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Pete, Paulo and Rebecca from Cool FM's Breakfast Show with Clare McGimpsey (Regional Charity Manager, Cash for Kids NI), JulieAnn Martindale (AXA Insurance Regional Manager, NI) and Mark Johnston (AXA Insurance Claims Director, Ireland) ahead of the Cash for Kids Northern Ireland Christmas Nostalgia Gala Ball, proudly sponsored by AXA Insurance and taking place at Belfast's Europa Hotel on Saturday 29th November in aid of the Mission Christmas Appeal 2025.

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Cash for Kids Northern Ireland Announces Glamorous Christmas Nostalgia Gala Ball - In Aid of Mission Christmas 2025 - Ensuring No Child Wakes Up Without Gifts on Christmas Morning

Cash for Kids Northern Ireland is rolling out the red carpet for its Christmas Nostalgia Gala Ball, in aid of the Mission Christmas Appeal 2025, on Saturday 29th November at the iconic Europa Hotel, Belfast.

Proudly sponsored by AXA Insurance and hosted by Cool FM's dynamic trio -Pete, Paulo and Rebecca - this dazzling night promises festive elegance, laughter, and the heartwarming chance to help ensure no child in Northern Ireland wakes up without gifts under the tree.

Your donation has the power to bring joy to up to 180 local children this festive season. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our suppliers, every £1 you give can be tripled in value - turning into £3 worth of support for disadvantaged children across Northern Ireland. Together, we can help make their Christmas a little brighter.

The Mission Christmas campaign is now in its 16th year in Northern Ireland, ensuring that no child wakes up to an empty stocking. In 2024 alone, the campaign brought joy to over 17,000 local children - but the need is growing fast. By sponsoring a table at the Gala, your business could help provide gifts for up to 180 children this Christmas.

Continued on page 6

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"A Season to Sing" Set to Captivate Audiences While Supporting Peace

Sounds Connected Community Chorus is delighted to announce the once-in-a-lifetime musical experience showcasing composer Joanna Forbes L'Estrange's breathtaking choral reimagining of Vivaldi's The Four Seasons.

Taking place at St. Anne's Cathedral Belfast on 22nd November 2025 at 19:30, it promises to be artistically stunning evening which will raise essential funds for The Corrymeela Community.

A Revolutionary Musical Experience

"A Season to Sing" transforms Vivaldi's iconic baroque instrumental work into a rich choral tapestry, breathing new life into familiar melodies through the power of the human voice. Renowned contemporary composer Joanna Forbes L'Estrange has crafted an innovative interpretation that honours the original's seasonal journey while creating something entirely new for modern audiences.

L'Estrange will be attending this Irish premiere.

Music That Changes Lives

Beyond the breathtaking artistry, every ticket purchased becomes a powerful act of hope. All proceeds from this extraordinary evening will directly support Corrymeela's life-changing work in healing divisions and building bridges between communities. For over 60 years, this remarkable charity has been transforming lives and fostering understanding across Northern Ireland's social, religious, and political divides.

Tickets are £15 and are now available to buy online.

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Ards CCÉ celebrate All Ireland Fleadh success ahead of joint host with Belfast City Council of event next year!

Alliance representatives Andrew Muir MLA and Cllr Gillian McCollum have congratulated all the musicians from Ards Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) involved in the Wexford All-Ireland Fleadh (3rd-10th August 2025).



Ards CCÉ held an All-Ireland Homecoming celebration on Sunday, 17th August at the Imperial Bar in Bangor. The branch had a successful Fleadh, winning a total of 21 medals, including Seamus McClean becoming the All-Ireland Champion in the Pipes Slow Air category (12-15 years); Patrick Skelly taking third in the under-twelves piano; and the Senior Grúpa Cheoil also being awarded third place.

Belfast City Council will jointly host the next Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann with Ards CCÉ. Speaking at the Homecoming event, North Down MLA Andrew Muir said: “The talent and skill of the musicians of Ards CCÉ is just incredible, and I’m not surprised at all by their huge success in Wexford. I cannot wait to see what more they can achieve on home ground when the Fleadh comes

to Belfast next year. They have all done themselves and the Borough proud, and special mention needs to go to Seamus McClean for taking the gold after only just moving up the age bracket, as well as Patrick Skelly and the Ards CCÉ senior group.” Hollywood & Clandeboye Councillor and Mayor of Ards and North Down Gillian McCollum added: “The atmosphere at the homecoming was electric

as Ards CCÉ celebrated another amazing year at the Fleadh. The musicians from the branch continue to show that they are serious contenders at an All-Ireland level, and twenty-one medals is such an achievement. I am over the moon for all of them. We are so lucky to have Ards CCÉ locally, and their hard work has been critical to securing the Fleadh for Belfast, which is just going to be massive for the city.”

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LYONS ANNOUNCES £2.5M FOR HOMELESS PREVENTION SERVICES

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has announced an additional £2.5 million funding package for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to boost homeless prevention services.



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Minister Lyons highlighted the funding during a visit to the final training session for the national teams taking part in the Homeless World Cup in Oslo at the end of August.

Meeting the teams, Minister Lyons praised the work of Street NI, a local charity which aims to positively impact disadvantaged groups through football. The Minister said: "My ambition is the prevention of homelessness and charities like Street NI are key to this goal. The stories I have heard today have been truly inspiring and highlight the continued need to support those in crisis, while working on innovative ways to prevent homelessness."

"Street NI has provided the players with the opportunity to represent their

country in an international tournament, as well as an intensive wraparound support service, helping them transform their lives. This additional funding will continue to encourage new thinking in our approach to homelessness and further support NIHE's partners in delivering critical services for people who are homeless."

"I congratulate everyone on being selected and I wish them every success in Oslo and for their futures."

Every year, the Homeless World Cup Foundation delivers a week-long football tournament that brings together 500 players representing 48 countries from around the world, all of whom have faced homelessness and social marginalisation.

Northern Ireland will be represented by both a male and female team who will compete in a purpose-built arena in the heart of the host city.

Justin McMinn, CEO and co-founder of Street Soccer Northern Ireland, said: "This is a dream come true for all the players, a chance to represent your country in a sport that you love. Over the last 12 years we have witnessed the impact this event has on the players, with many of them breaking out of homelessness and unemployment on their return. They will come back full of confidence and motivation to make positive changes in their lives."

Louise McConnell is attending the tournament as a mentor for the women's team this year, having repre-



Minister Lyons meets the NI Men's team who competed in the Homeless World Cup in Oslo.

sented Northern Ireland last year. She highlighted how beneficial the experience has been, saying: "Playing in the Homeless World Cup in South Korea last year was one of the best experiences of my life and it was a proud moment for me to captain the side. This year I get to go back as a coach mentor to help other people on their

journeys and pass on my knowledge and experience. Street NI has made a massive difference in my life and now I want to help the charity make a difference to others."

Alongside football, Street NI offers support with housing, employment, education, addictions and mental health issues.

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Belfast's green spaces shine with 23 Green Flag Awards

Belfast City Council is celebrating after 23 of its much-loved parks and open spaces have been recognised with prestigious Green Flag Awards, an internationally recognised mark of excellence for well-managed green spaces.

The announcement was made at the annual Green Flag Awards ceremony at Bangor Castle Walled Garden, where 118 sites across Northern Ireland were honoured this year.

Belfast's winners include iconic destinations such as Botanic Gardens, Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park, Cavehill Country Park and Ormeau Park, as well as community favourites like Falls Park, Drumglass Park, Grove Park and Springfield Dam. Botanic Gardens was also recognised with a Heritage Award for excellence in the care of its historic features.

The Green Flag Award scheme celebrates the vital social and environmental value that parks bring to our communities – from boosting health and wellbeing to protecting biodiversity. The awards are an important reminder that Belfast's green spaces are free, open and accessible to everyone all year round.

Councillor Ruth Brooks, Chair of People and Communities Committee, said:

"We're incredibly proud that so many of our parks and open spaces have been



recognised with Green Flag status this year. This achievement is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our staff, volunteers and community partners who care for these spaces and keep them welcoming for everyone. Belfast's parks are not just beautiful places – they are vital for health, wellbeing, biodiversity and community connection. These awards show that we're delivering world-class green spaces for our residents and visitors."

The Green Flag Award,

run locally by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, sets international standards for park management and encourages the sharing of best practice across the world. Since the programme's launch in Northern Ireland in 2008, demand for the award has grown year on year.

Belfast City Council's 2025 Green Flag Award winners are:

Barnett Demesne; Belfast Botanic Gardens (Heritage); Belmont Park; Cavehill Country Park; Connswater Community

Greenway; Drumglass Park; Dunmurry Village; Dunville Park; Falls Park; Fullerton Park; Grove Park; Half Moon Lake; Knocknagoney Park; Lagan Meadows; Musgrave Park; Pairc Nua Chollan; Ormeau Park; Roselawn Cemetery; Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park; Tullycarnet Park; Waterworks Park; Woodvale Park; Springfield Dam.

For more information on the Green Flag Awards, visit: <https://www.keeponnorthernirelandandbeautiful.org>

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Belfast City Council’s Community Support Plan

Community groups and voluntary organisations are being encouraged to come along to upcoming info events highlighting new funding opportunities available through Belfast City Council’s Community Support Plan.

Large grants are now open to organisations delivering programmes and projects across the city to support residents between April 2026 and March 2029, up to a maximum of £60,000 per group, per year.

The council is running info sessions for interested groups to chat to staff about the scheme and get advice on completing the application process.

They will be held on:
Monday 8 September, 1.30pm-3pm - Divis Community Centre;
Tuesday 9 September, 6.30pm-7.30pm – online session;
Friday 12 September, 10am-11.30am - Donegall Pass Community Centre.

To register, email cgugrants@belfastcity.gov.uk with the session you want to attend.

The Large Grant scheme replaces previous grants offered by council to support the community and voluntary sector. It has been designed to support groups to plan ahead and deliver activities and services across a three-year



period. “When we asked the public for their views on our new Community Support Plan earlier this year, continued financial support for local organisations was key,” said Councillor Ruth Brooks, Chair of the council’s People and Communities Committee. “Groups also told us that the ability to plan ahead for the future, stay flexible and give their staff a feeling of confidence and

job security, was also essential. “Council has taken that on board in designing this new grant scheme, so this a really positive step forward for the third sector, as well as our residents who will benefit from the projects it will support, including many within our own facilities – everything from after-schools groups and arts and crafts activities to lunch clubs for our seniors and men’s sheds.

“I would encourage groups to join one of our info sessions and chat to our team about the programme, and how they can apply. This includes groups who have previously benefited from funding from us for community activities, as there are changes to our application process. “All the info is on our website – belfastcity.gov.uk/funding – and groups have until Monday 6 October at 12pm to submit an application.”



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Looking for a Primary School?

