

What makes me
unhappy?
Depression.
Uncertainty.
Crowds. Parties.
Lack of sunlight



Monty Don, gardening expert

Born in Germany, Don, 62, was raised in Hampshire and educated at Cambridge University. He ran a costume jewellery business before becoming the gardening expert on *This Morning* in 1989. In 2003, he was made the main presenter on BBC's *Gardeners' World* and since 2011, the show has been broadcast from his garden, Longmeadow, in Herefordshire. He has written more than 20 gardening books and discusses the latest, *Paradise Gardens*, at the Hay festival on 2 June. He is married with three children.

What is your earliest memory?

Being dried by my mother after a bath. I put my head on her shoulder and smelled bonfire smoke in her hair and patted her back. It is the only physical affection I remember.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Vanity and an absurd competitiveness. Not to mention having to control everything.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

This still makes my toes curl. A banker whose garden I had helped with rang to arrange a visit. As the conversation finished, I meant to give my love to his wife but it came out as a rather high-pitched: "Love you!"

Aside from a property, what's the most expensive thing you've bought?

A tractor, 12 years ago. Bright yellow and still brilliant.

What makes you unhappy?

Depression. Uncertainty. Crowds. Parties. Lack of sunlight.

If you could bring something extinct back to life, what would you choose?

The absence of mechanical noise in the countryside (with my lawnmowers, I am aware how hypocritical that is).

What is your favourite smell?

The nape of my wife Sarah's neck.

What is your favourite word?

Tilth. Followed closely by home.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Watching box sets of *Family Guy* with dogs on my lap while eating a junk chocolate pudding and drinking grappa.

What do you owe your parents?

I had a difficult relationship with my parents, who died young, but they instilled self-discipline and a sense of honour and loyalty and accountability. I'm grateful for that.

To whom would you most like to say sorry, and why?

My children. I was away an awful lot when they were little and not very good at being a father when I was around. I could have done better.

What is the worst job you've done?

I once had to dig a fire escape from a basement in a health club. It took two weeks.

What has been your biggest disappointment?

At the time, losing our business, home and all our possessions in 1991 after the failure of our jewellery company. But if that had not happened then other good things would not have happened, either.

What is the closest you've come to death?

Despite a stroke, cancer as a child and various dramas with chainsaws and tractors, the closest was probably when I choked on a lamb chop 25 years ago. Sarah performed the Heimlich manoeuvre and the lamb shot out.

What single thing would improve the quality of your life?

Getting my 21-year-old knees back.

Tell us a secret

Gardening is easy. Stick it in the ground the right way up and most plants will grow perfectly well ■

Rosanna Greenstreet