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Merry Christmas

Welcome to the December edition...

Wishing you all a very merry Christmas.

Christmas will be just around the corner by the time this reaches you. So here's hoping you're all stocked up with goodies and gifts to see you through the festive season.

It can be the most wonderful time of the year, but it can also be the loneliest. If you have time why not try reaching out to any local people who live on their own to see if they'd like a cup of tea and a chat.

However you spend your Christmas, here's hoping you have a lovely time and wishing you all a happy and healthy 2026.

Zoe Reece

Tel: 07557 220585

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GET THE WORD OUT

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community events



Wicked Wizard of Oz Cirque spectacular

21-22 December

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Visit Santa at Touchwood

Until 24 December

Santa is back in residence this year at his enchanted Christmas grotto. He's eagerly waiting to receive wish lists and will even have an early gift for your little ones. Be sure to book online so the elves can reserve your space. www.eventsattouchwood.co.uk/christmas

Santa's Christmas Party

19-24 December

The Core Theatre Solihull

This is a 45 minute, interactive family show, particularly suitable for 2-8 year olds, after which the adventure continues as each child gets the chance to receive a special present from Father Christmas. Book tickets at www.thecoretheatresolihull.co.uk

Family New Year's Eve Disco

31 December

Shirley British Legion

Celebrate the New Year beginning with music, dancing, and a great family-friendly atmosphere right up until 1am! Don't miss out on the most fun way to ring in 2026 with your loved ones. Tickets from www.ticketsource.co.uk

Poker Night Experience

16 January 7.30pm

Land Rover Sports & Social Club

Royal Sharks Poker is launching in Solihull. Entry is £5 – pay on the door. All abilities welcome.



Keep Busy Through the Winter Chill

December may feel like the quietest month in the gardening calendar, but there's still plenty to keep the green-fingered busy. While growth has slowed and the frosts have set in, it's a crucial time for maintenance, preparation, and adding festive touches to the garden.

Protect Plants from Frost - Frost can cause serious damage to tender plants. Insulate pots with bubble wrap or hessian and move containers to sheltered spots where possible. Mulch borders with compost or bark to protect roots, and if it's a white Christmas, remember to brush heavy snow from evergreen shrubs to prevent branches snapping under the weight.

Tidy-up and Plan - Take advantage of the calmer pace to clear fallen leaves, especially from lawns and ponds. A tidy garden not only looks better but also prevents pests and disease. December is also the perfect month for planning next year's displays. Browse seed catalogues by the fire and sketch out crop rotations for the vegetable patch.

Festive Colour - Winter gardens need not look dull. Plant evergreen favourites



like holly, ivy, and skimmia for seasonal cheer. Pots of winter pansies, cyclamen, and heather will brighten a doorstep or patio. If you have space, consider planting a Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*), which flowers in mid-winter and brings welcome beauty to the darker days.

Fruit and Vegetable Tasks

- Pruning is an important December job. Apples and pears benefit from a winter prune to encourage healthy growth the following year. Soft fruit bushes like currants and gooseberries can also be trimmed. If the soil isn't waterlogged, it's a good time to plant bare-root fruit trees and bushes. In the vegetable plot, harvest remaining leeks, parsnips, and sprouts for the Christmas table, and dig over empty beds, incorporating manure to enrich the soil.

Look After Wildlife - Garden wildlife needs a helping hand in cold weather. Top up bird

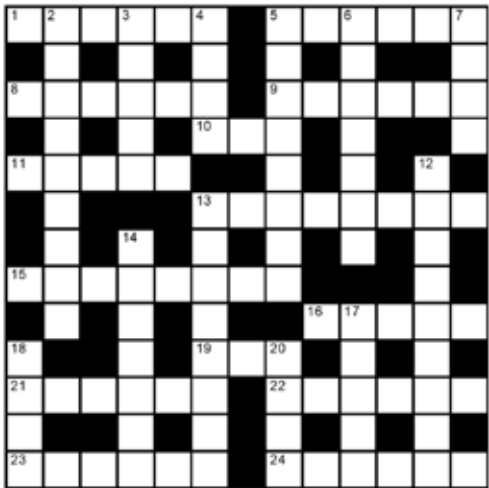
feeders regularly and provide fresh, unfrozen water. Leave seed heads on perennials because it looks attractive in frost and also provides food for birds. Piles of logs or leaves can shelter hedgehogs and insects.

Greenhouse and Indoor

Jobs - Clean the greenhouse glass to maximise light and insulate it with bubble wrap if temperatures plummet. Check heaters are working and keep an eye open for mould caused by damp conditions. Indoors, poinsettias and amaryllis add a touch of festive flair but keep them away from draughts and fluctuating temperatures.