We would love to welcome you to Leadhill Primary School. We have a range of ways to provide you with the information you need:

Visit our school website.

Arrange to take a tour of the school. Visits can be arranged by appointment throughout the year

Make an appointment to meet with the Principal.

Take part in our Toddle Time group each Wednesday from 9 -11am.

Find out about our Wrap-Around childcare solutions.

Find out about our Pre-School Playgroup for children from 2 years and 10 months.

Speak to the Principal about our SEN provision in our new unit for children with Severe Learning Difficulties.



‘Children are offered a range of opportunities to shine, which highlights all children’s gifts. Leadhill is a great family school.’
(Parent comment)

Limited spaces available in playgroup and P1-7

Visit our school website for further information.
Casaeldona Park, Belfast, BT6 9RD Tel: 028 90401101 www.leadhillps.com

Continued from
page 1

Pete, Paulo and Rebecca, Cool FM Breakfast show said:

“Supporting Cash for Kids is something really close to our hearts. Every child deserves to feel the magic of Christmas, and the Mission Christmas Gala Ball is an incredible way to help make that happen. We’re so proud to be part of a night that brings people together to raise vital funds for local kids who need it most. It’s more than a party - it’s a chance to change lives.”

Entertainment will include live music, comedy with a series of unforgettable moments - including a very special Live Bid Auction with exclusive prizes, to be revealed soon. And that’s just the start - we have more exciting announcements coming in the weeks ahead.

To sponsor a table, please get in touch with the team at Cash for Kids on 028 91815555 or email ni@cashforkids.org

SPORT FOR GOOD SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMME

Lidl Northern Ireland has opened applications for its groundbreaking Sport for Good Mental Health Athlete Mentorship programme for the new school year, welcoming hundreds of secondary school pupils across the region to avail of a bespoke athlete-led mentorship programme using sport to build resilience and support wellbeing.

Developed in partnership with Youth Sport Trust, selected schools will receive visits from Northern Ireland sporting heroes, who will deliver a series of dedicated mental health workshops, designed to enable young people to better manage stress, build resilience and self-esteem, and view sport and movement as tools for looking after their mental wellbeing.

To date, Lidl Northern Ireland’s Sport for Good programme has reached over 100 secondary schools and is backed

by an investment of over £400,000 in youth wellbeing across Northern Ireland.

Since its launch in 2019, Olympic heroes Rhys McClenaghan and Bethany Firth OBE have spearheaded the programme for the last six years, working in partnership with Lidl Northern Ireland as programme ambassadors to promote the programme within secondary schools across the region and encourage more schools to avail of the free educational support.

Following his recent injury and his own experience of maintaining mental strength and resilience when confronted with adversity, Sport for Good ambassador and Olympic gymnast Rhys McClenaghan said:

“I am delighted to continue working with Lidl Northern Ireland on the 2025 Sport for Good programme. I’ve been an ambassador for the

last six years and have experienced first-hand the amazing impact it has had on young people.

The workshops have been developed to really tackle mental health head on and empower students with the knowledge, confidence and skills to better manage daily issues and their overall mental health.

As an Olympic champion athlete, I’m no stranger to adversity and I understand how important mental health is for overall wellbeing. For me, resilience is a key skill that I continue to develop through the ups and downs of professional sport. Recently, I underwent surgery for a shoulder injury and again found myself relying on the skills I have developed over the years to keep a positive outlook throughout recovery and not let setbacks interrupt my overall goals.

I’ve really learned the



importance of mental resilience, especially in the face of injury or when you’re out of your usual routine.

Learning to do things to maintain your mental health at those more challenging times has been really important.

It’s skills like these that pupils really need and Lidl Northern Ireland’s Sport for Good

programme provides very practical, supportive and bespoke training, delivered by amazing local athletes, which resonates so well with pupils.

I’m excited to launch the programme for the new school year ahead and encourage as many secondary schools as possible to apply for a spot on this fantastic

programme.”

Rhys is joined by fellow ambassador Paralympic swimmer Bethany Firth, and Sport for Good mentor and Olympic steeplechase athlete Kerry O’Flaherty.

Joining the team of Athlete Mentors is four-time Paralympic athletics champion Michael McKillop MBE, Olympic hockey

player Eugene Magee, and Commonwealth badminton player Ciaran Chambers. These specially selected mentors will lead school visits, deliver workshops, and support peer-led mental health initiatives.

Applications open for schools and customers (are via Lidl Community Works) and close on Sunday 14th September.

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Belfast Maritime Festival

Belfast's heritage waterfront is all set for the Belfast Maritime Festival - a weekend of free fun on Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 September from 11am-6pm each day.

People of all ages are invited to dive deep into a celebration of Belfast's rich maritime past and innovative future along the Maritime Mile – from Donegall Quay to HMS Caroline.

Organised by Belfast City Council in partnership with Maritime Belfast Trust, the Belfast Maritime Festival is also supported by Belfast Harbour, Titanic Quarter Limited, Titanic Belfast, Department for Communities, Tourism NI and the Odyssey Trust.

Media partner Cool FM/Downtown will be on site with prizes, games and giveaways.

Festival goers can hop on board a fleet of ships docked at Queen's Quay and Belfast Harbour Marina, including the stunning Andalucia – a Spanish galleon replica - and meet the crews to get a glimpse of life at sea.

Younger visitors will enjoy the Kids' Cove at the Queen's Quay – with arts and crafts, circus and dance and pirate play time – as well as family-friendly funfair rides at the Island Adventure Park beside the Slipways.

Meanwhile, a packed



line-up of local and international artists at the Maritime Mile Music Stage and circus performances at Fools by the Sea at The Arc are sure to keep the mood buoyant.

Hamilton Dock Maritime Village will celebrate past and future with immersive technology, interactive exhibits and boat building exhibitions. And Science Street is back by popular demand, transforming the waterfront into a space for hands-on learning and discovery – from marine biology and climate change to biodiversity.

The Slipways Street

Food Market is sure to tempt the tastebuds, along with the Artisan Producers' Market, where regional producers will be showcasing and selling their goods supported by DAERA, through the NI Regional Food Programme (NIRFP).

Saturday evening brings a magical concert under the stars featuring Hothouse Flowers with special guests Ríoghnach Connolly and Honeyfeet. Tickets (£20) are available at visitbelfast.com

Those who'd prefer a more chilled out experience can check out what's happening

at floating installation, 'Drift' and explore 'City Sensations' - a range of accessible and inclusive programming at Belfast Harbour's City Quays Gardens.

Visitors attending the Belfast Maritime Festival are encouraged to walk, cycle, take the Glider from Belfast city centre directly to the Titanic Quarter, or travel by train to Titanic Quarter Halt. Cycle parking is available outside Titanic Belfast and at Belfast Bike docks at the SSE Arena and SS Nomadic.

For more event information, visit belfastcity.gov.uk/maritime

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Spotlight on Pat Lundy - Clinical Dental Technician at East Belfast Dental & Implants

Pat Lundy is a Clinical Dental Technician at East Belfast Dental & Implants.

He was one of the first dental technicians in Northern Ireland to complete the Clinical Dental Technician course, which allows him to work directly with the public to create hand-crafted dentures. His passion is dentures, and his work at the clinic focuses on helping patients regain their bite confidence with custom-made solutions such as those below.

When teeth are lost due to dental disease or other issues, dentures provide a second chance for a healthy smile. There are several types of dentures available, including full dentures for a complete set of replacement teeth and partial dentures when some natural teeth remain.

A full denture, called an immediate complete denture, is inserted right after teeth are removed, so the patient doesn't have to go without

teeth during the healing period. Even with full dentures, it is essential to maintain oral hygiene by brushing gums and visiting the dentist regularly to check for issues and make adjustments. Ill-fitting dentures can cause irritation and should be fixed by a dentist. Partial dentures are a cost-effective solution that prevents bone loss and attaches to remaining teeth.

Overdentures are a more permanent solution retained by dental implants, which can prevent the natural deterioration of the jawbone and preserve facial contours. Additionally, dentures can be relined, either with a soft material for tender gums or a temporary, medicated one to allow inflammation to subside before a new, permanent reline. Regardless of the type, dentures are custom-made to



fit a patient's unique facial structure and can significantly improve chewing, speech, and facial aesthetics.

Located at 65 Cregagh Road, Belfast, BT6 8PX, East Belfast Dental & Implants is a practice that provides a wide range of dental services. They offer complementary consultations for both dental implants

and dentures. The practice is owned by Clinical Director Dr. Peter McCarron and is known for its patient-focused approach, using modern technology and techniques to provide high-quality care. The practice's services are designed to be convenient, comfortable, and efficient, ensuring a positive experience for all patients.

It's Toddle Time at Leadhill Primary School

The staff in Leadhill Primary School are excited to welcome in the new school year.

We are always excited to meet new children as they start in our playgroup, unit and primary school classes, but it is especially enjoyable to meet the babies and toddlers who are the youngest members of our Leadhill family. Our Toddle Time group meets on Wednesdays during term time from 9-11am. Babies and toddlers attend alongside their adults, enjoying playtime, chat and refreshments together. The group provides a great opportunity for children and adults alike to make connections and friendships. Parents, Grandparents, Childminders and friends – all are welcome in Toddle Time! The team would love to welcome new members to our Toddle



Time group this year! Just pop in on a Wednesday morning and you can be sure of a warm welcome.

Toddle Time is one of the ways that Leadhill provides for families in the local community. Leadhill supports families with provision of affordable and flexible childcare and a pre-school playgroup for children from 2 years and 10 months.

If you would like to know more about Leadhill Primary School, the new Special Educational Needs Unit, Toddle Time, Pre-school Playgroup or

Wrap-Around Care, please visit our website on www.leadhillps.com. Leadhill would love to welcome you for a visit. Contact the school office on 028 90401101 or email [Mrs.Millis on amilllis370@c2kni.net](mailto:Mrs.Millis@amilllis370@c2kni.net) to arrange for a suitable date and time.

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Employers For Childcare

Many working parents find it challenging to manage and afford childcare for children who are at school. Organising the morning drop-off and the afternoon pick-ups, and the childcare required to allow parents to be in work on time in the mornings and also be able to work into the late afternoon. This is often referred to as 'wraparound' childcare as it wraps around the school day.

