planting a row of bush *buxus* (box) – choose plants between 40 and 60cm high. Plant them in a row and trim with ivy. You could even add a few flowers at the front,

such as pansies for this time of year.

Another pretty idea is to display a row of cordyline plants which are available in green and dark red varieties. Plant them alternately for an attractive, contemporary look. Either leave them as they are, or trim with ivy and pansies or violas.

This should keep the nosy parkers out as well as creating a lovely looking window.

HERBS FOR ALL SEASONS

I love cooking, and would like to have herbs to hand throughout the year. Can you suggest any that will happily go through winter?

Sarah Edwards, by email

There are a few. Bay trees are evergreen and you could mix them with rosemary, which is a nice hardy herb. Oregano and thyme also fare well in

winter. To make your pot or window box aesthetically pleasing, you could plant a small bay in the middle, position two pots of thyme on either side, then two pots of oregano at each end. If you still have gaps, simply add more of the same.

Most herbs come in various sized pots so you can create a nice balanced arrangement. If you wanted to you could also add some pansies, as these are also edible. Don't forget to water during the wintertime. Once a week should be sufficient – just make sure that the soil is moist to the touch.

MARTINE DAVIS has been running her Balcombe Street Window Box Company for six years. Originally inspired by her own empty window ledge in Marylebone, her company specialises in window boxes, entrance pots, hanging baskets and planters for balconies, terraces and patios.

For individually designed, ready-filled containers delivered to the door, and on-site planting, call 020-7586 2614 or visit www.window-box.co.uk

Coco's corner

Dear Readers,

January. New Year, New You, eh? Not where the Office Dog is concerned, I can assure you! What are these places popping up everywhere? In Notting Hill, for example, there are about five pet shops/beauty salons within a two-mile radius. My retriever friends Muffin and Bonnie, a mother and daughter, have their coats washed at Happy Dogs in Kensington. A new pet shop has opened down the road from my house in Clarendon Cross, there are at least two in Notting Hill Gate, and now on the news I see there's a place called Shampooch in Rothley. The owner was very, very proud of the service she provided for what she called her esteemed canine guests/Very Important Pets. She listed them as bathing and conditioning, clipping, trimming, hand stripping, nail clipping, ear plucking... I paused in horror. What could she mean by ear plucking? One is not a pheasant! She went on, ear plucking, cleaning – then a slight hesitancy came over her and I had this awful feeling she was going to go there. Yes, she was going to refer to that humiliating inspection she subjected me to last week in Knightsbridge. Then she did. 'And glands,' concluded the owner of Shampooch. I ask you. What is the point of all this grooming and fiddling? She's far too mean to pay for such services – she simply puts me on a lead, squirts Bob Martin shampoo into my coat and hoses me down in the yard. I don't even see the point of that, to be honest. As everyone knows, the dirtier the dog, the more delicious she smells, whatever the time of year!

Till next week

COCO
Office Dog

