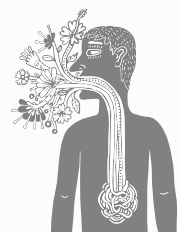


# PODCASTING for garden writers

Joff Elphick

an introduction



## **PODCASTING FOR GARDEN WRITERS**

### **(or bloggers, gardeners, and other nice people)**

If the amount of calls I've received about podcasting are an indication of anything it's that there's a real hunger and interest in this relatively new area of garden media. Perhaps you've been writing a blog for years and have started to think now is a time for change. Maybe you're getting no traction in a highly populated arena and young Johnny-come-lately is passing you by with his witty repartee and army of social media followers. Maybe you just feel it's time for change and your voice on the airwaves is just what the world has been waiting for!! There can be a number of reasons for looking at podcasting as an alternative or addition to your written word, a particularly compelling one being that for every 650 blogs (some say more) there is only one podcast. Daunting odds if you're a blogger.

The first thing you will probably want to know is 'will podcasting cost me anything?' You may be surprised to hear that it can be done for no financial outlay using equipment you already have and online services that are free to use. Whilst this may seem attractive, bear in mind that 'free' is not always a good business model and many companies have gone to the wall when offering an unpaid-for set-up; just as you were becoming successful with thousands of listeners paying for more, your podcast and hard work disappears overnight!! If however you want to take matters seriously be prepared to trowel out about \$5 a month. There are other price tiers with other benefits, the most common being improved stats giving you far more detail and insight into your hard earned listenership as well as a greater monthly download allowance.

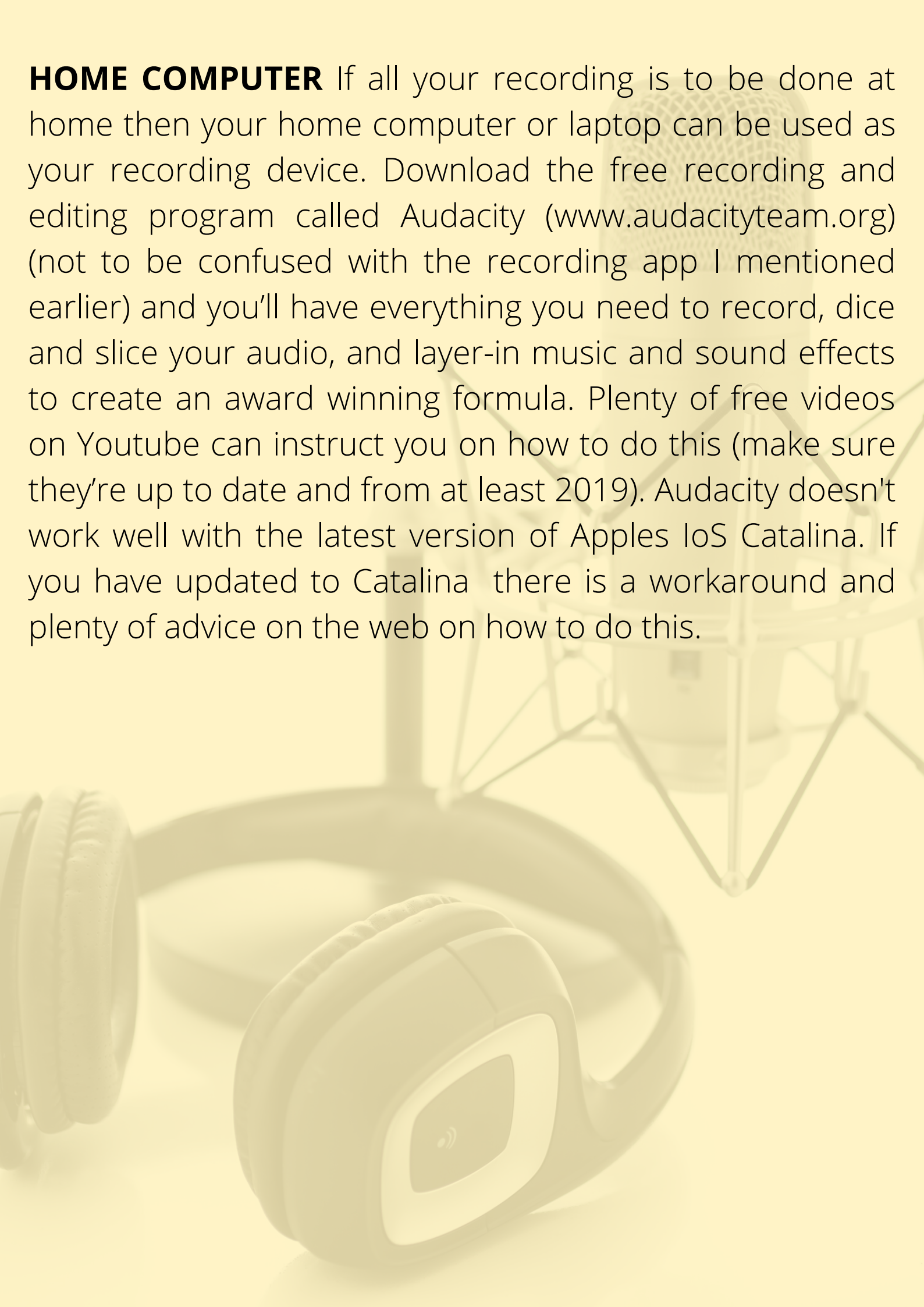
# RECORDING DEVICES



**SMARTPHONE** Combined with a suitable voice recording app a smartphone can give you pretty decent recordings-I like one called **Auphonic**. It's simple but also gives you the option of recording in top quality formats. Find it in your app store. Don't try to use your phone or any recording device outside on a windy day, wind will ruin your recording. For a similar reason when you talk into your phone, talk over the microphone area and not directly into it. This will avoid 'plosives' , an annoying effect that happens when fast moving air (from your breath) passes over the microphone capsule causing a rumbling sound that will make your words inaudible or muffled. You can also help overcome this by putting one of your favourite fluffy socks over your phone. If you want improved audio an appropriate lightning jack adaptor and a regular microphone can be used with your phone. iPhone specific mics are also available. These will be a step up in quality from your phone's built in technology.