In addition, there is the added complication of childcare that is required when schools are closed, whether for the weeks of school holidays or for those one-off days of closure that happen during each term, as well as perhaps having other younger or older children requiring a different form

of childcare. Find out what financial support is available. Many parents don't realise that there is help available with the cost of registered childcare for older children. This can include some wraparound childcare such as breakfast or after school clubs, as well as registered childminders and day nurseries. Parents may be paying a number of different providers to meet their childcare requirements and may be able to get financial support through Universal Credit, Childcare Vouchers or Tax-Free Childcare plus the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme to help meet their bills. Eligible parents can claim support through any of these schemes for children



under the age of 12, however for older children below the age of 16 only Universal Credit and Childcare Vouchers offer support, unless the child is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance. Finding suitable childcare. The Family Support NI website www.familysupportni.gov.uk is a useful resource for families looking for registered childcare and includes a search function for all registered childcare providers across Northern Ireland. This includes some breakfast and after-school clubs and

also information on day nurseries and childminders who offer transport to and from school. It's worth speaking to your local primary school to see what childcare it may offer and whether it accepts Tax-Free Childcare, the NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme or Childcare Vouchers as forms of payment. Further information. To find out more about what financial support you are entitled to towards childcare, contact Employers For Childcare's Family Benefits Advice Service on 028 9267 8200 or email hello@employersforchildcare.org.

£1.6 Billion Funding Milestone with Giant Fingers Crossed Sand Sculpture

The National Lottery has celebrated the landmark achievement of £1.6 billion being distributed to over 35,000 Good Causes in Northern Ireland with a giant, hope-inspired Fingers Crossed sand sculpture on Portstewart beach.

From grassroots sports, heritage projects, and arts initiatives to vital health and wellbeing services, The National Lottery funding has made a significant difference to the lives of people across Northern Ireland since funding began in 1994. To mark this incredible £1.6 billion milestone, The National Lottery joined together with the Mae Murray Foundation, one of the 35,000 projects that have received National Lottery funding to celebrate the positive impact the funding has had to their members. The Mae Murray Foundation are a charity based in Larne dedicated to creating inclusive environments for people with all abilities, including beach access. One of the beaches that has been made inclusive is Portstewart Strand, a National Trust beach, which has been named the best beach in the UK in 2025 by the Sunday Times. The National Lottery and the Mae Murray Foundation joined with MLA Maurice Bradley on Portstewart Strand to reveal a striking 7ft sand sculpture representing the iconic National Lottery 'Fingers Crossed' symbol.

Part of a series of National Lottery Fingers Crossed installations across the UK, the sand sculpture symbolises the hope and optimism the funding to Good Causes provides in Northern Ireland. Kyleigh Lough, CEO from the Mae Murray Foundation said, "This funding has been truly life changing. Many of our members have never been able to access the beach or experience the joy of the seaside until now. Thanks to The National Lottery, we're creating more inclusive opportunities for people of all ages and abilities." Maurice Bradley, MLA for East Londonderry, praised the impact of

The National Lottery funding in the local community, "The National Lottery funding has been transformational for countless groups and organisations across Northern Ireland. In my own constituency, I've seen first-hand how these grants empower local people to change lives every day. Raising £1.6 billion for good causes is a remarkable achievement and a clear sign of the positive legacy that The National Lottery continues to provide. It's our duty to protect this institution that has driven such powerful change, to ensure the next generations in Northern Ireland can also benefit from

life changing funding." Grants big and small, have been awarded across Northern Ireland in every single community. Some of the largest grants ever awarded in Northern Ireland include the Odyssey Trust, they were awarded £45 million for entertainment and educational facilities and the construction of the SSE arena, and the Ulster Folk Museum, they were awarded £10 million to help preserve history for future generations. Whilst one of the most westerly grants awarded in the whole of the UK, was for £178,000 to Dolans Social Farm in Fermanagh, which provides educational farming visits.

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Communities Minister announces £3.3m for Housing Rights

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has today announced a three-year £3.3 million funding package for Housing Rights.

Minister Lyons made the announcement during a visit to Housing Rights in East Belfast to meet the Board and staff and hear first-hand how the charity helps households deal with housing and homelessness problems. During the visit, Minister Lyons praised the work of those combating homelessness. The Minister said: "I have made it clear that addressing homelessness and increasing the supply of housing are amongst my top priorities. This three-year funding package will support the de-

livery of valuable services, helping those who need it most. I welcome the opportunity to hear more about the work of Housing Rights and how their guidance, advice and support has helped people right across Northern Ireland. "I also recognise the valuable training on housing issues Housing Rights provides for the wider advice sector; it is vitally important that people in crisis have access to accurate advice and timely support. The collaborative work of Housing Rights and the

organisations and individuals working with homeless people is critical if we are to prevent the risk of homelessness and continue to support people who need help in our society." Kate McCauley, Housing Rights CEO, welcomed the Minister's support and said: "Housing Rights' vision to ensure everyone has a home is strengthened with support from a range of funders and partners across government and civil society. Despite our collective efforts, too many people still wait too long for a home to meet

their family's needs. Our work to deliver independent, quality, specialist housing advice across Northern Ireland has therefore never been more needed. We are delighted to host the Minister's visit to our offices to mark a further three years of support for our services from his Department." Housing Rights has a dedicated service telephone number on 028 9024 5640 for Housing Rights Advice. Information can also be found at www.housingrights.org.uk/housing-advice.

Discover 'Mourne Living' at House of Vic-Ryn, Lisburn

We're delighted to announce the opening of Mourne Living, our brand-new furniture store at the House of Vic-Ryn, Lisburn, on Friday 29th August at 9:30am.

Mourne Living has been created with one simple aim: to bring stylish, high-quality furniture to local homes at accessible prices. Whether you're searching for a statement sofa, a practical dining set, or the finishing touches to complete a room, you'll find inspiration around every corner. We're proud to be part of the Lisburn community and

excited to welcome our first customers through the doors. Our friendly team will be on hand to offer advice, inspiration, and guidance to help you find the perfect pieces for your home. And with the award-winning Cafe Vic-Ryn right next door, it's the perfect place to make a day of it: shop for your home, then enjoy a well-deserved coffee and bite to eat.



Specsavers Connswater encourages parents to prioritise children's eye health as the new school year begins

Local experts at Specsavers Connswater are reminding parents not to forget about getting their children's eyes tested as the new school year begins.

With 80% of learning done through sight in a child's early years, undiagnosed vision problems can often lead to difficulties in reading, writing, and in some cases behaviour. A simple, quick, and NHS-funded eye test at Specsavers can help identify and address any issues. Paula Cunningham, ophthalmic director at Specsavers Connswater says: "Good eyesight is vital for a child's learning, confidence and development, yet many children don't know they could be having issues with their vision. "We believe getting your child an eye test at the start of the school year is vital, and it is timely to remind parents that children up to 16 years old can avail of a NHS funded eye test



and a second pair of glasses from just £10* at Specsavers "Back to school is a busy time but making sure your child's vision is in top shape can make a huge difference. Our goal as a locally owned and run business is to

help every child in the local area see clearly and comfortably this school year!" Children visiting Specsavers for an eye test can also now enjoy a fully interactive experience, thanks to new sticker books which take

them through the entire process, from arrival to getting their frames fitted. Appointments can be booked online at SPECSAVERS.CO.UK/STORES/BELFASTCONNSWATER or by calling the store on 028 9045 8156.

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Annahilt’s The Pheasant restaurant announces Christmas Menu.

The Christmas 2025 menu offers two- and three-course options.

From Sunday to Thursday, a two-course meal is £28 and a three-course meal is £35. On Friday and Saturday, a two-course meal is £31 and a three-course meal is £38. A “Turkey & Ham Dinner” is also available for lunch at £22 and dinner at £24.

Menu Highlights:

- Starters include Curried Parsnip & Granny Smith Apple Soup, Larchfield Estate Salt and Chilli Pheasant, and Mexican Style Mixed Bean Taco.
- Main courses feature County Antrim Glazed Turkey & Belfast Ham, Pan Fried Glenarm Salmon, and Crispy Chinese Half Duck. There is also an 8oz Prime Irish Ribeye Steak available for a £10 supplement.
- Desserts on the menu are



Mrs Patterson’s Homemade Christmas Pudding and a “Trio of Desserts” which includes Raspberry & white chocolate profiteroles, chocolate nemesis, and Baileys & salted caramel cheesecake. A gluten-free dessert option can also be requested.

The Pheasant also has a number of events planned for the festive season. Live music will be featured every Friday and Saturday in

December. “Party Nights” with live entertainment are also being offered for small parties and groups of up to 90 guests. For further details on these events, you can contact the restaurant’s Christmas Coordinators.

For families, “Santa Sundays” will take place on the 7th, 14th, and 21st of December.

Children can meet Santa in his grotto and enjoy a festive fun day out that

includes balloon modelling. The cost is £12 per child and includes a main course, dessert, drink, and a gift from Santa.

The restaurant can be contacted at 028 9263 8056 or info@thepheasantrestaurant.co.uk. More information can be found on their website, thepheasantrestaurant.co.uk. Please note, a 10% service charge will be applied to parties of over 8 people

Mulroy Woods Hotel:Your Perfect Wedding Venue in Donegal

Mulroy Woods Hotel is a stunning wedding venue nestled in the heart of Milford, Donegal.

With a commitment to providing personalized experiences, the hotel offers couples the opportunity to create their dream wedding, tailored to their unique vision.

Exclusively Yours

One of the most appealing aspects of Mulroy Woods Hotel is its exclusive approach to weddings. The hotel ensures that each couple receives undivided attention by hosting only one wedding per day. This allows for a truly intimate and personalized experience, free from distractions or crowds.

Customizable All-Inclusive Packages

Mulroy Woods Hotel offers flexible all-inclusive wedding packages that can be customized to suit your specific needs and preferences. Whether you’re dreaming of a small, intimate ceremony or a grand celebration, the hotel can accommodate your



vision. From the menu to the décor, every detail can be personalized to create a truly memorable event.

Catering for All

The hotel caters to both small and larger wedding celebrations, ensuring that couples of all sizes can find the perfect venue. Whether you’re planning a wedding for 20 guests or 200, Mulroy Woods Hotel can provide the ideal setting for your special day.

Civil Ceremonies

For couples seeking a

convenient and hassle-free wedding experience, Mulroy Woods Hotel offers civil ceremonies on-site. This means you can enjoy the convenience of having your ceremony and reception in the same location, creating a seamless and stress-free day.

Looking for a Break?

In addition to being a popular wedding venue, Mulroy Woods Hotel also offers a relaxing and enjoyable getaway. Enjoy a mid-week 2 night break for two people sharing (B&B),

complete with a delicious meal on the evening of your choice, for just €318.00 in total. This package is available from September to December, excluding all bank holidays.

Mulroy Woods Hotel is the perfect choice for couples seeking a personalized, exclusive, and unforgettable wedding experience. With its stunning location, customizable packages, and commitment to excellence, the hotel is sure to exceed your expectations.



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Autumn brings a bounty of hearty, nutritious, and delicious fruits and vegetables that are perfect for warming meals and cozy gatherings. Eating seasonally is not only great for flavour, but it can also be more sustainable and economical.

Fruits of the Season

Autumn's fruits are perfect for baking, snacking, and making warming desserts.