December is about care, preparation, and enjoying this slower time of the garden year. While there's little new growth, the work you do now will set the stage for spring. With some protection, pruning, and planning, your garden will emerge healthier and brighter when the warmer months return.

crossword



Down

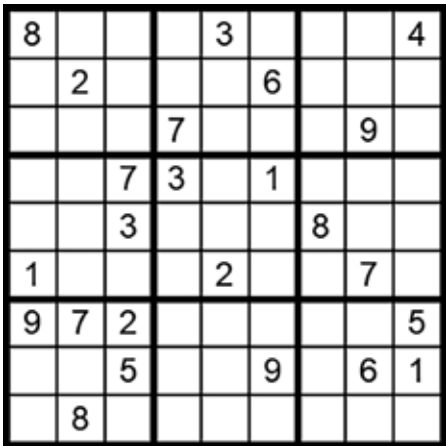
- 2 Jeans with a bib and straps (9)
- 3 Turn of phrase (5)
- 4 Joy, satisfaction (4)
- 5 Be of different opinions (8)
- 6 Elucidate (7)
- 7 Errand (4)
- 12 Clock or watch (9)
- 13 Mournfully resonant, sonorous (8)

clues

- 1 Bordering (6)
- 5 Gradually pour from one container to another (6)
- 8 Bitter leafy green vegetable (6)
- 9 Beams of light (6)
- 10 Seventh letter of the Greek alphabet (3)
- 11 Mild and pleasant (weather) (5)
- 13 Fuel derived from petroleum (8)
- 15 Exist passively (8)
- 16 Hits with an open hand (5)
- 19 Neither liquid nor solid (3)
- 21 Bring back to consciousness (6)
- 22 Device which warms (6)
- 23 Thoroughfare (6)
- 24 Wrote (6)

- 14 Coldblooded vertebrate (7)
- 17 Discover (5)
- 18 Weapons (4)
- 20 Sea-going vessel (4)

answer on page 14



how to play
sudoku

It's simple!

Fill in the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1 through to 9 with no repetition. You don't need to be a genius. These puzzles use logic alone. Watch out! Sudoku is highly addictive.

answer on page 14



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a good read

By Natasha Donovan

Letters from Father Christmas

by J. R. R. Tolkien

J.R.R. Tolkien's *Letters from Father Christmas* feels like opening a keepsake trunk. Gathered from the notes Tolkien wrote to his children between 1920 and 1943, these letters arrive from the North Pole with wobbly calligraphy, postmarks, and gloriously chaotic side-comments from the accident-prone North Polar Bear. The result is a scrapbook of make-believe that somehow grows more believable with every page. There are capers involving fireworks gone wrong, goblin interlopers, and pantry raids, all rendered with gently anarchic humour. And there's wonder, with flaring auroras, moonlit ice cliffs, and marching bears 'bearing' gifts! Tolkien's illustrations and invented alphabets provide half of the magic; the other half is the voice of Father Christmas who sounds at once ancient and avuncular, and also wistful and wry; a storyteller who knows when to whisper and when to boom. Because the letters span decades, his children grow up, wars darken the winters, and merriment turns tender. The melancholy never breaks the spell though; it deepens it, the way candlelight adds depth to a room. Readers of Tolkien will recognize his hand - names that taste right, lore that feels lived-in, jokes that land. As a December ritual, a family read-aloud, or simply a tonic for grim days, this book shimmers. Open it, and you may hear sleigh bells somewhere beyond the page. It certainly leaves footprints in snow.



That Christmas

by Richard Curtis, illustrated by Rebecca Cobb

Five families who always spend Christmas together with set traditions and routines are all set to do it again this year. Except the adults are off to a wedding.

Only they can't get back! So, the ten children get to do Christmas their way, and in the process make it a little bit better. It's festive chaos in picture-book form with everything going delightfully off-script in this fast-paced, funny, and fun to read aloud story. Parents will recognise the seasonal logistics; kids will relish the anarchy and the promise that Christmas can be remade by anyone with enough imagination and a bit of courage. Rebecca Cobb's illustrations, with her loose lines and soft textures have a lively feel, and make the chaos feel safe. Her eye for tiny, domestic comedy rewards 'reading' the pictures as much as the words. There's a clear message that tradition isn't set in stone; it's a living thing that evolves with each new generation; the best gifts can be improvised, kindness is important, and little brave silliness is always to be encouraged. It also wraps everything up with a bit of sparkle so reading *That Christmas*, with a cup of hot chocolate, may well become a festive tradition in its own right.



Kids Page

Can you find all the Christmassy words hidden in the grid?

bauble
cards
carols
gifts
lights
party

pud
snow
sparkle
star
tinsel
turkey



FIND 10 DIFFERENCES



All the characters in the school nativity play have been mixed up. Can you unscramble them?

KyeoN

gram

lpeKeNein

pheojs

preSSHhed

leang

SWie nM

rast



Nativity word
scramble

Donkey
Innkeeper
Shepherds
Wise men
Mary
Joseph
Angel
Star



Find the differences

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8	1	6	9	3	2	7	5	4
7	2	9	5	4	6	1	3	8
5	3	4	7	1	8	6	9	2
4	6	7	3	8	1	5	2	9
2	5	3	4	9	7	8	1	6
1	9	8	6	2	5	4	7	3
9	7	2	1	6	4	3	8	5
3	4	5	8	7	9	2	6	1
6	8	1	2	5	3	9	4	7

Sudoku Solution
from page 8

EDGING	DECANT								
UD	LI	LL							A
ENDIVE	SHAFTS								
GO	ETAR								K
BALMY	GI								T
ER	PARAFFIN								
ER	LEY								M
VEGETATE									E
SP	N								SLAPS
A	T								GASE
REVIVE	HEATER								
M	LN								IR
STREET	PENNED								

Crossword Solution
from page 8



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