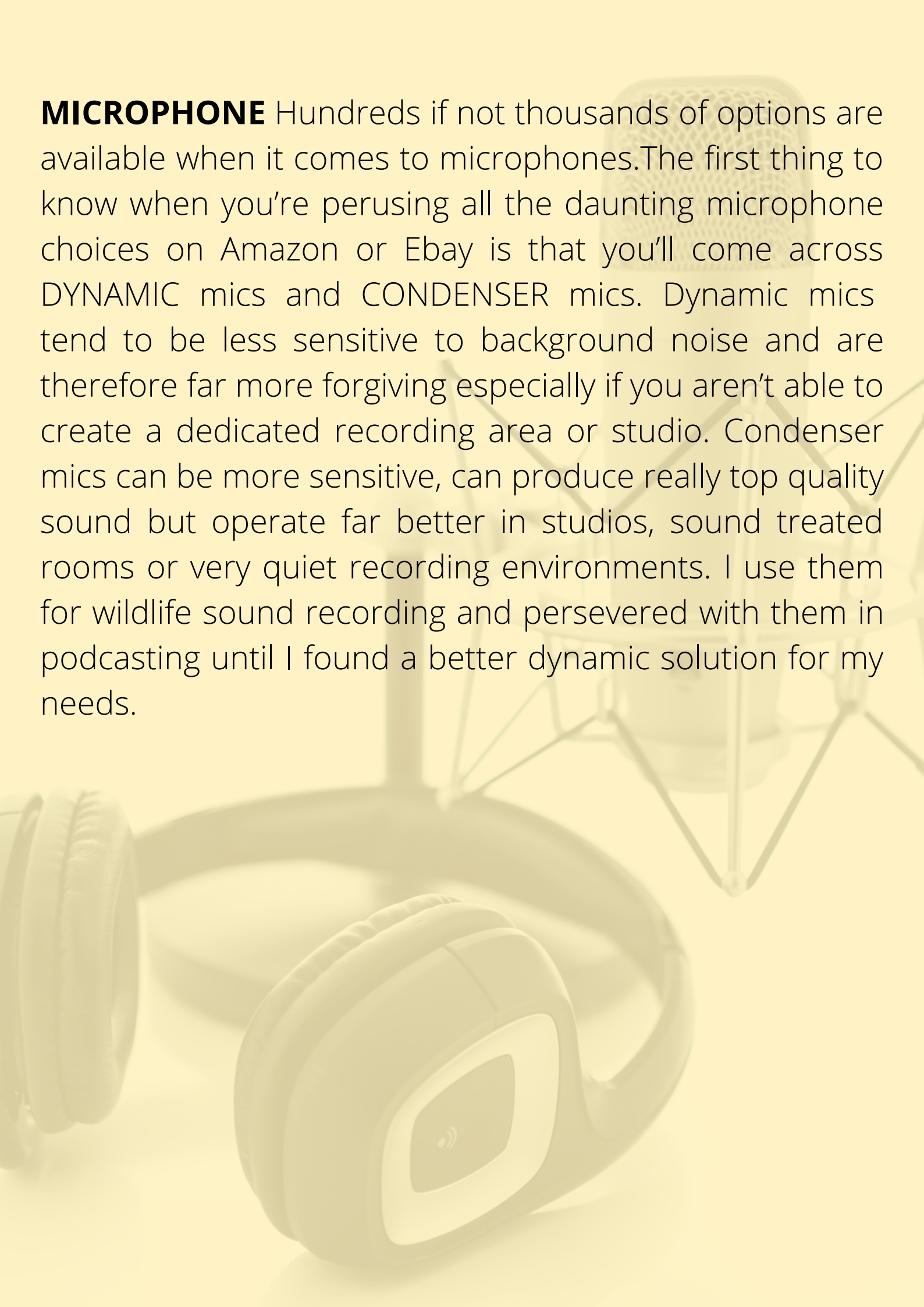
**HANDHELD DIGITAL RECORDER** Good quality hand held recorders are widely available these days. Look at the ZOOM range of recorders starting with the **Zoom H1n** (£80) favoured by Lee Connelly aka The Skinny Jean Gardener ([www.skinnyjeangardener.co.uk](http://www.skinnyjeangardener.co.uk)) Julianne Robertson from the Scottish Garden Podcast ([www.juliannerobertson.com](http://www.juliannerobertson.com)) and yours truly. Sarah Wilson of award winning 'Roots and All' podcast ([www.rootsandall.co.uk](http://www.rootsandall.co.uk)) uses a **ZOOM H5** (£210) while Saul Walker and Lucy Chamberlain from the Talkingheads podcast ([www.talkingheadspodcast.co.uk](http://www.talkingheadspodcast.co.uk)) use a **Zoom H4n** at £199. John Jones from the recently launched Master my Garden Podcast ([www.mastermygarden.com](http://www.mastermygarden.com)) also favours this efficient workhorse. Michael Perry and Ellen Mary from the ever popular Plant Based Podcast ([www.theplantbasedpodcast.net](http://www.theplantbasedpodcast.net)) use the reliable little brother of the H4n the **H2n** at £130. If you have the budget then a **Sound Devices MixPre3ii** (£699) with its super quiet Kashmir pre-amps will give you brilliant clean audio when combined with a suitable microphone. I use this recorder but still love using my simple Zoom H1n. All of these recorders have fairly decent built in mics (except the Mixpre3ii) but you can plug a handheld microphone into them too. Other secondhand options can be found on Ebay; I particularly like the ediol R09hr handheld recorder from Roland which will set you back about £85.

**HOME COMPUTER** If all your recording is to be done at home then your home computer or laptop can be used as your recording device. Download the free recording and editing program called Audacity ([www.audacityteam.org](http://www.audacityteam.org)) (not to be confused with the recording app I mentioned earlier) and you'll have everything you need to record, dice and slice your audio, and layer-in music and sound effects to create an award winning formula. Plenty of free videos on Youtube can instruct you on how to do this (make sure they're up to date and from at least 2019). Audacity doesn't work well with the latest version of Apples iOS Catalina. If you have updated to Catalina there is a workaround and plenty of advice on the web on how to do this.



# MICROPHONE





**MICROPHONE** Hundreds if not thousands of options are available when it comes to microphones. The first thing to know when you're perusing all the daunting microphone choices on Amazon or Ebay is that you'll come across DYNAMIC mics and CONDENSER mics. Dynamic mics tend to be less sensitive to background noise and are therefore far more forgiving especially if you aren't able to create a dedicated recording area or studio. Condenser mics can be more sensitive, can produce really top quality sound but operate far better in studios, sound treated rooms or very quiet recording environments. I use them for wildlife sound recording and persevered with them in podcasting until I found a better dynamic solution for my needs.



Dynamic models to look out for are the **Samson Q2U** (£65), **ATR2100** (£75) or the new **ATR2100x** with usb C connector (£110 est), **Rode Podmic** (£100).

