

Gardening Aids

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I look after my garden of just under an acre on a south facing slope, which is fairly steep in places and has a long view. It is at an altitude of 721 feet. The house lies near the northern edge of the plot and when we moved here, nearly 26 years ago, the garden was a small cultivated area of mostly shrubs and lawn surrounding the house. The property was surrounded by an untamed *C. x leylandii* hedge on three sides, with a natural field hedge on the eastern boundary. Included in the purchase was a small paddock, formerly an orchard, which was used for sheep grazing. It was a shame that a natural spring was, carefully, not included and fenced off by the vendor. This area was surrounded by sadly neglected, natural field hedging.

We were returning to live in this country after several years abroad and both my husband and I, not yet ready to retire, were looking to set up some form of income. My husband has a time consuming passion with vintage cars and as I planned to make a garden, I knew there would not be much help. We moved in early October so needed to get the *C. x leylandii* cut fairly promptly. Not having any local contacts we looked in the paper for someone to do the job for us. The first person who agreed to do the job did not turn up, so we tried again and got someone who turned out to be a "Cowboy". Disappointed with the outcome we have since bought a Henchman ladder, and a long hedger, so we have been able to do the job ourselves.

I had decided to leave the "garden" for a year, which was a good thing because I learnt about the late frosts, the snow, the wind, and the strength of it, where small springs pop up when the water table is high and the soggy area, which was a failed pond filled with all sorts of rubbish, and had been fed by the spring we no longer had access to. We used that area for a bonfire area until we had time and the spare money to do the pond properly.

Whilst I was working I had little time for the garden but gradually moved trees, planted quite a few, removed some of the *C. x leylandii* and made beds and borders, to which I am still adding! In my work I travelled around the county quite widely and often returned home with plants I had been given. At that time I was grateful for any plant to help fill the beds, but several I have come to regret! Definitely learning by mistakes!

Before retirement I treated myself to a good quality shredder, compost tumbler, cantilevered loppers, and an easy start lawn mower that can pick up or mulch. I tend to use the latter after the first couple of spring cuts. It makes lawn cutting so much quicker, and lighter work. My husband does the grass, in the former paddock, with a ride-on mulcher.

As my fingers have stiffened with age, our daughter has bought me a couple more gadgets, which I use regularly. One is a battery operated pruning saw, and the second battery-operated secateurs. The latter gives me more than enough battery time for an afternoon pruning.

I wear a variety of gloves for most gardening jobs – 'Showa', 'Seal Skin' for wet tasks, which keep my hands warm even in winter, along with 'Gold Leaf winter touch', but I also wear joint support gloves for heavier tasks. They are not cheap, but the benefit is worth it.

But I think one of the best things I have bought in recent years has been my gardening trousers. I first came across Genus trousers at the Hampton Court Flower Show three years ago. When looking at them I commented to my daughter that “they must have been designed by a woman”, when a lady’s voice came from behind, telling us that they were ‘her baby’. I now have two pairs, as does my daughter, daughter in law, and their gardening friends. Our son was looking at the men’s’ version so they may well be his Christmas present!

I still manage the garden without any help, except that we try and have a family weekend each autumn when jobs that need a bit of strength are tackled. A local farmer does the tops and field sides of the natural hedging. Occasionally we use a tree surgeon, particularly for the willow tree that we inherited and is in the wrong place, but a few years ago the tree acquired a swing and tree house, so it will not be condemned until the grandchildren have outgrown it.

I am very grateful for still being able to manage my garden but equally I think that the garden and my gadgets keep me fit enough to be able to do so.