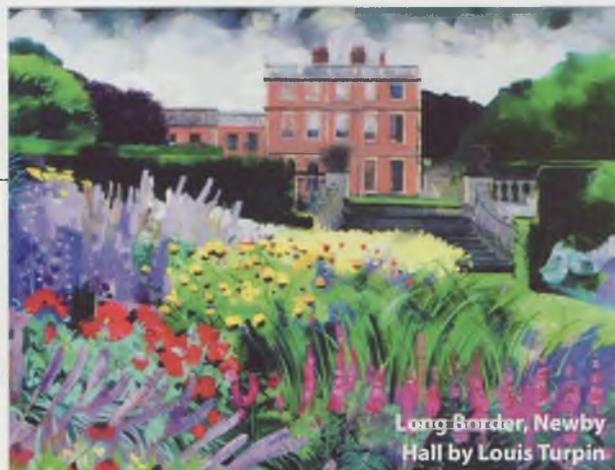




Cool Border by Louis Turpin at Bohun Gallery



Long Border, Newby Hall by Louis Turpin

## CELEBRATING GREAT GARDENS

Louis Turpin is a leading horticultural painter who captures in vivid colour the glorious fireworks of gardens such as Great Dixter in East Sussex. Here, the great Christopher Lloyd created a garden, which, in the words of his friend and head gardener Fergus Garrett, 'made many people dizzy with delight'.

An exhibition of new paintings by Turpin has opened at the Bohun Gallery in Henley-on-Thames.

The transfixing gardens he has painted include, as well as the drama and abundance at Great Dixter, privately commissioned

gardens by Dan Pearson, the new allotments at Sissinghurst, and also Burton Agnes and Newby Hall.

In addition to the sheer energy of the gardens he paints, Louis Turpin delights in their spirit of place and relationship with the countryside beyond.

◆ *Louis Turpin: A Passion For Gardens* is at the Bohun Gallery, 15 Reading Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire until 12 October. Open Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 1.15pm and 2.15pm to 5pm: 01491-576228, [www.bohungallery.co.uk](http://www.bohungallery.co.uk)

### 3 OF THE BEST: *new products*



This **Architectural Cloche** by Sophie Conran (available early Oct) in galvanised steel, turns crop protection into a design feature. £15.95: [www.burtonandball.com](http://www.burtonandball.com)



In frost-resistant **TecLite**, this rhubarb forcer looks good in the kitchen garden and guarantees an early crop. £99: [www.haddonstone.com](http://www.haddonstone.com)

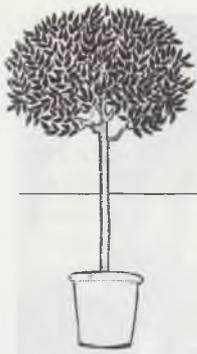


The **Sneeboer Tough Weeder** has a sharp point for easy weeding among established plants. £24.55: [www.harrodhorticultural.com](http://www.harrodhorticultural.com)

### Plant of the week



Wild rocket 'Dragon's Tongue' is a new British bred, bolt-resistant variety with red-veined, peppery leaves. Easy to grow and ideal as a cut-and-come-again salad in autumn and winter. £1.89 for a packet of seeds: [www.suttons.co.uk](http://www.suttons.co.uk)



## GARDEN PLOTTING

by Sarah Langton-Lockton

# Life in the slow lane

Nurturing a compost heap – and the slow worms that live in it – is one of the great joys of gardening

**O**n the allotment I have two large wooden compost bins and a green plastic bin bought for a nominal sum from the council. This bin makes excellent compost, but I haven't dared empty it for five or six years as it is the adopted home of an expanding colony of slow worms. Neither slow nor from the worm family, *Anguis fragilis* (so named because it can shed its tail in emergencies and grow a smaller new one), is in fact a legless lizard – you can tell because lizards have eyelids and snakes don't.

Along with other British reptiles, slow worms are a protected species. They are, however, quite common in gardens and widely resident on allotments, which provide a ready diet of slugs, snails, small insects and spiders. I often uncover them under paving stones or nestling in the uncut grass at the edge

which then break open, and take three years to reach maturity. Young slow worms are golden in colour with a darker stripe, like the females (males are spotted). Many fall prey to frogs and toads, domestic cats and strimmers, which I should like to see banned on allotments.

If they do survive, slow worms will live for 30 years or more in the wild and even longer in captivity, where one happy specimen – in Copenhagen Zoo – is recorded as reaching 54 years.

To attract slow worms into your garden, keep some patches of rough grass, preferably with a few old paving stones or a piece of corrugated iron or other heat-retaining metal to provide warmth and cover.

Although the slow worms have led me astray, compost-making is my intended theme, since it will soon be

*'Slow worms live longer in captivity. One happy specimen – in Copenhagen Zoo – reached 54 years'*

of raised beds. They seem happiest in compost bins, invisible in winter, and basking on the top of the compost as soon as the weather warms up. In fact, as soon as my slow worms emerge in spring I know it is time to start sowing seeds for the new season.

The females in my bin, identifiable by a stripe along the spine and dark sides, have been growing bulges around their middles, a sure sign that offspring are imminent. The young, up to a dozen at a time, grow inside the female's body. This keeps them at a stable temperature and protects them from the British weather. They are born in birth sacs,

time to spread good organic matter on flower and vegetable beds. Perennial plants will benefit from protection, and the compost will break down over the winter, feeding and conditioning the soil ready for sowing or planting in the spring. Many people are nervous about making compost, but observing a few basic principles ensures success.

Plastic bins are fine, but in my experience wooden ones are best, particularly those with removable slatted fronts, which make for easy turning and removal of the compost when it is ready. In community gardens I have seen excellent compost made in



builders' bags. Ingredients can be 'green' – grass clippings, annual weeds, leaf prunings and kitchen waste, but not cooked food – or 'brown' – twigs, newspaper, cardboard and dead leaves. I do not add diseased plants or perennial weeds. A balance of half green and half brown is ideal. Shred or cut up twigs and large plants and turn the heap, slow worms permitting, once a month if possible. Watch moisture levels and add more dry material if the mix is too wet, and more leafy stuff or water if it's too dry.

Your compost will be ready in six to 12 months by which time it will be dark brown, will crumble readily and smell clean and healthy, like a wood after rain.

♦ For further instruction I recommend the *Compost Clinics at Chelsea Physic Garden* (17 October and 21 November): 020-7352 5646, [www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk](http://www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk)

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