Jane Perrone ([www.janeperrone.com](http://www.janeperrone.com)) garden writer and presenter of the hugely popular 'On The Ledge' houseplant podcast upgraded to the beautiful **Rode Podcaster** mic (£145) about a year ago and loves it. Fay Edwards ([www.fayedwards.com](http://www.fayedwards.com)) of the GardenHead podcast uses the **ATR2100** loving it's sound quality and ease of use with a simple usb connection to her computer. Ben Dark of The Garden Log ([www.bendark.com](http://www.bendark.com)) uses this mic too but puts it through a **Focusrite Scarlet Solo** (£90) interface, a small bit of hardware that gives some adjustable gain in volume as well as enabling any microphone with an xlr input (a common connector for professional equipment) to be attached to a computer via a USB connection. The **Shure SM58** (£85) is a real workhorse of a mic and is often favoured by musicians who may handle it roughly when on stage. With an xlr connection you'll need an interface like the Focusrite mentioned above to be able to attach it to your computer. Finally the **Heil PR40** (£330) is a top-end xlr mic for podcasting and is so highly regarded that if you whisper its name quietly you can sometimes hear angels singing. So I'm told!! Try it now. But quietly.

If you want to use your iPhone and still want top quality audio go for the **Shure MV88** (£120). It plugs straight into the phones lightning connector.

If you would prefer to not worry about holding the mic altogether then a clip on microphone similar to the ones you see news presenters wearing on their lapel might be for you. Michael and Ellen Mary from 'The Plant Based Podcast' sometimes use this type of mic as does Tamsin Westhorpe with her 'Fresh From The Pod' podcast from Candide ([www.candidegardening.com](http://www.candidegardening.com)) They're called lapel mics or lavalier mics; lav mics for short. The **Rode Smartlav+** (£50) is a good choice in this instance.



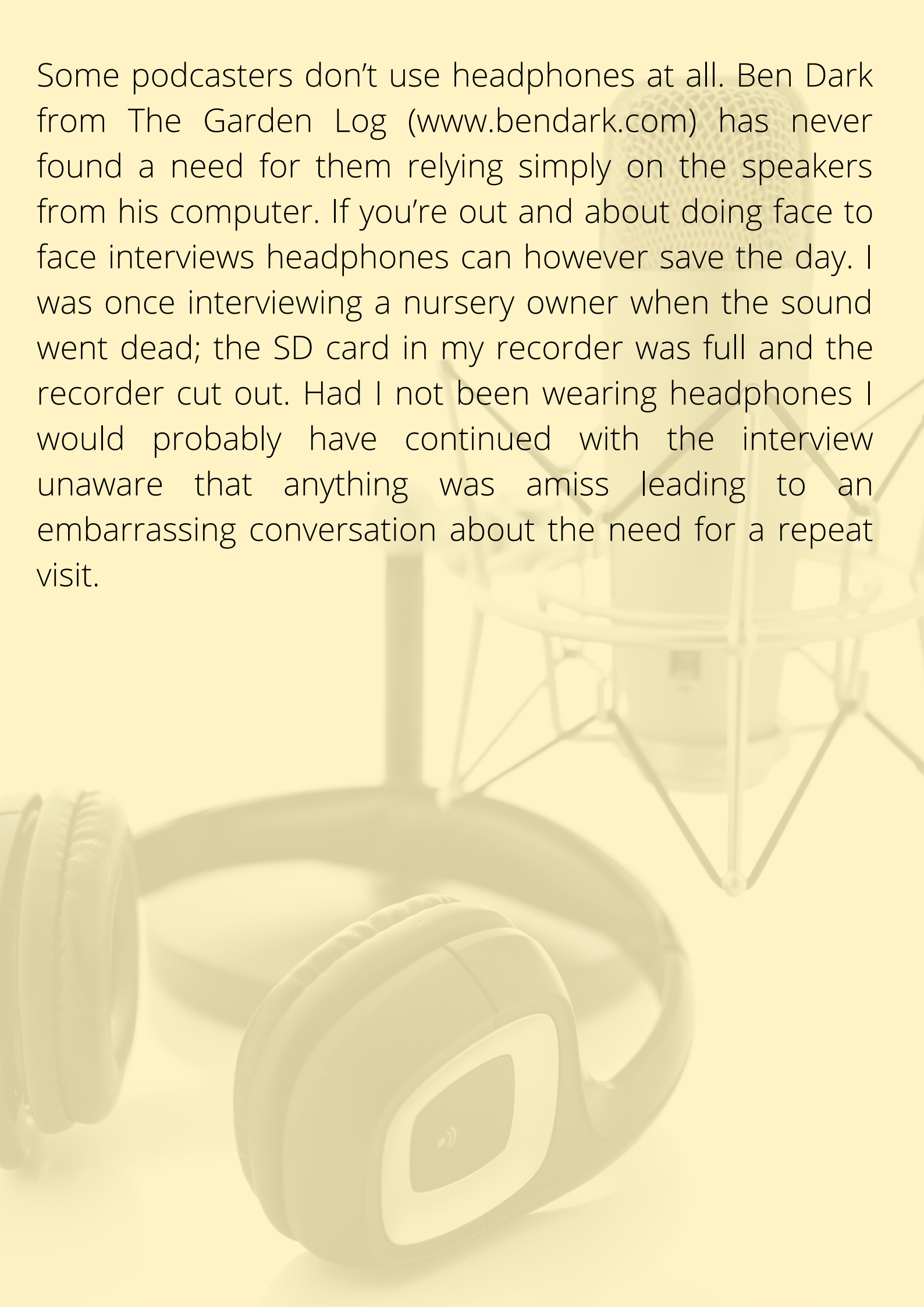
# HEADPHONES



A pair of headphones and a microphone are faintly visible in the background of the page. The headphones are at the bottom, and the microphone is at the top right. The background is a solid light yellow color.

Audio engineers would probably tell you that headphones are of the utmost importance. They're kind of right if you want to produce top quality audio. It's worth remembering however that most listeners will be experiencing your podcast through their car stereo system, their phone speakers, or on their airpods or earbuds while mowing the lawn; not exactly hi fidelity. Therefore whatever you have available or can afford will do a pretty good job. I use a pair of **Beyer Dynamic DT 770 pro** headphones (£100) as does Julianne Robertson. Jane Perrone likes her **Superlux HD-662** Closed Back Studio Headphones which you can pick up for around £40. Others like John Jones from the recently launched podcast *Master My Garden* ([www.mastermygarden.com](http://www.mastermygarden.com)) and Saul Walker and Lucy Chamberlain of *Talking Heads* podcast ([www.talkingheadspodcast.co.uk](http://www.talkingheadspodcast.co.uk)) use whatever is available. Take your pick from the wide range of other headphones on offer. Be aware that some of the models designed for listening to music can over accentuate the bass. Try to avoid these if you can.