Apples: A true autumn staple. With hundreds of varieties, there's an apple for every purpose, from crisp eating apples like Gala and Honeycrisp to firm baking apples such as Granny Smith and Braeburn. How to use them: Beyond the classic apple pie, use them in salads, make homemade applesauce, or roast them with cinnamon and a drizzle of maple syrup for a simple dessert.

Pears: Pears come into their own in the fall. Varieties like Conference and Comice are sweet and juicy when ripe.

How to use them: Pears are fantastic poached in red wine or spices, baked into tarts, or sliced into a cheese board for a sophisticated starter.

Plums: Late-season plums are rich in flavor. How to use them: They are excellent for making jam, compotes, or simply roasting with pork or chicken for a sweet and savory dish.

Vegetables to Enjoy
The vegetables of autumn are robust and versatile, forming the foundation of many comforting dishes.

Squash and Pumpkins: From butternut to acorn and delicate courgettes, squash is the star of autumn. How to use them: Roast cubes of butternut squash with herbs, make a creamy pumpkin soup, or stuff a whole acorn squash with a savory filling of rice and vegetables. Don't forget to toast the seeds for a crunchy snack!

Root Vegetables: Carrots, parsnips, and potatoes are at their



peak. How to use them: Roasting these together brings out their natural sweetness. They are also essential for hearty stews, chunky soups, and mashed dishes.

Cabbage and Brussels Sprouts: These cruciferous vegetables thrive in cooler weather. How to use them: Sautéed Brussels sprouts with bacon and chestnuts are a classic side dish. Shredded cabbage can be used

in slaws or braised with apples for a tangy accompaniment.

Mushrooms: Foraged or store-bought, mushrooms like shiitake, cremini, and oyster mushrooms are in abundance.

How to use them: Sauté them with garlic and herbs, add them to risottos, or use them as a hearty base for a mushroom gravy.

Autumn also brings fresh, aromatic herbs and a bounty of nuts.

Herbs: Rosemary,

sage, and thyme are perfect for flavouring roasted meats and vegetables. Their earthy notes complement the season's produce beautifully.

Nuts: Walnuts and chestnuts are harvested in the fall. How to use them: Walnuts are great in salads, baking, or as a snack.

Roasted chestnuts are a classic autumn treat, either on their own or used in stuffings and purees.

Creating your best smile with Implants & Cosmetic Dentistry at Morrison Dental Clinic

Opened last year Morrison Dental is now well known at 95 Saintfield Road, Belfast.

The Principal Dentist and practice owner is Dr Richard Morrison who has a passion for all things dentistry - implant and cosmetic dentistry in particular!

Dr Morrison says: "You can really change someone's life through their smile. Seeing their reaction after showing them their finished result in the mirror is priceless. The change you see in a patient, giving them their smile and confidence,

it is not just an aesthetic change but also gives a psychological change which is so rewarding!"

Morrison Dental Clinic is primarily a Denplan practice. The practice ethos is that prevention is better than cure, and that seeing the hygienist every six months or more is the best starting point to maintain a healthy dentition for life. As a Denplan practice, the practice plan includes

twice yearly check-ups and hygiene appointments, any x-rays required, and also gives discount off routine treatment. Preventative care, such as routine exams, cleaning, x-rays and oral hygiene instruction can help catch problems early and avoid the need for costly treatment later on.

Significant investment has already been made to ensure that the practice remains at the forefront of technology



to improve the patient experience. This includes an intra-oral scanner, which uses 3D photo imaging to scan the mouth, avoiding the need for taking moulds of your teeth. Treatment can then be planned digitally and with greater accuracy than ever, achieve perfectly fitting labwork such as crowns, veneers, bleaching trays etc. Another addition is a recently-installed CBCT scanner, used when there is a need for more information than what traditional 2D x-rays can offer, such as 3D visualisation of jaw bone for optimal planning for implant placement.

Dr Morrison is a member of the Irish Academy of Aesthetic Dentistry and the Association of Dental Implantology, and is always reading articles and attending courses to stay

up to date with the latest advancements!

He says: "I believe that we are at an exciting time in dentistry, with more and more technological advances which can improve what is possible for our patients. I feel as a dentist in the modern age we must continually learn and improve our practices otherwise we will be left behind!"

The growing team (so far!) consists of five dentists, five nurses, dental hygienist Claire, receptionist Shauna, Yuko (Richard's wife) who does a lot of the work behind the scenes!

Morrison Dental Clinic is conveniently located at 95 Saintfield Road (not far from Forestside), and offers free parking available on site! For your appointment Tel: 028 9070 3215



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Jack Frost at the MAC a festive family outing that makes the season magical

Summer has only just ended, but the Christmas tradition is already calling.

Jack Frost lands at the MAC from 26 November 2025 to 1 January 2026, and it is exactly the kind of festive family outing that makes the season magical. Recommended for ages 5+, it is bright, brisk and packed with moments that will have little ones wide-eyed and parents smiling.

In a hidden town where the Frozen Bell should ring only once on the solstice, a second chime spells trouble.

Jack teams up with Saint Nicholas, Jon the talking snowman, Hoot the owl and Neve the snow angel to face Krampus and an icy sorceress. Expect a flurry of adventure, plenty of laughs and a simple truth at its heart. The real magic is courage, cleverness and love. Make it a proper day out! Pair an afternoon performance with a festive lunch, hot chocolates or a Santa visit and tick the

family show off the list before December gets busy. There are even relaxed performance in the run too for those who find a gentler environment helpful.

Tickets start low and rise as dates fill up, so early booking wins. Children are £14, and babies under 12 months go free in arms. Monday to Friday, the Four or More Saver takes 10% off when you add four or more seats. If you are 16 to

24, join the MAC scheme for a £5 ticket, subject to availability.

Pop Jack Frost on the calendar now, and enjoy the satisfaction when December arrives and your seats are sorted.

Jack Frost runs at the MAC 26 November 2025 - 1 January 2026. You can buy tickets now at themaclive.com. Follow @themacbelfast for more festive updates.

HALLOWEEN IS COMING ...

With its rich folklore and stunning landscapes, Northern Ireland is the perfect place to embrace the autumn season with your family.

The cooler, crisp weather and changing colours create an ideal atmosphere for outdoor adventures, spooky fun, and celebrating the harvest.

From picking your own pumpkins to navigating a corn maze, here's a guide to some of the best family-friendly autumn activities across Northern Ireland.

Pumpkin Patches and Halloween Fun!

Picking your own pumpkin has become a cherished autumn tradition for many families. These events often offer more than just a chance to find the perfect gourd; they also include fun activities

like spooky trails and face painting.

Mountpanther Farm Park in County Down hosts a large Halloween event with a pumpkin patch where you can pick and have your pumpkin carved. They also have a spooky trail and other surprises.

Streamvale Open Farm, located just outside Belfast, is well-known for its pumpkin patch experience, which includes a "Broomtastic Disco" and a haunted house.

The Ark Open Farm in Newtownards also opens its pumpkin patch for the spooky season, often featuring a Halloween trail

and marshmallow toasting.

Northern Ireland, particularly County Armagh, is famous for its Bramley apples, which have PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) status. While traditional "pick-your-own" apple farms are not common, you can still celebrate the apple harvest at various events and farms.

Look for orchard tours and tasting experiences at places like Long Meadow Cider in Portadown.

These visits often give families a chance to learn about the history of apple growing, see the orchards, and sometimes even taste

the freshest apples right from the tree.

For those looking for a bigger spectacle, Northern Ireland has some fantastic Halloween festivals.

Derry Halloween is arguably Europe's largest Halloween festival, a multi-day event that transforms the city into a hub of spooky celebration. It's a fantastic experience with a large carnival parade, fireworks, and a "Awakening the Walled City" trail that's suitable for families.

Smaller, local events in cities like Newry also offer family-friendly fun with street carnivals, craft caves, and spooky discos.

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The Fiery Transformation: Why Autumn Leaves change colour

As summer's verdant embrace loosens its grip, a spectacular transformation sweeps across our landscapes.

The lush greens of trees give way to a breathtaking palette of fiery reds, brilliant oranges, sunny yellows, and deep purples. This annual display, a hallmark of autumn, isn't just a pretty show; it's a fascinating natural process driven by biochemistry and the changing seasons.

The Science Behind the Spectacle:
The primary player in the green of summer leaves is chlorophyll, the pigment essential for photosynthesis. Throughout the warmer months, trees are busily converting sunlight into energy, and chlorophyll efficiently absorbs light in the red and blue spectrums, reflecting green, which is what we see.

However, as days shorten and temperatures drop in autumn, trees begin to prepare for winter dormancy. This preparation involves a gradual shutdown of photosynthesis. With less sunlight and colder conditions, the production of chlorophyll slows down and eventually stops. The existing chlorophyll then starts to break down, revealing other pigments that have been present in the leaves all along, but were previously masked by the dominant green.

These "hidden" pigments are:

- Carotenoids: These are responsible for the vibrant yellows and oranges. Carotenoids are present in leaves year-round but become visible once the chlorophyll degrades. They are also found in carrots, corn, and bananas.
- Anthocyanins: These pigments produce the striking reds, purples, and even some deep blues. Unlike carotenoids, anthocyanins are not present in the leaves throughout the summer. They are actively produced in the autumn, particularly when there are warm, sunny days followed by cool, crisp nights (but not freezing). Sugars trapped in the leaves by cool temperatures and bright sunlight contribute to their formation. The specific hue of red or purple can depend on the acidity of the leaf's sap.

The combination and concentration of these pigments, along with environmental factors, determine the precise colour we see. Some trees, like maples and oaks, are renowned for their spectacular reds and oranges due to their ability to produce abundant anthocyanins. Others, like birches and aspens, typically showcase brilliant yellows from their carotenoids.

A Last Hurrah Before Winter:
The shedding of leaves in autumn is a vital survival mechanism for deciduous trees. By dropping their leaves, trees reduce water loss during the colder, drier winter months when water can be scarce or frozen. It also helps them shed accumulated waste products. The stunning display of colour is a beautiful, albeit temporary, farewell to the growing season, preparing the tree for a period of rest before the cycle begins anew in spring.

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Ballyness Caravan Park: Voted Best in NI and Still Leading the Way

Ballyness Caravan Park in Bushmills, Northern Ireland, continues to set the standard for excellence in the UK's caravan and camping industry.

Following last year's accolade as the Best Caravan Park in the UK in the Practical Caravan and Practical Motorhome Top 100 Sites Guide 2024, the park remains firmly at the top of its game. For 2025, Ballyness has once again been named Best Campsite in Northern Ireland for the fifth consecutive year and retains its listing as a Premier Park—a distinction awarded to the top-rated sites across the UK.

