

My happy PLACE



Relaxing with a cuppa on my lockdown bench

Simple pleasures



A photinia tree tribute



My star-gazing hare



Bees flock to the verbena

Squeeze alongside **DEBBY CONTEH** on her lockdown bench in Altrincham, Greater Manchester

“ My garden has a huge oak tree, an apple tree, a rowan tree, a holly tree and some dwarf firs – it’s very green. Near to the house is a small square patio laid with gravel and a sofa, with a coffee table made from pallets by my husband, Kem, during lockdown, and it’s a great little spot for a cuppa in the morning or after work, or a cheeky G&T.

When I’m relaxing on the sofa with the beautiful scent of my new rose wafting in the air, I can view the whole garden while listening to the birds and laughing at the squirrels chasing each other in the trees. The sense of peace and the joy of the garden I’m slowly creating is huge.

But it’s the lockdown bench behind the shed where you’ll probably find me. My beloved father passed away in March 2020 just before lockdown started, and the restrictions meant we couldn’t come together as a family to celebrate his life. The sense of loss was immeasurable.

As part of my grieving process, Kem planted a tree in the garden for my dad and built the lockdown bench beside it so I could sit near and chat with him. And that’s how we started the

Whenever I need a chat, I sit on the bench with a cuppa and tell him about my day, and what the children have been up to, and the grandchildren. Deep down inside I can almost hear him laugh at the stories I’m telling, giving me the wonderful words of wisdom that he always used to, and telling me, ‘Don’t worry, everything will be ok.’ With the sun on my face, I can feel my shoulders drop as the stress of the day drifts away.

The lockdown bench is where my daughter and I like to sit and watch the garden birds too. She’s a keen birdwatcher and takes the most amazing wildlife photos, especially of our resident robin Rodney. She was diagnosed in 2018 with a rare genetic condition called NF2, which caused tumours to grown on her nerves. She has lost the



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garden. We made some borders and started to plant, and the feel of the soil between my fingers, the sound of the gravel underfoot, the birds, the swaying of the trees throwing out the dappled light onto the ground, it all helped.

Now the borders are filled with lavender, hydrangeas and cosmos, I’ve added clover to the lawn and I’ll be sowing daisy seeds for the bees to enjoy. We’re making plans for an outside dining area with barbecue and bar too. I’m flushed with pride at what we’ve already achieved with not a great deal of money and next-to-no experience, but loving every minute.

My dad’s tree is a standard photinia ‘Red Robin’, and I knew it was perfect as soon as I saw it. My dad was a Manchester United fan all his life, hence the red, and there’s the rhyme that well-loved ones appear when robins are near.

hearing in both ears, and it affected her balance. I feel getting out in the garden, sitting and taking photos of birds and waiting for Rodney the robin to come down to see her was a life-saver in itself.

So all in all, my garden always gives me the most amazing big green hug. When I get back home from work, I go straight into the garden to help bring me down from my day, sowing seeds, deadheading, trimming the lawn or hedges, or pottering at my potting bench. At weekends in the morning, weather permitting, I’ve started doing a little yoga. I’m certain that being outside in my happy place makes everything feel so much better.

As the poster on my potting bench says: Into the garden I go to lose my mind and find my soul.

* See more of Debby’s garden @queenbee_at_82