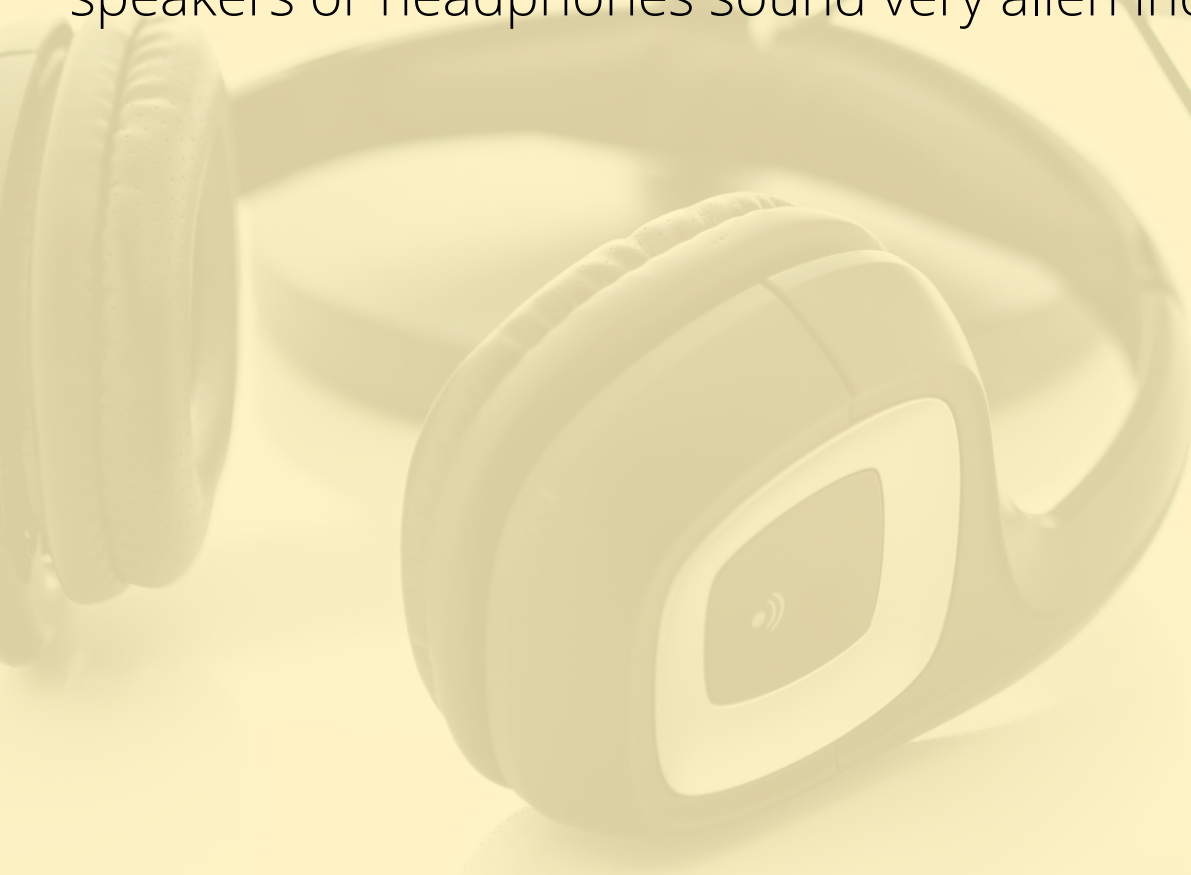
Some podcasters don't use headphones at all. Ben Dark from The Garden Log ([www.bendark.com](http://www.bendark.com)) has never found a need for them relying simply on the speakers from his computer. If you're out and about doing face to face interviews headphones can however save the day. I was once interviewing a nursery owner when the sound went dead; the SD card in my recorder was full and the recorder cut out. Had I not been wearing headphones I would probably have continued with the interview unaware that anything was amiss leading to an embarrassing conversation about the need for a repeat visit.



# EDITING



You've recorded your masterpiece and now need to edit the audio file to remove your stumbles, mumbles, um's and ah's, plus the odd swear word that crept out on the fifth attempt at pronouncing *Rubus cockburnianus* without laughing!! You might want to insert a spoken mention for your sponsor or layer in some music or sound effects to add drama or a sense of place. Your editing program can also remove a lot of unwanted background noise. This is probably the first time that you may have heard your own voice like you've never heard it before; you probably won't like it!! Don't worry. Everybody feels the same the first time they listen to their own warblings. When we speak normally we don't just hear ourselves through our ears but also via the bones of our head and jaw making a recording listened to through speakers or headphones sound very alien indeed.



Editing software or a DAW (Digital Audio workstation) comes in numerous forms. Most people will be familiar with **GARAGEBAND**, free on most Mac computers. It's not ideal, having been designed mainly for music production but some people use it very proficiently. The Skinny Jean Gardener, Lee Connelly ([www.skinnyjeangardener.co.uk](http://www.skinnyjeangardener.co.uk)) uses GarageBand. Being a keen musician he finds it ideal for his requirements. John Jones from Master my Garden is also a fan of Garageband. By far one of the most popular editing programs is **AUDACITY** mentioned above in HOME COMPUTER. It's free to download and can do most if not all of the things you'll need. Jane Perrone, Ben Dark, and Fay Edwards all like to use Audacity as do I. Other alternatives are **PROTOOLS** a top end DAW that is available as a basic free download or £500 full version which is very popular with experienced editors. **REAPER** offers a free trail that can be constantly extended or purchased for about £50. Saul Walker and Lucy Chamberlain from The Talking Head Podcast are fans of Reaper. **Hindenburg Journalist** ([www.hindenburg.com](http://www.hindenburg.com) £78 and a free 30 day trial) is designed specifically for the spoken word and is the one DAW I would most like to try. There are plenty of other lesser known DAWS to choose from if none of the above suit you.

