



# Kim Stoddart

*Leading expert on climate change savvy, resilient gardening for person, plate and planet*



**the guardian**

**Gardeners' World** magazine



## Kim's money saving tips for resilience

My experiences of gardening entirely for free, which I wrote about for The Guardian newspaper back in 2013, transformed the way that I garden forever.

My adventures in gardening for no-cost built confidence and further skill, allowing me to innovate and experiment and, at times, throw away the gardening rule book to problem solve cost-free ways to grow. It nurtured a resilience and ability to think on my feet, which comes in incredibly handy with our changing climate where it is no longer feasible to expect 'the usual' gardening or seasons. Even on a small level, learning to repair and repurpose feels like part of the solution for the future and is incredibly feel-good in a way that money literally cannot buy.

### 1. Think before you buy

From learning to weld a spade back together, to figuring out how to secure a grow tunnel door that was hanging off, I really enjoy problem-solving low-cost solutions nowadays. I'm no DIY expert, but fixing something that is broken is incredibly rewarding and gives much more of a glow than buying new. I don't even own a tool belt, so if I can build makeshift cold frames, bang a nail in to hold a raised bed together or tie some string and a bamboo pole to secure a grow tunnel door in a gale, so can you.

### 2. Try to nurture more resilient, lower-cost plants

If you are growing in the ground, try and focus more on making your soil the best it can be, rather than buying in lots of fertilizers and associated products. Think of the soil as potential low-maintenance, slow release fertilizer for your plants.

Overfed plants can ultimately become lazier and more reliant on fertilizers and watering and will not attempt to develop deeper root systems to forage for themselves. Why would they when everything they need is on tap? There is immense natural resilience to be found in healthy soil ecosystems where fungal networks thrive. They can and will attach to hungry plant roots, helping them to find food and water from further afield, saving you time and money in the process. Plants that are overfed and over watered can also be less resilient against pests and greater extremes of weather because they are so needy of intervention and support. I am amazed how plants can flourish in the face of adverse weather once they tap into these natural systems.



### 3. Try to grow on everything and anything you can

Growing on anything and everything you can is a really fun to do. During a supermarket shop you may find some lemongrass stalks to root in water, a potential pineapple crown to plant and grow on, a few citrus and avocado houseplants to nurture. One person's leftovers can be another's colourful houseplants for many years to come.

When rifling through your seed store, always consider sowing any out-of-date packets. They are more than likely to have some germination potential still within. Simply sow seed more thickly, or do a germination test on damp kitchen paper if you are unsure, and if they sprout, get sowing! A plant or several as a result is bonus treasure and time well spent.

### 4. Learn from and connect with your garden and the natural world

Many of the best things I've done have been through watching, thinking and learning from nature. These days, I do what feels right a lot of the time based on what I see. As part of this I try not to use tools where I can and I like to feel my way by gardening by hand as I find and see so much more. I have lots of amphibians living at the back of the garden, so I always go carefully when I mow pathways and work in their domain. They provide vital natural pest control and are a delight to behold.

Similarly, I also leave some weeds to grow and dead wood on trees because I know it provides a vital overwintering habitat for many of my finest garden predators such as beetles, and pollinators such as solitary bees. I know where many of them live because I see them while I am out gardening. This approach helps wildlife, means I don't need to rely on chemicals to keep my plants safe, and is a simple yet effective and mindful approach.

Happy climate change savvy growing

### Kim

Award winning environmental journalist, Amateur Gardening magazine editor and author of new upbeat, solution-focused book, *The Climate Change Resilient Vegetable Garden* - launching Feb 2024.

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