

# Fast-growing demand for gardens-to-go

A new species of grower wants instant results and is prepared to pay for them, writes Susie Steiner

THEY are a fresh species of gardener: young, fashion-conscious, with little time and still less expertise. A publisher of gardening magazines explained: "These people don't want to plant a seed and watch it grow. They want to create an instant look."

The new army of inept gardeners also has deep pockets. As the planting season approaches, the commercial world of horticulture is rubbing its hands with glee.

Consumers are expected to spend £3 billion on gardening this year. Two new magazines will shortly join the existing nine to help them to do it. On television, two new gardening series will cram in with the seven already in prime-time slots. But content, across the board, has little to do with plants.

Marginalised are the practised pruners whose expertise makes them frugal. The lucrative world of fast foliage is courting enthusiastic novices who kill plants and come back with their garden-centre trolleys for more.

Next Friday sees the introduction of *Garden Ideas* magazine, published by Romsey, aimed at readers who are "clean-fingered rather than green-fingered". Its editor, Chris Day, said his magazine, at the *Woman's Own* end of the market, will offer "fresh ideas and quick-fix solutions".

"These are people who want to entertain in their gardens, who want an attractive outdoor room," Mr Day said. "They don't own wellies and would be put off by mud under foot so, for example, wooden decking will really take off in 1999."

Joining *Garden Ideas* on the shelves next month is an



Garden centres are stocking up for the extra custom



New magazines, fresh faces: a television series has been commissioned from Andy Sturgeon, above with cabbage palm

upmarket offering from the magazine publishing company IPC. *New Eden* — "aimed at design-conscious, aspirational women in their late twenties to mid-forties" — will go on sale on April 15, priced £2.40.

*New Eden's* publisher, Evelyn Webster, said: "Younger people, and particularly first-

time home buyers, want their garden to look as good as their home. It's a lifestyle badge." To add to the magazine pile, last week *Garden Inspirations*, from GE Publishing, went on sale for the first time.

Plant hunger is accelerating despite garden ownership slipping from 85.6 per cent of adults in 1990 to 83.9 per cent

in 1996. "It is ironic," noted a survey of the industry by Mintel, "that the keenest gardeners spend very little on commercial products." Real gardeners buy seeds, and seed sales have gone down.

Some link the designer garden boom to a plethora of television makeover shows such as *Home Front* and *Changing*

*Rooms*. Outdoor makeovers have been taken up across the terrestrial channels, via programmes such as *Home Front* in the Garden on BBC and *Instant Gardens* on Channel 5.

ITV is the only channel lacking a gardening show of any kind but a new series, commissioned by Carlton, is set to go into frenetic production.

□ The top five sellers at garden centres are: 1. *Euphorbia Charasiac Wulfenii*, or "spurge". Green-blue leaves with yellow flowers in summer. Unkillable rating: 8. 2. Ready-grown bulbs: hyacinths, daffodils, crocuses. Increasingly bought ready-blooming in pots. Even if they wither indoors and are

chucked outside, will pop up again next year. Unkillable rating: 10.

3. *Eucalyptus Gunnii*. Grows fast: 10ft a year. Evergreen silvery leaves with fashionable metallic look, refreshing smell. Could die if kicked over but otherwise indestructible. Unkillable rating: 10.

4. *Lavatera Rosea*, or "mal-

## THE EXPERT

# New career blossoms in TV's glare

By Susie Steiner

Andy Sturgeon has been a gardener for 15 years. It has been a quiet time of mulching, pruning and listening to the birds.

During the past few months, however, the air has trilled with the incessant sound of his mobile phone as Mr Sturgeon is drawn out of his potting shed and into the cut-and-thrust world of the media.

The 33-year-old has become hot property. Handsome and with a London twang, Mr Sturgeon is the new face of a booming industry. He has just been commissioned to front his own gardening programme based on his book, *Planted*, and a hectic round of filming is about to ensue so that the series can be screened in May.

Then there is a column in a national newspaper, a weekly radio show and features to write for gardening magazines and women's glossies. He is also talking with his publishers, Hodder & Stoughton, about a new book.

"Everyone's trying to appeal to a 25 to 35-year-old market," he said. "So they are all saying gardening is this, gardening is that, gardening is the new sex, gardening is the new black."

"What will happen in the next year or two... is you'll get more and more trendy, stylised packages. And, of

course, what they're missing out on is that gardening is gardening. It's always been there and it's about putting stuff in a pot and watching it grow."

Mr Sturgeon went into gardening because he enjoyed the slow and tranquil world of his glass lean-to full of seedlings and cuttings. His new celebrity lifestyle, however, leaves him little time to rest a muddly wellington on his fork.

"The last time I did landscaping was in December and the last time I did any gardening before then was in September," he said.

"People used to say to me 'What's in flower now?' and I wouldn't have to think because I'd seen it that day. Now I have to say 'I'll get back to you!'"

He does not deny that the gardening revival has worked in his favour. "It's all been media-led, which is great for me," he said. "But the joy is in the nurturing and going out daily and saying 'Ooh, look. That's come up!'"

It is a comfort to Mr Sturgeon that the security of the potting shed will always be there. "This could all just go in a matter of weeks, but I'll always be left with gardening," he said.

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low". Grey-green leaves with plentiful white flowers. Cheap, fast-growing. Will survive the most barren of soils and requires no maintenance. Unkillable rating: 7.

5. *Clematis Montana*: really fast climber producing mass of flowers, from white to very deep pink. Unkillable rating: 6.