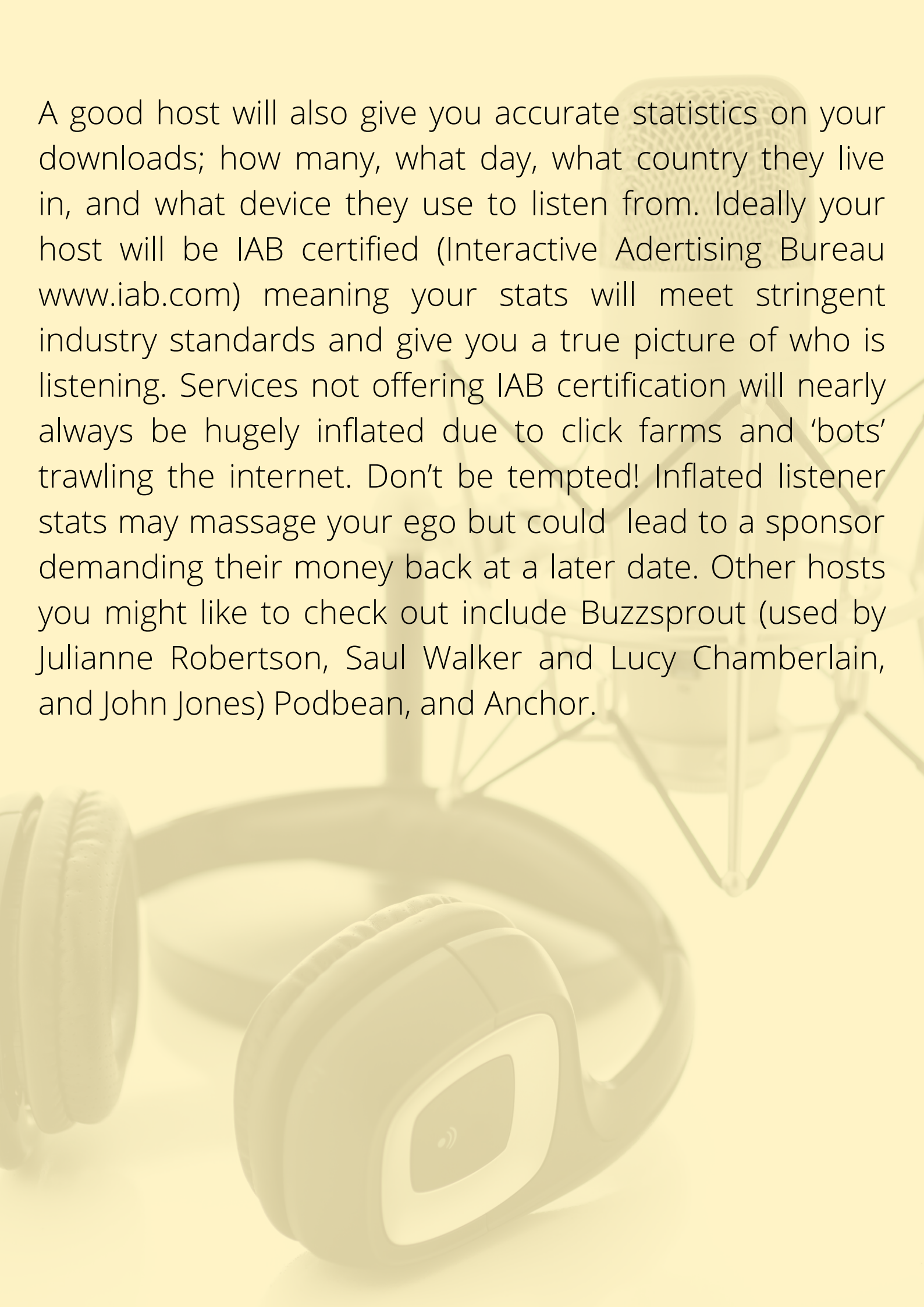


# HOST



You'll need a host to get your podcast out into the big wide world. Your host will get you onto Spotify and Apple Podcasts (formerly iTunes) from which a large number of other podcast aggregators will take your RSS feed (a long piece of code, something bloggers are probably familiar with) and distribute it through their network. There's probably several dozen hosts to choose from but there's no doubt the top two are **Libsyn** and **Blubrry**. Blubrry is especially good for people with wordpress sites. Fay Edwards from GardenHead podcast uses Blubrry for this specific reason. Both offer various tiers and pricing depending on your needs. Expect to pay \$5 (they're usually quoted in dollars) upwards per month. I have spoken via Skype to Rob Walch, Vice President of Libsyn and twisted his arm for all you horties to have up to **two months free hosting**. Type in **Garden** when signing up. He'll give me a few dollars for my trouble which I'll pass on to the amazing **Greenfingers Charity** ([www.greenfingerscharity.org.uk](http://www.greenfingerscharity.org.uk)) You'll save as much as \$80 in the higher tier. Rob told me to get you to sign up for the tier that amply covers your requirements. You can always reduce it when you start paying.