With a legacy now spanning 25 years, Ballyness has long been regarded as one of Ireland's most awarded and celebrated parks. Its ongoing honours include being one of the very few AA 5 Gold Pennant caravan parks in Northern Ireland, and holding the prestigious David Bellamy Gold Conservation Award for more than a decade.

Owner Conor O'Neill expressed his appreciation for the continued support from visitors. "We're



incredibly proud of the recognition we've received over the years, and it's all down to the support of our guests. Their votes, feedback and continued return visits keep us moving forward," he said.

That spirit of continuous improvement lies at the heart of the park's success. Over the past year, Ballyness has continued to invest in upgrades and enhancements to make every stay memorable. A new extension to the holiday home park has added 26 spacious pitches with countryside views, setting a new benchmark for holiday home standards along the North Coast. The play park—already a favourite with families—was also expanded with new features designed specifically to entertain younger children.

Looking ahead, further development is already underway. Plans are in place to refurbish the on-site shop and games barn ahead of the 2026 season, all part of a wider strategy to continue improving the facilities and experiences that guests

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Embracing Outdoor Workouts in Cooler Weather

As the days get shorter and the air turns crisp, it's easy to retreat indoors and let your fitness routine hibernate for the winter.

But autumn is a fantastic season for outdoor exercise. The cooler temperatures can make high-intensity workouts more comfortable, and the beautiful scenery—think vibrant changing leaves and golden sunlight—provides a refreshing backdrop that can boost your mood and motivation.

The Benefits of Exercising Outdoors in Autumn

Working out in the autumn air offers unique advantages. The cooler climate helps your body regulate its temperature more efficiently, which can improve endurance and prevent overheating during intense sessions. A brisk autumn walk or run can feel invigorating, and the natural light exposure can help combat seasonal mood changes. The changing landscape also provides a visual feast that makes your workout feel less like a chore and more like an enjoyable experience.

Tips for Staying Safe and Comfortable

To make the most of your outdoor autumn workouts, a little preparation goes a long way.

• Dress in Layers: This is the golden rule of cold-weather exercise. Start with a moisture-wicking base layer to draw sweat away from your skin, a middle layer for insulation (like a fleece or wool), and a wind-resistant or waterproof outer layer. As you warm up, you can shed layers.

• Protect Your Extremities: Your hands, feet, and ears are most

susceptible to the cold. Wear gloves or mittens, thermal socks, and a hat or ear warmers.

• Stay Hydrated: Just because it's cooler doesn't mean you don't need to drink water.

You can still become dehydrated, so carry a water bottle with you.

• Choose the Right Footwear: As the ground

may be wet or covered in leaves, opt for shoes with good traction. If you're running, consider trail shoes for better grip.

• Mind the Daylight: With earlier sunsets, it's crucial to be visible. Wear bright or reflective clothing, and consider a headlamp if you'll be out around dusk or dawn.

Inspiring Autumn

Workout Ideas

Don't be limited to your usual routine. Autumn is the perfect time to try something new.

• Trail Running or Hiking: Take to local trails and immerse yourself in the changing colours. The varied terrain will challenge different muscle groups and keep things interesting.

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CREATING AN AUTUMN SANCTUARY AT HOME

As the days grow shorter and the air turns crisp, there's a natural shift in focus from the bustling outdoors to the comforting indoors.

Autumn isn't just a season; it's an invitation to create a sanctuary—a cosy, warm, and inviting space where you can retreat from the changing weather. By thoughtfully incorporating a few key elements, you can transform your home into the ultimate seasonal escape.

Embracing the Autumnal Colour Palette

The colours of autumn are nature's own masterpiece. Move away from bright summer shades and embrace the rich, muted tones of the season. Think deep, earthy hues like burnt orange, moss green, terracotta, and warm chocolate brown. You can introduce these colours through soft furnishings like throws and cushions,

or with a statement wall painted in a deep, sophisticated shade. Don't forget to add pops of brighter accent colours like mustard yellow or a hint of berry red to keep the palette from feeling too heavy.

Layering Textures for Tactile Comfort

A cosy home is one that engages all the senses, and texture is a key

player. This is the time to bring out all your softest materials. Combine chunky knit blankets with soft velvet pillows, or a faux-fur rug with a wool throw. The goal is to create a multi-layered, tactile experience that makes you want to curl up and stay a while. Consider adding natural textures like wood, stone, and rattan to ground the space and add a touch of rustic charm.

The Warmth of Light

Lighting is a powerful tool for setting a mood. As the sun sets earlier, swap out harsh overhead lighting for warmer, softer alternatives. Layer

different light sources, such as table lamps, floor lamps, and even candles, to create inviting pools of light throughout a room. The soft glow of a lamp in a corner or the flicker of a few candles on a mantle-piece can instantly make a space feel more intimate and comfortable.

Bringing the Outdoors In

Autumn is a season of harvest and natural beauty. Echo this by incorporating elements from the outdoors into your decor. A simple vase filled with dried grasses or autumn branches can add a subtle, organic



touch. Display pumpkins or gourds on a console table, or arrange a bouquet of seasonal flowers like sunflowers or chrysanthemums. This

not only connects your home to the season but also adds a fresh, vibrant element to your interior.

By embracing these principles—colour,

texture, light, and natural elements—you can create a home that is a true sanctuary, a place of comfort and calm to be enjoyed all season long.

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By incorporating natural elements, colours, and textures, you can create a serene living space that feels deeply connected to the natural world just outside your window.

Embracing Earthy Tones and Natural Palettes

Autumn's palette is rich and warm. Move beyond traditional orange and red and consider the full spectrum of fall colours: deep moss greens, warm terracotta, mushroom browns, and muted ochre. These colours can be introduced through paint, but also in more subtle ways like a clay vase, a set of linen cushions, or

a soft, woollen throw. These hues create a grounding and calming effect, mirroring the forest floor.

Integrating Natural Materials

Texture is key to making a space feel inviting. The tactile quality of natural materials adds depth and a sense of authenticity. Think about using wood, not just for furniture, but for decorative pieces like a live-edge cutting board in the kitchen or a stack of birch logs next to the fireplace. Rattan, wicker, and jute can add a casual, bohemian feel, while materials like unpolished stone or slate can

introduce a more rustic, grounded aesthetic.

The Power of Plants

Bringing living plants indoors is the most direct way to connect with nature. For autumn, consider plants with rich, dark green foliage or those that have unique textures. Fiddle-leaf figs, snake plants, and philodendrons are great choices. For a more seasonal touch, display branches with changing leaves or berries in a simple vase. The presence of plants not only purifies the air but also adds life and a sense of tranquility to any room.

Harvesting Seasonal Decor

One of the most enjoyable aspects of this trend is using seasonal items as decor. A bowl of pumpkins or gourds on a coffee table can be a simple, charming centerpiece. Use branches of colorful leaves, pinecones, or acorns to create a mantle display. These elements are not only beautiful but also remind you of the ongoing cycle of nature. Dried flowers and grasses are also an excellent way to add texture and a rustic, foraged feel to your home.

Lighting to Mimic Nature

As the days shorten, lighting becomes crucial

for setting a mood. Ditch harsh overhead lights in favour of softer, warmer illumination. Use lamps with natural linen shades that cast a gentle glow. Place candles around the room to create a cosy, flickering ambience. The goal is to mimic the soft light of a cloudy autumn day or the warm glow of a setting sun.

By mindfully incorporating these trends, you can transform your home into a sanctuary that celebrates the beauty of autumn. It's about creating a space that feels personal, connected, and deeply restful, a true haven from the world outside.

Bring the outdoors in

Embrace the changing season by bringing the beauty of the outdoors inside. Autumn is a time of transition, and our homes can reflect this shift from the vibrant energy of summer to the cosy calm of fall.

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Tiny Home Thinking that could benefit you

In a world where living large often comes with a hefty price tag, a growing movement is proving that true luxury isn't measured in square footage.

"Small Space, Big Design" is more than just a catchy phrase; it's the ethos of tiny home living, where every inch is meticulously planned and every design choice is a stroke of genius.

The tiny home movement isn't just about downsizing; it's about rightsizing. It's about a conscious choice to live more simply, more sustainably, and more intentionally. This lifestyle challenges the notion that more is always better, instead celebrating efficiency, creativity, and a deep connection to your space.

So, how do tiny home dwellers manage to fit everything they need into a cosy footprint without sacrificing style or comfort? The answer lies in the art of maximizing every inch. Here are some of the key principles of small-space design:

M a s t e r i n g

Multi-Functionality

The golden rule of tiny home design is that every item should serve more than one purpose. Think of a sofa that transforms into a bed, a dining table that folds down from the wall, or a staircase with built-in storage drawers. These aren't just clever tricks; they're essential components of a functional tiny home. By investing in furniture that works as hard as the homeowner, the living area can fluidly shift from a lounge to a dining room to a guest suite in a matter of minutes.

Thinking Vertically

In a tiny home, the only direction to go is up. Vertical space is a precious resource that is often underutilized. Smart tiny home designs make use of every available vertical surface, from floor-to-ceiling shelving to wall-mounted desks and vertical

gardens. Lofted sleeping areas are a classic example of this principle, creating a distinct and private bedroom space while freeing up the ground floor for living and entertaining. The use of floating shelves and wall hooks keeps the floor clear, creating a sense of openness and airiness.

The Magic of Hidden Storage

Clutter is the enemy of a small space. That's why hidden storage is a tiny home's best friend. Designers are getting incredibly creative with concealed compartments: built-in drawers under benches, storage beneath the stairs, and even secret cubbies hidden behind false walls. This not only keeps the home tidy but also maintains a minimalist aesthetic, making the space feel calm and uncluttered.

Connecting with Nature



Tiny homes often emphasize a strong connection to the outdoors, which helps to visually expand the space. Large windows, skylights, and glass doors blur the line between indoor and outdoor living, bringing in natural light and views that make the home feel much larger than it is. The use of natural materials like reclaimed wood, bamboo, and cork also helps to ground the home and create a warm,

inviting atmosphere.

In the end, tiny home living is a testament to the idea that a well-designed space can be both beautiful and practical. It's about building a home that perfectly suits your needs, with no wasted space and a deep appreciation for the art of living small. It's a reminder that with a little creativity and a lot of intention, you can live large, no matter the size of your footprint.

What is Feng Shui?

Feng shui is an ancient art and science that was formalized over 3,000 years ago in China.

In literal translation feng means "wind" and shui means "water." In Chinese culture, wind and water are associated with good health, thus good feng shui came to mean good fortune. Conversely, bad feng shui means bad luck or misfortune.

Some elements of Feng shui practice date back at least 6,000 years, and it contains elements of various branches of scholarly study, including physics, philosophy, astronomy, and astrology. It is related closely to the Taoist vision and understanding of nature, particularly the idea that the land is alive and filled with Chi, or energy. Other concepts shared between feng shui and Taoism include the polarities of yin and yang—the polar opposites that cannot exist without the other—and the theory of five elements. Feng shui is sometimes thought to be the art of placement—understanding how the placement of yourself and objects within a space affects your life in various areas of experience.