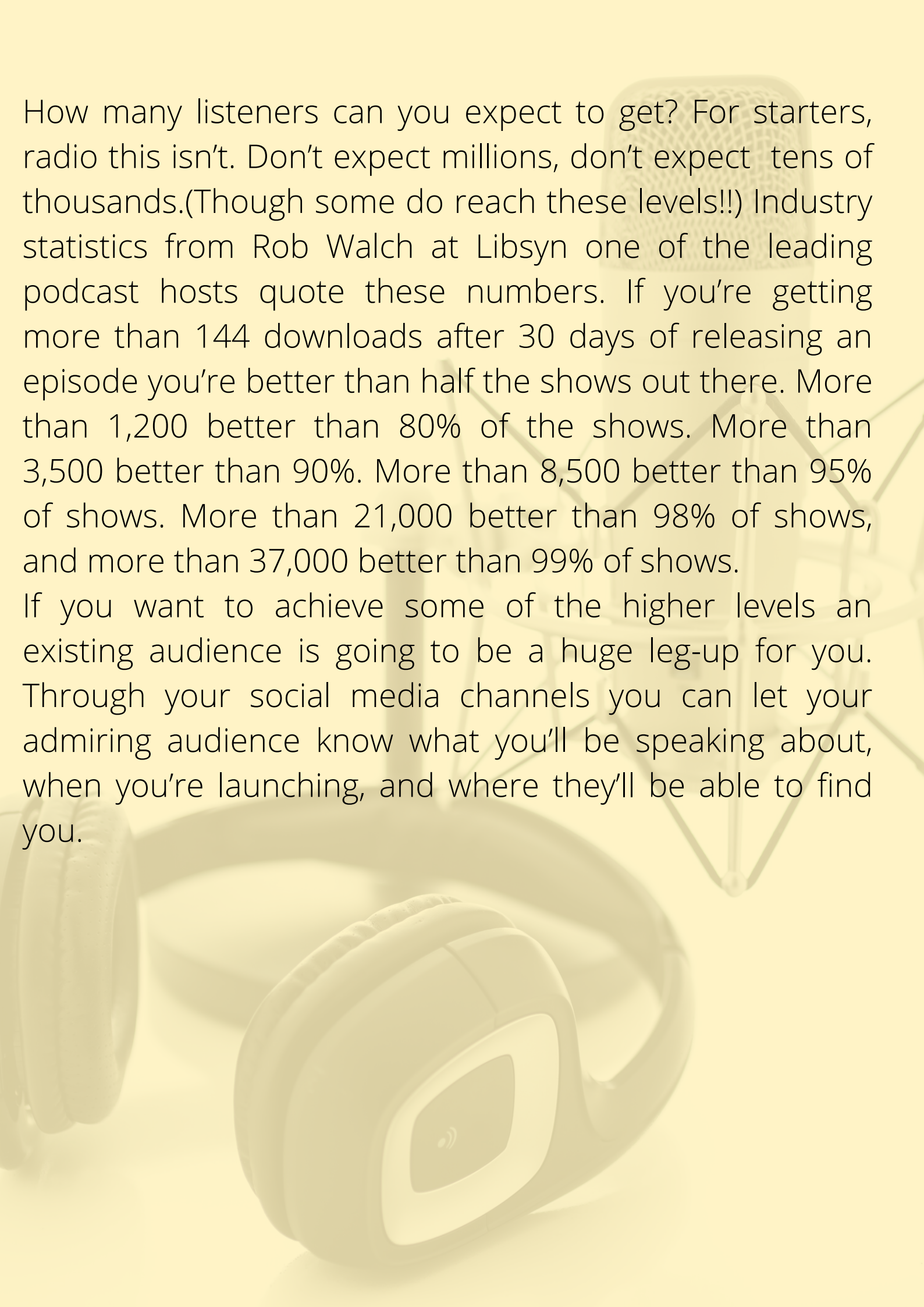
There are other hosts available, some offering a free service but usually at a price; remember, historically the free business model in this sector has struggled and your suddenly popular podcast could disappear overnight if the company shuts down. I use Libsyn who through their website give you code to paste into your website so that you can offer a 'player' and visitors can listen to your latest episode on your website without leaving. (If you want to see an example you can see the player on my website podcast page [www.joffelphick.co.uk/podcast](http://www.joffelphick.co.uk/podcast)) Jane Perrone host of 'On the Ledge' is also a fan of Libsyn. If you haven't got a website don't worry Libsyn will also give you a free one with your plan that's easy to use even for non techies. Lee Connelly, The Skinny Jean Gardener uses **Squarespace** a website builder that also gives you the option to embed and host your podcast from your website. ([www.squarespace.com](http://www.squarespace.com)) Squarespace is a popular choice for people who want to build a website but struggle with technology. I use a German website builder called **Jimdo** ([www.jimdo.com](http://www.jimdo.com)) and find it has a slight learning curve to start with which soon becomes second nature.



A good host will also give you accurate statistics on your downloads; how many, what day, what country they live in, and what device they use to listen from. Ideally your host will be IAB certified (Interactive Advertising Bureau [www.iab.com](http://www.iab.com)) meaning your stats will meet stringent industry standards and give you a true picture of who is listening. Services not offering IAB certification will nearly always be hugely inflated due to click farms and 'bots' trawling the internet. Don't be tempted! Inflated listener stats may massage your ego but could lead to a sponsor demanding their money back at a later date. Other hosts you might like to check out include Buzzsprout (used by Julianne Robertson, Saul Walker and Lucy Chamberlain, and John Jones) Podbean, and Anchor.

# STATISTICS



A pair of headphones and a microphone are visible in the background, rendered in a light, semi-transparent style against a yellow background. The headphones are in the foreground, and the microphone is in the background.

How many listeners can you expect to get? For starters, radio this isn't. Don't expect millions, don't expect tens of thousands. (Though some do reach these levels!!) Industry statistics from Rob Walch at Libsyn one of the leading podcast hosts quote these numbers. If you're getting more than 144 downloads after 30 days of releasing an episode you're better than half the shows out there. More than 1,200 better than 80% of the shows. More than 3,500 better than 90%. More than 8,500 better than 95% of shows. More than 21,000 better than 98% of shows, and more than 37,000 better than 99% of shows.

If you want to achieve some of the higher levels an existing audience is going to be a huge leg-up for you. Through your social media channels you can let your admiring audience know what you'll be speaking about, when you're launching, and where they'll be able to find you.

# SPONSORSHIP



When your podcast becomes successful you might want to look for a sponsor to cover your costs or even bring in a few pounds for new equipment or to pay for an editor or a virtual assistant. Historically the classic podcast arrangement was for them to pay you using a **CPM** model. That is **C**ost **P**er **M**ille or cost per thousand listens. This model is still used but a fixed rate based on your average listenership may be easier. It's a little known secret that a sponsor may not even ask you for your numbers especially if you're already a big horticultural mover and shaker!!