It is a complex body of knowledge that teaches us how to balance and harmonize with the energies in any given space—be it a home, office, or garden. Its aim is to assure good fortune for the people inhabiting a space. Although regarded by some in the scientific community as a pseudo-science, feng shui has had an impact on the aesthetics of interior design and the architectural layout of living and working spaces, both in its native eastern and, more recently, western cultures. Since good fortune comes in many forms, including better health, a successful career, or a fulfilling love life, feng shui practice includes detailed tips for almost every area of your life. The main tools used in analyzing the feng shui of any space are the feng shui compass and the bagua. The Taoist theory of yin and yang is essential to feng shui. At the core of this principle lies a belief that a balance of the feminine (Yin) and the masculine (Yang) in our lives is neces-

sary to maintain a good flow of Chi and a content, happy, successful life.

In Taoist and Feng shui theory, yin and yang are opposites that are dependent upon one another and which must always be in balance. The principle of duality—the idea that all things are balanced blends of two things—is at the root of yin/yang theory. While most other spiritual philosophies believe in opposing dualities, such as good vs. evil, the Chinese Taoist system believes that balance and equilibrium between opposites is the desirable state. Discord occurs when one principle outweighs the other. Also central to Taoism and feng shui is the theory of five elements. By tradition, feng shui practice holds that all things consist of varying degrees of five elements. In the feng shui system, wood, fire, earth, metal, and water are the five elements, and each is represented by certain colors that can help us bring harmony to a particular space.



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THE IMPORTANCE OF USING RECLAIMED AND RECYCLED BUILDING MATERIALS

In a world increasingly aware of its environmental footprint, the construction industry is undergoing a significant transformation.

No longer is it just about erecting structures; it's about building them responsibly. At the

forefront of this green revolution are reclaimed and recycled building materials, rising as the

ethical and innovative answer to traditional construction. This

movement isn't just a trend; it's a fundamental shift towards a more sustainable future, offering both environmental benefits and unique aesthetic appeal.

The range of reclaimed and recycled materials now available is vast and ever-expanding, offering architects, builders, and homeowners a wealth of choices:

- **Reclaimed Wood:** Perhaps the most popular and versatile, reclaimed timber from old barns, factories, and even underwater logging provides incredibly strong, stable, and beautiful wood. Its history is often evident in its unique grain patterns, nail holes, and distressing, adding

unparalleled character to flooring, beams, and furniture.

- **Recycled Steel and Metal:** Steel is one of the most recycled materials globally. Recycled steel rebar, structural beams, and corrugated roofing offer excellent strength and durability with a dramatically lower environmental impact than new steel.

- **Recycled Concrete and Aggregates:** Demolished concrete can be crushed and reused as aggregate for new concrete mixes, roadbeds, or landscaping. This significantly reduces waste and the need for virgin aggregate mining.

- **Reclaimed Brick:** Old bricks, with their unique variations in colour and texture, are highly sought after for their authentic charm in both interior

and exterior applications.

- **Recycled Glass:** From countertops to decorative tiles and even insulation, recycled glass is finding new life in myriad forms, adding sparkle and sustainability to modern designs.

- **Salvaged Fixtures and Fittings:** Old doors, windows, sinks, bathtubs, and lighting fixtures from demolition sites or architectural salvage yards offer a chance to incorporate vintage charm and reduce waste.

Incorporating reclaimed and recycled materials isn't just about environmental responsibility; it's an aesthetic choice that adds depth, history, and a unique narrative to a building. Designers are skilfully blending these materials with contemporary elements,



creating spaces that are both modern and timeless. A sleek, minimalist kitchen might feature a countertop made from recycled glass, while a grand living room could boast stunning reclaimed timber beams.

As the demand for

responsible building practices grows, the innovation in this sector will only continue. From transforming plastic waste into durable building blocks to pioneering new uses for industrial by-products, the future of construction is increasingly looking

to the past for its raw materials. By embracing reclaimed and recycled elements, we are not simply constructing buildings; we are building a more resilient, resource-efficient, and character-filled world, one salvaged piece at a time.

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Choosing seating for the living room

When decorating a living room, one of the biggest and most important challenges is deciding what type of seating to use.

Should you get a sofa, a large sectional, two sofas, a sofa and two chairs or a bunch of armchairs? Maybe some ottomans and poufs would also work nicely. There are a lot of possible furniture arrangements to choose from. Chairs are tricky because they're a bit difficult to work with. In addition, with so many different designs and styles to choose from, finding the right look is never easy.

Pick your living room chairs based on the style chosen for the rest of the room. In a modern living room, stylish chairs can add a sculptural touch to the decor. Normally this features a simple design but can also be

eye-catching thanks to the unexpected shapes. Depending on how the rest of the room is decorated, these chairs can either blend in or stand out.

It's important for the chairs and sofa to be comfortable. So if that is a key consideration go for a voluminous frame with luxurious fabric which looks and feels very cosy and comfortable. Choose brocade fabric for a stand out look or the simpler white linen version for a clean and fresh look. Armchairs can be perfect for cosy reading nooks. Paired with a matching footstool or ottoman. For increased comfort, add more accent pillows.

Accent chairs can be used to make a room look and feel inviting. In fact, the accent chair is can also look beautiful in other settings such as in a bedroom or home office.

A living room chair can be a source of colour. In fact, chairs in general can fulfill this role in a lot of stylish ways. One option is to choose one or more accent chairs in the selected accent colour for that particular room.

When organizing the seating in the living room, make sure you either place all the seating with the legs completely on or completely off the rug. Avoid having wobbling chairs or



creating eyesores. This is something to consider before choosing the dimensions of the rug.

Unify a seating arrangement with an area rug. However, don't forget to place the chairs with all feet or no feet at all on the rug. This also applies to sofas, sectionals and tables. It's a way to maintain a cohesive, organized and symmetrical look.

Of all the possible seating layouts that involve a sofa and accent chairs, three are the most popular. The rounded layout creates an intimate ambience. In this case, the sofa and chairs are facing each other and the chairs are turned inward a little bit. This type of layout inspires conversation and looks very inviting.

Another popular option is the square-off layout where the sofa and the chairs face each other at right angles. The classical version includes a sofa and two

chairs and variations are possible using more chairs that also occupy the sides. At the centre is the coffee table.

The L-shape layout features the seating on two sides of the room. This a cosy and casual layout which can be created both with and without a sofa. Additional furniture pieces can be added. For example, a side table can occupy the space to the side of the sofa while a chair sits on the other side. The coffee table is not a must-have, although it ties things together nicely.

One of the biggest challenges when selecting the chairs or seating in general for the living room is finding the right balance between looks and comfort. Obviously, you want the furniture to be comfortable and to serve the function is was intended for. At the same time, it should look good in context.

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Ways to use mirrors to make your home feel bigger and brighter

Using mirrors creatively in your home can make them not only useful for checking your appearance, but also for capturing light and projecting it into those darker corners, creating textural and spatial illusions, and highlighting your favourite accessories and ornaments by reflecting them into your vision from different angles.

Placing a mirror in the correct place in a room allows you to optimise natural light. To do so, place the mirror adjacent to a window to perfectly catch the angle of light and bounce it throughout the room.

Mirrors can be used to create texture in two ways. The first is by installing a textured mirror frame which adds a three dimensional level to the wall. These can act as statement furnishings in any room.

The second way to add texture in a room

is to position the mirror so it reflects a textured object already in the room – a rustic, wooden coffee table, vase or faux fur throw, for example.

Think about where you spend most of your time in that room and what angle you'd like to see. In the living room, for example, when sitting on the sofa you might like to be able to see a vase which is positioned on the surface behind you. In that case, you can position the mirror opposite the vase and

directly in your eye line.

Remember that mirrors aren't just for the indoors and, when we've put so much time and effort into creating a designer garden, why not reflect it and enjoy it from more angles?

Garden mirrors can be placed in numerous places to create a powerful effect. For instance, against the perimeter of the garden amongst blooming shrubbery can create the idea of a secret gateway.

Use the 'rule of thirds' when hanging

an overmantel mirror. Simply take the height of your mantel shelf, double it, and you have the ideal height for the mirror to go above it. The width of the mirror should not be wider than the mantel itself.

Once you have chosen the shape, colour and texture of the mirror that best compliments the room, the mirror should be positioned symmetrically without touching the ceiling.

The bigger the mirror, the more space it will appear to create.

Think carefully about

the angle of the room you want to reflect – placing a mirror opposite a window, for example, will bring both natural light and greenery into a smaller room.

In a room where you are likely to entertain, a larger mirror can increase the atmosphere in the room by giving the illusion of more guests.

A statement mirror in the entrance way of a house gives the immediate feeling of uplifting light as soon as you enter.

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NIHF LAUNCHES SEARCH FOR RISING STARS

As part of its longstanding partnership with Ulster Bank, the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation (NIHF) has announced the return of the Rising Stars competition, a celebration of emerging talent in Northern Ireland's hotel and hospitality industry.

Now a key fixture in the sector's calendar, the initiative shines a spotlight on young professionals making a meaningful impact and highlights the exciting career pathways available within the industry.

Forming a central part of Hospitality Exchange 2025, the Rising Stars Awards Lunch will take place on Tuesday 14th October, hosted by broadcaster Pamela Ballantine and headlined by hotel icon Alex Polizzi.

Best known as The Hotel Inspector, Alex Polizzi brings a wealth of experience, having launched and managed successful hotels within the renowned Polizzi family. Her current venture, The Star in Alfriston, has earned widespread acclaim for its charm and commitment to excellence. During the lunchtime session, Alex will reflect on her hospitality and television career, sharing practical insights and leadership lessons. The awards presentation will follow, honouring the sector's brightest young talent.



L-R: Hospitality Exchange Compere Pamela Ballantine; Ulster Bank Relationship Director Richard Lusty and NIHF President Vicky Green.

NIHF President Vicky Green said: "A career in hotels can open the door to a bright and rewarding future, offering both job satisfaction and competitive pay. I'm delighted to launch this year's Rising Stars competition in partnership with Ulster Bank – an initiative that not only celebrates emerging talent

but also shines a light on the breadth of career opportunities within our sector. "Hotels along with businesses in the wider tourism and hospitality sector offer a wide variety of roles that help individuals build valuable skills and lay the foundation for long-term career progression. I encourage all Federation

members to get behind the programme and support their rising stars. I'm looking forward to meeting this year's exceptional finalists." The Rising Stars Awards Lunch will take place on 14th October 2025 at the Crowne Plaza Belfast, hosted by Pamela Ballantine as part of Hospitality Exchange 2025.

The competition provides a high-profile platform to celebrate exceptional individuals, acknowledge their contributions, and raise awareness of the industry's potential as a long-term career path. Entries close on 5th September 2025. Applications can be submitted via the NIHF website: www.nihf.co.uk

Pawpularity contest: dogs vs cats

Leading vets reveal UK pup and kitty ownership hotspots

It's an age-old debate and defining characteristic: are you a cat person or a dog person? Now the UK's leading pet health plan provider, Pet Health Club, has revealed which regions are the biggest pooch and moggie lovers.

The team at Pet Health Club analysed data from across their nationwide network of over 800 vet practices*, revealing that South West England is the most dog-daft region, with the highest number of dogs per household, while Wales is the most cat-crazy area.

Dogs continue to lead as the UK's favourite pet – outnumbering cats in nearly every region by population, density, and per-household ownership – but the cats have got the cream in Wales and NI, where there are more kitties than pups per household.

While dogs are still in first place across the country, social media trends suggest cats are gaining ground. Cats dominate meme culture and feline content is shared twice as much as dog images and videos.

Cat-loving celebrities like Taylor Swift, Miley Cyrus and Ed Sheeran are potentially driving a trend for Gen-Z cat ownership, with TikTok searches for videos comparing cat breeds up by 1000% and Scottish folds (Taylor's cat of choice) the most popular searched

breed. Holly McKinley, Senior Vet at Pet Health Club, said: "While we see a huge variety of pets in our practices, dogs and cats are still very much a mainstay of British households.

"There's nothing quite like welcoming a new puppy or kitten into the family, and while those in the South West are the biggest dog lovers and those in Wales and the North East are the top cat fans, we're lucky as vets to see every day how much families across the UK love their pets.

Research has shown that certain types of people are more drawn to dogs or cats†. For example, dog owners are traditionally thought to be more extroverted, loyal and conformist, while cat owners are typically more introverted, creative and independent.

So it would appear that 'dog people' and 'cat people' really are a thing, however what matters most is that they are given a loving home and are well cared for by their owners and their vet, right through from being a puppy or kitten through to adulthood.

The top 10 UK regions for dog ownership are (per household): South West, Scotland, East of England, North West, Northern Ireland

South East, Wales, East Midlands, West Midlands, Yorkshire & The Humber. The top 10 UK regions for cat ownership are (per household):

Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland, South East, South West, West Midlands, East Midlands, East of England, North East, North West.

Pet Health Club has launched Little Paws, a puppy and kitten preventative healthcare package to help new owners in the early days. With expert support for every step of their pet's journey, owners will receive advice on training, diet and healthcare plus essentials like worming, anti-flea treatment, micro-chipping, vaccines, check-ups and more. There's also a welcome bundle worth up to £100*, and exclusive access to Pet Health Club's popular Puppy and Kitten Academy.

* Dog and cat ownership analysis taken from pet registrations at over 800 Pet Health Club vet practices in the UK in June 2025. † Gosling, S. D., Sandy, C. J., & Potter, J. (2010), 'Personalities of self-identified dog people and cat people', Anthrozoös (Vol. 23, Issue 3)

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Effortlessly electric: the all-new Nissan LEAF is the EV for everyone

Nissan Motor Co, Ltd. Recently launched the all-new LEAF. The third-generation electric vehicle (EV) benefits from over 15 years of real-world insights gained through global sales of nearly 700,000 units.

Beyond appealing to EV intenders, the all-new LEAF provides a compelling alternative for internal combustion engine (ICE) buyers with its substantially increased maximum range, enhanced charging speed and a technology suite that makes daily driving easier and enriches owners lifestyles.

The all-new LEAF is targeted to arrive at retailers across the United States from autumn, with other regions to follow.

The all-new LEAF embodies Nissan's Timeless Japanese Futurism design with a distinctive Japanese aesthetic conveyed in a simple yet powerfully modern way.

A fastback-like silhouette and features such as flush front door handles, aerotuned wheels and a flat underbody combine to ensure the all-new LEAF not only looks bold and sleek, but also offers a 0.26 drag coefficient for U.S. and Japan models, and an even more impressive 0.25 for European variants.²

The interior is spacious with an almost entirely flat floor courtesy of Nissan's CMF-EV platform and the wide horizontal instrument panel appears to be floating.

A Nissan-first Dimming Panoramic Roof featuring heat shielding with embedded Polymer Dispersed Liquid Crystal (PDLC) technology allows owners to enjoy natural light



and year-round comfort at the touch of a button.

The all-new LEAF delivers a responsive, ultra-smooth drive. The all-new, 3-in-1 EV powertrain with an integrated motor, inverter and reducer is 10% smaller than its predecessor and features Nissan's unique motor control, which enhances refinement.

The new motor, paired with a new, high-rigidity motor-mount bracket, supports a 75-percent reduction in motor vibration compared to the outgoing model.

For select regions, newly available Intelligent Distance Control Assist helps intuitively maintain a set distance from the vehicle in front

while driving in city traffic and also optimizes regenerative braking.

The all-new LEAF is available with two liquid-cooled lithium-ion battery options, both of which offer thermal conditioning functionality.

Select models are powered by batteries with 52 kWh of usable capacity, supporting an output of 130 kW and 345 Nm of torque. Larger 75 kWh batteries are also available, providing 160 kW and 355 Nm of torque.

An enhanced thermal recovery and management system harvests heat created by the onboard charger (OBC) to warm up the battery, increasing its regeneration potential in

cold weather.

Additionally, on applicable grades a new intelligent navigation-linked thermal conditioning function optimizes battery cooling based on the selected drive route.

When connected to a fast charger, owners can replenish 10-80% of their charge in as little as 35 minutes.

The all-new, third generation Nissan LEAF will be assembled at the Tochigi Plant in Japan, as well as at Nissan's state-of-the-art production facility in Sunderland, northeast England.

Further details including pricing will be provided closer to the start of sales in each respective market.

KIA EV3 NAMED AUTOTRADER'S CAR OF THE YEAR FOR 2025

The Kia EV3 has collected two major award wins at the Autotrader Drivers' Choice Awards 2025: 'Best Mainstream Electric Car' and overall 'Car of the Year'.

The awards, formerly known as the Autotrader New Car Awards, feature 25 categories. Finalists and overall winners are determined by the real-world opinions of more than 225,000 UK car owners, who completed an online survey sharing exactly what they think of their car. Every vehicle is rated across 16 different criteria, from reliability and performance to appearance and running costs. Owners were also asked about their overall satisfaction with their car and how likely they would be to recommend it to others.

The EV3 impressed UK customers for offering great value and a complete, refined package, with owners naming the model both the EV that represents the best of the best in terms of 'mainstream' vehicles, and the best car overall of 2025. The Kia EV3 is priced from £33,005 and offers up to 375 miles on a single charge* on the WLTP 'combined'



cycle, a range of three competitively equipped trim levels, and space for five occupants.

Erin Baker, Autotrader's Editorial Director, said: "It may be Kia's most affordable current EV on sale, but the EV3 still manages to pack a premium punch. It scored top marks for the quality of its features which, combined with eye-catching looks and a great driving experience, has made the EV3 a massive hit with its owners. One told us: 'This was my

first ever electric car, and it really stood out among all the other EVs, particularly within my price bracket. It's quirky, futuristic, packed full of brilliant features, and it's really easy to drive. Plus, I can get the whole family in it with room to spare. We absolutely love it.' Congratulations Kia on a very well-deserved win."

Kia is no stranger to success at the Autotrader Drivers' Choice Awards. Last year, the Kia EV6 was

named 'Best Car for Families' and 'Best Car for Dog Owners', whilst in 2023 the Soul EV collected 'Best Value Electric Car', and EV6 was named 'New Car of the Year'.

The EV3 is soon to be joined by the EV4 and EV5. Both models will embark on a nationwide tour of 'Kia Electric Experience' events across the Kia UK dealer network, starting 8 July, and showcasing the latest of Kia's electric offerings to customers.

Essential Car Maintenance for Autumn

As the vibrant greens of summer give way to the golden hues of autumn, the change in seasons brings with it unique challenges for your vehicle.

Cooler temperatures, increased rainfall, and falling leaves can all impact your car's performance and safety. Taking a proactive approach to car maintenance now can save you headaches and costly repairs down the line. Here's a rundown of essential checks to ensure your car is autumn-ready.

Check Your Tyres: Grip and Pressure Are Key

Your tyres are your car's only point of contact with the road, and their condition is paramount for autumn driving.

- Tread Depth: Aim for at least 3mm of tread depth for optimal grip in wet conditions. If your tyres are nearing the legal limit (typically 1.6mm in the UK), consider replacing them before the wet weather sets in.

- Tyre Pressure: As temperatures drop, so does tyre pressure. Check your tyre pressures regularly (at least once a month) when the tyres are cold, and inflate them to the manufacturer's recommended levels. Correct pressure improves handling, fuel efficiency, and tyre longevity.

- Punctures and Sidewall Damage: Inspect your tyres for any bulges, cracks, or embedded objects that could lead to a sudden deflation.

Inspect Your Wipers and Washer Fluid: Clear Vision is Non-Negotiable

Autumn often brings more rain and even early morning mist.

- Wiper Blades: Worn or cracked wiper blades won't clear your windshield effectively, leading to reduced visibility. Replace

them if they leave streaks or chatter across the glass.

- Washer Fluid: Top up your washer fluid reservoir with a good quality screen wash that includes an antifreeze agent. This prevents the fluid from freezing in colder temperatures and helps to clear grime and salt from the road.

Test Your Lights: Be Seen and See Clearly

Daylight hours shorten significantly in autumn, making properly functioning lights crucial.

- All Lights: Check all exterior lights – headlights (high and low beam), tail lights, brake lights, indicators, and fog lights – to ensure they are working correctly. Replace any blown bulbs promptly.

- Headlight Clarity: Over

time, headlight lenses can become cloudy. Consider a headlight restoration kit if yours are looking dull, as this can significantly improve light output.

Examine Your Brakes: Stopping Power Matters

Wet and leafy roads can significantly increase stopping distances.

Brake Pads and Discs: Listen for any squealing or grinding noises when you brake, and pay attention to any changes in pedal feel (e.g., spongy or vibrating). If you have any concerns, have your brakes inspected by a qualified mechanic. They will check the thickness of your brake pads and the condition of your discs.

Check Your Battery: Don't Get Caught Out by the Cold

Cold weather puts extra strain on your car's battery.

- Battery Age: If your battery is over three years old, it's worth having it tested.

- Terminals: Look for any signs of corrosion on the battery terminals, and ensure they are clean and securely fastened.

Top Up Your Coolant/Antifreeze: Protect Against Freezing

Your coolant system not only keeps your engine from overheating but also prevents the water in the system from freezing in cold temperatures.