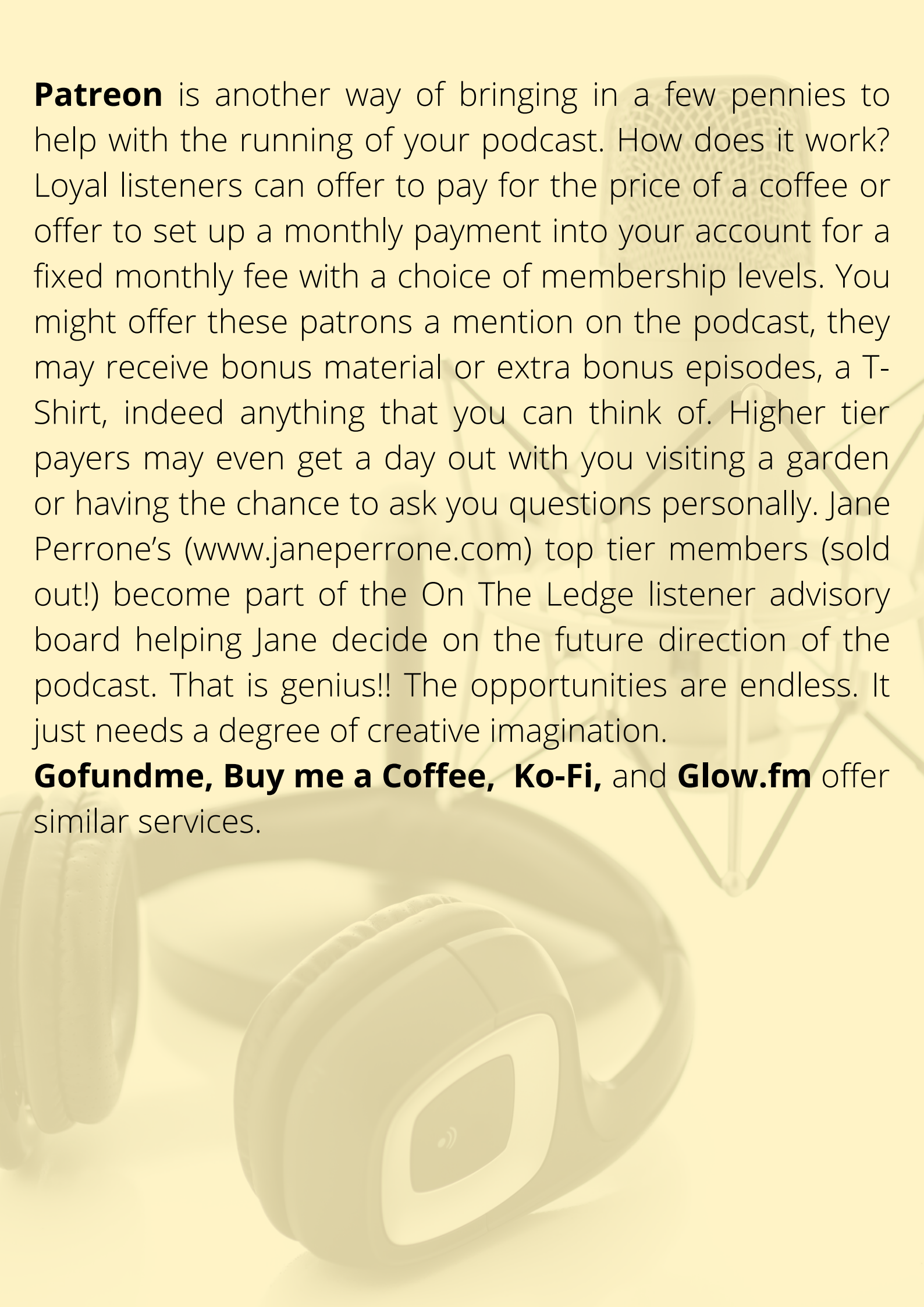
How do you find a sponsor? Ask them! Find one that fits your niche. They would rather pay for a small number of highly focussed individuals passionate about the subject than ten times that amount who are just vaguely interested in what's being discussed. There's a well known mantra in podcasting 'The riches are in the niches'. (Yes, I know, I know, but say it a la Americana and it'll work!!)

If you can't find a sponsor, think laterally. Could you sponsor it yourself. As a writer you could advertise your writing or copywriting skills on the podcast. Maybe you have a self published book you could mention, or perhaps you sell macrame trowel warmers for a favourite charity! The list of possibilities is endless.



# PATREON



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**Patreon** is another way of bringing in a few pennies to help with the running of your podcast. How does it work? Loyal listeners can offer to pay for the price of a coffee or offer to set up a monthly payment into your account for a fixed monthly fee with a choice of membership levels. You might offer these patrons a mention on the podcast, they may receive bonus material or extra bonus episodes, a T-Shirt, indeed anything that you can think of. Higher tier payers may even get a day out with you visiting a garden or having the chance to ask you questions personally. Jane Perrone's ([www.janeperrone.com](http://www.janeperrone.com)) top tier members (sold out!) become part of the On The Ledge listener advisory board helping Jane decide on the future direction of the podcast. That is genius!! The opportunities are endless. It just needs a degree of creative imagination.

**Gofundme, Buy me a Coffee, Ko-Fi,** and **Glow.fm** offer similar services.

# MISCELLANEOUS



**AUPHONIC** ([www.auphonic.com](http://www.auphonic.com)) is an online program that harnesses the power of voodoo magic. Well, it seems that way; put in your finished recording and it'll level-out the audio to prevent too many peaks where you'll blow away your listeners ears or too many troughs where they'll be struggling to hear you. It can remove any background noise or hum, and it'll put out an mp3 file that is set at -19 lufs mono or -16 lufs stereo; units of loudness that are broadly accepted as the industry standard. Auphonic is free to use up to 2 hours a month, but if you require more it's not expensive to purchase more hours. 10 hours will currently cost you \$22. A desktop version is available for a one off payment. A non commercial license is \$89. Commercial use \$349.



**BOOM ARM** A boom arm is an articulated arm that clamps onto your desk enabling you to move your microphone into a comfortable position. Prices start at about £13. Jane Perrone ([www.janeperrone.com](http://www.janeperrone.com)) uses a quality **Rode PSA1** swivel mount boom arm. (£62.50) Be aware that some of the cheaper boom arms may struggle to cope with the weight of some heavier mics.

**WIND PROTECTION** If you're recording outside, wind will be your biggest enemy, blowing across the microphone capsule and making your audio impossible to listen to. Wind protection in its basic form will come as a foam cover that you pull over the microphone. They offer minimal protection so one of the furry types that you commonly see on film sets will be an ideal solution. They come in extra small sizes for the little lavalier lapel mics or larger sizes depending on the mic you are using. There are models available to fit your handheld recorders too. Prices fro £3 upwards.