- Level and Strength: Check your coolant reservoir and ensure the level is between the min and max marks. If you're unsure about the strength of your antifreeze, a mechanic can test it for you.

- Clear Out Debris: Protect



Against Clogs and Corrosion

Falling leaves and other organic matter can accumulate in various parts of your car.

- Wiper Scuttle/Drain Channels: Clear leaves from the area around your windscreen wipers and the drain channels beneath your bonnet. Blockages here can

lead to water ingress into the cabin or affect electrical components.

- Radiator Grille: Remove any leaves or debris from your car's front grille, as these can restrict airflow to the radiator and lead to overheating.

By taking the time to perform these essential

autumn maintenance checks, you'll not only enhance your driving safety but also extend the life of your vehicle, ensuring a smoother and more reliable journey through the changing season. If in doubt about any of these checks, consult a professional mechanic.



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You're here because you've probably noticed a stench, damage to electrical fittings, or there's a lot of water sitting on the ground outside your home.

The following are often causes of a blocked drain. Leaves (covering the grid or inside the drain); Food waste, fat or oil from the kitchen sink; Soil or sand due to a collapsed drain; Objects lodged in the pipes; Tree root damage or Toilet roll build-up.

Before deciding what to do - whether to repair yourself or hire a professional - you'll

need to assess the damage. Take a look at the drain and see what you're dealing with. It might be that the blockage is caused by leaf litter on the grid, in which case you can just clear it by hand. In most blocked drain cases though, you'll need to lift the cover and take a look inside.

To lift a cover you might need a screwdriver or a piece of rope. Once you have access to the pipe below, you're looking to see if the blockage is visible or out of sight, this will give you an idea of the work and tools needed to clear it. If, after assessing the



cause of the blockage, you're confident that you can clear it yourself, then you can source the tools needed for the job. Different clogs require different solutions to clear them. If the blockage isn't too serious - using a solution is an obvious first step. If that doesn't work you'll need: Rubber gloves with long sleeves; Goggles and a face mask; Drain rods; Bucket and bin bags and a Pressure hose.

Armed with the tools and equipment above, including the all-important safety gear, you can take action

yourself if your outside drain keeps blocking.

Bear in mind that clearing an outside drain without the help of a professional is only possible if it's not too clogged or too complex a job.

Remove any blockages - This is all about doing the obvious and simple stuff first, as that might be all it takes to clear a blocked drain outside your house.

Put on your long-sleeve gloves, goggles and face mask, remove any debris you can easily reach, such as leaves, soap scum or food waste, and place it in your bucket or bin

bag.

Clear the blockage with your rods - If clearing the drain by hand doesn't work, then it's time for the rods.

Start with one and carefully insert down the drain and into the pipe below.

If you feel resistance, twist the rod into the blockage with sufficient pressure until you break through. Can't feel it? Connect more rods until you find the blockage.

Clean up the debris - You don't want to do all that dirty work only to have to do it all over again in a few days, so clear up any material you removed and use the opportunity to clear away anything nearby that might cause another blockage. Again, pop it in your bucket or bin bag.

It's important to take care when using rods or any kind of invasive equipment

down your outside drain and pipes, as any damage caused could result in a hefty repair bill and a lot of upheaval to access the area.

To avoid this, or if your drain won't unblock, it's always advisable to call in a professional to take care of the job and it might not cost as much as you think.

On average you'll pay £60 for a call out, with drain rodding costing £80, jetting £175 and a drain CCTV survey for really difficult jobs costing on average £250. They will have the equipment, know-how and insurance to unblock your outside drain efficiently and safely. Plus, you don't get dirty!

For more information see <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/expert-advice/outside-drain-blocked-problem-solve/>

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How to find a good tradesperson!

The majority of tradespeople are hard-working, reliable and will do a good job, but we've all heard of the cowboy horror stories.

Let's help you to avoid the bad eggs with this guide that looks at how to find a good tradesperson in your area.

Request quotes from at least 3 tradespeople

With all home improvement projects, we always recommend obtaining at least three quotes from different tradespeople in your area. You'll want to shop around to make sure you're paying a fair price for the work.

Make sure they have the relevant qualifications

To get the best results, it's important to hire tradespeople who are dedicated to their trade. Look for a tradesperson with relevant qualifications and accreditations, and check if they're part of national trade schemes.

Choose tradespeople with local experience

Hiring a tradesperson with a lot of local experience can be really valuable. They'll have a working knowledge of local planning permission, have access to a local network of suppliers and labour, and will be close at hand should you need them during the course of your project.

Ask for customer references (and contact them)

We do this to make sure a tradesperson's reviews on our website are real, but there's certainly no harm in you following up on customer references.

When you've found a tradesperson (or tradespeople) you think could be right for the



job, ask them to provide you with references from previous customers about the quality of the tradesperson's work, what it was like to work with them, and would they hire them again.

Ask these 10 questions... Before you hire a tradesperson, it's a good idea to meet with them in person to discuss the work you need them to do. That way, you can find out more about their experience and approach to their trade.

If you want to know how to find a tradesperson you can trust, ask potential candidates these questions:

1. How long have you been working in the business?

2. What qualifications and/or accreditations do you have?

3. Have you done many projects like this before?

4. Can you show me examples of previous projects that you've worked on?

5. Do you have appropriate insurance, and can you provide valid certificates?

6. Could you provide me with references from previous customers for me to contact?

7. Do you offer a customer satisfaction guarantee?

8. How long will it take you to complete the work? And when can you start?

9. How much will it cost, and what are the payment terms?

10. What steps do you take to keep your work on

schedule and within budget?

The average cost of a tradesperson will depend on the trade, the nature of the work, and where they are located (labour costs in London tend to be higher than in the North).

To help you plan a budget, here are some average rates you can expect to pay:

- Plumber costs – £40 - £60 Per hour or around £350 per day

- Carpenter prices– £30 - £45 per hour

- Builder rates – £50 per hour or £400 per day

- Electrician rates – £50 per hour or £400 per day

- Painter and decorator prices– £250- £400 per day

For more info see <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/hiring-guides/find-good-tradesperson/>

Autumn Tasks in the Home

Autumn cleaning is about creating a cosy, functional, and organised space for the winter months. Focus on tasks that ready your home for the cold.

- Windows and Doors:

Inspect every window and exterior door in your home for signs of drafts or gaps. A simple way to do this is by running your hand along the frame to feel for cold air or holding a lit candle near the edges to see if the flame flickers. If you notice leaks, apply fresh weather stripping, install a draft excluder, or use caulk to seal gaps. This not only prevents heat from escaping but also keeps cold air out, improving comfort and reducing your heating bills. Before winter sets in, give your windows a thorough clean inside and out—clear glass lets in more natural light during short winter days, which can brighten your home and help slightly with warmth.

- Heating System:

Before temperatures drop, arrange for a professional to service your furnace, boiler, or heat pump. A routine inspection ensures your heating system runs efficiently, reducing the risk of breakdowns during the coldest months. Replace or clean furnace filters to maintain good airflow and air quality. If you have radiators, bleed them by opening the valve slightly



until water starts to appear—this removes trapped air, allowing them to heat evenly. For programmable thermostats, check the settings so your heating schedule matches your winter lifestyle.

- Fireplace and Chimney:

For wood-burning fireplaces, have the chimney swept by a certified professional to remove soot and creosote, which can cause dangerous chimney fires. This is also a good time to check for any cracks or damage in the chimney structure. Stockpile dry, seasoned firewood in a covered location, or, if you

have a gas or electric fireplace, test it to ensure it's working properly before the first cold snap.

- Gutters and Downspouts:

Clear leaves, twigs, and debris from your gutters and downspouts before heavy autumn rains arrive. Blocked gutters can cause water to overflow, potentially damaging your roof, walls, and foundation. Check that downspouts direct water at least three feet away from your home's base to prevent pooling and erosion. Installing gutter guards can help reduce future cleaning needs.

- Outdoor Furniture

and Garden: Give your outdoor furniture a good clean to remove dirt, mold, or pollen buildup, then cover it with weather-resistant covers to protect it through the winter. Store cushions and fabrics indoors to prevent dampness and mildew.

Mow your lawn one last time before growth stops, trim back perennials, and plant spring bulbs like tulips and daffodils before the ground freezes. Drain garden hoses completely, coil them, and store them away. Shut off and drain any outdoor taps to avoid frozen pipes, which can cause costly bursts.

How To Transform Your kitchen Without Breaking The Bank

Kitchen renovations don't have to break the bank; even small changes can make a huge difference.

Add New Appliances

Appliances can double as both functional pieces of tech and decorative accessories. There is a wealth of choice when it comes to kitchen appliances and there is something for you no matter what your budget is. An orange fridge might be too bold and too expensive for most, but why not mix it up with a cherry red kettle or a cobalt blue toaster.

Mix Up Your Lighting

You would be surprised what

a difference that changing you lighting can do to a space. Once again the sheer abundance of options online and in store allows every style and budget to be catered for.

You can easily transform the mood of your kitchen simply by adding or changing your light source, drawing attention to certain areas and avoiding others.

By simply avoiding the sterile bright lighting that is often used, you can create a moody, subdued

style in your kitchen that will change the mood of everyone that enters. Small changes here and there such as these can make a huge difference to the look and feel of your kitchen.

Upgrade Your Fixtures

Get rid of those age-beaten handles and replace them with new, metallic fixtures to immediately upgrade your kitchen. Rust and damaged items such as handles can make your kitchen look far older than it should and changing these can be

a cheap way of giving your kitchen that lift it so badly needs.

Rusty taps are yet another easy fix that can do wonders for your kitchen. It is far too easy to put this off but if replaced it can breathe new life into that kitchen and give it the fresh look it deserves.

Storage

All too often you can't even appreciate the kitchen that you do have because every inch of the surface is cluttered. This can be easily remedied with the proper use of

storage. Once you are able to clear the space it will begin to feel larger, brighter and more modern. Storage solutions can be found very easily through racks, baskets, hooks and magnets – they do not have to break the bank.

Replace Your Counter-Top

If your budget permits, this can work wonders for transforming your kitchen and it is not always as expensive as you might think. Laminate kitchen counter tops range

in prices and could be that new addition that sparks life back into your kitchen. You might even be surprised by the options available, so why not have a look!

Easy Fix For Cabinets

One of the most common mistakes in kitchen design is using the wrong colour of paint from the beginning. Picking too dark a tone will make the space feel small and absorb the natural light which will seriously affect the mood of the room.

However, this is an easy fix. With a simple fresh coat of paint your kitchen can be transformed. Choosing a light, neutral tone such as white will make the room feel larger, brighter and more modern by

reflecting the natural light.

Interior designers often suggest that removing cabinet doors to create open-plan shelving can really open a kitchen up and emphasise all the space you have.



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