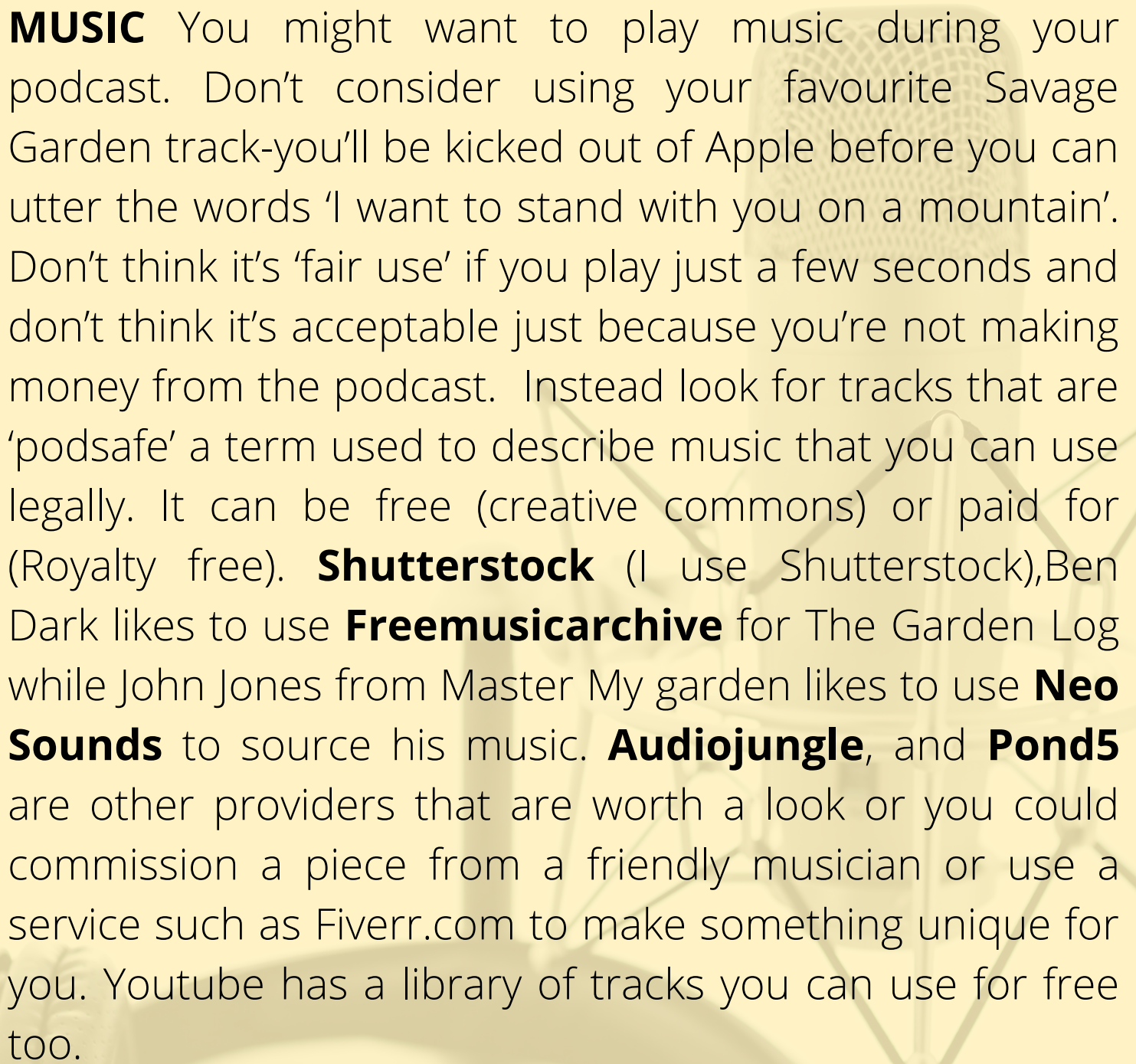
**MEMORY CARDS** If you're using a hand held recorder you'll need memory cards. Have several so that you can always carry a spare. Pay for the largest you can afford.

**BATTERIES** Carry plenty of batteries with you. They'll always run out when you're least expecting it.

**ARTWORK** You'll require artwork for your podcast. There are a few options here. You could get out your pencils and ruler and start designing your own artwork by hand. If your draughting skills haven't improved since T.D. classes in 1976 look at commissioning a graphic designer. Prices for this service will probably range from £100 upwards. Another DIY option is to use the online graphics program **Canva** ([www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com)) It is so simple even I can use it. (How do you think I produced this PDF you're reading now!!) and you'll have a professional looking logo within the hour. Take note: there are detailed artwork dimensions and file sizes that must be adhered to for your podcast to be accepted. This is important. They are as follows;

1400x1400 pixels minimum. 3000x3000 pixels maximum. The image must be square and under 500kb in size.

JPG, JPeg, or PNG and you need to use sRGB colour space.

A pair of white headphones with a black earcup and a silver microphone on a light yellow background. The microphone is positioned at the top center, and the headphones are in the foreground, slightly to the left. The background is a solid light yellow color.

**MUSIC** You might want to play music during your podcast. Don't consider using your favourite Savage Garden track-you'll be kicked out of Apple before you can utter the words 'I want to stand with you on a mountain'. Don't think it's 'fair use' if you play just a few seconds and don't think it's acceptable just because you're not making money from the podcast. Instead look for tracks that are 'podsafe' a term used to describe music that you can use legally. It can be free (creative commons) or paid for (Royalty free). **Shutterstock** (I use Shutterstock), Ben Dark likes to use **Freemusicarchive** for The Garden Log while John Jones from Master My garden likes to use **Neo Sounds** to source his music. **Audiojungle**, and **Pond5** are other providers that are worth a look or you could commission a piece from a friendly musician or use a service such as Fiverr.com to make something unique for you. Youtube has a library of tracks you can use for free too.

**and FINALLY**





I thought a few words from some old hands who have been through the podcast mill might give you the confidence to start your own.

**Jane Perrone** ([www.janeperrone.com](http://www.janeperrone.com)) uses Libsyn to host her award winning weekly podcast 'On the Ledge' and edits in Audacity. After nearly 150 episodes Jane's advice for those new to podcasting is 'Don't try to sound like your favourite radio DJ. Your personality is your biggest asset, so make the show unique to you. Get as high a sound quality as you can out of the equipment you can afford, but don't wait until you are perfect at everything before you start, otherwise you will never launch that first episode'.

Julianne Robertson host of The Scottish Garden Podcast ([www.juliannerobertson.com](http://www.juliannerobertson.com)) repeats the advice given earlier about hearing your own voice for the first time. 'Forget about hating the sound of your voice. Everyone hates the sound of their own recorded voice, but the only person it will bother is you! No-one else hears what you hear, so don't worry about it and don't let it stop you making a podcast!'

**Sarah Wilson** presenter of the podcast 'Roots and All' ([www.rootsandall.co.uk](http://www.rootsandall.co.uk)) has consistently produced episode after episode for week after week, hard work that was finally recognised by the Garden Media Guild when she was awarded Radio Broadcast/Podcast of the year 2019. Well deserved recognition for an expertly produced show.

Sarah echoes Jane's advice and told me 'You just have to get on and do it. To begin with, you'll probably have relatively few listeners which should give you some breathing space to hone your craft and your content. It's easy and relatively cheap to get started, plus I think most people have at least one good idea in them!'

It's so true. Once you've made that decision everything seems to slot into place. As a garden writer or blogger you have a huge resource at your fingertips. Why not repurpose one of your blogs or unpublished pieces as a podcast episode; you could have an episode 'out there' in as little as 48 hours!!

**Lee Connelly**, ([www.skinnyjeangardener.co.uk](http://www.skinnyjeangardener.co.uk)) repeats that familiar Nike message 'Just do it!' Lee says 'My biggest piece of advice is to just start. Get your phone, start recording your thoughts and put it out there. You'll eventually find your place and style over time.'

**Michael Perry and Ellen Mary** from The Plant Based Podcast ([www.theplantbasedpodcast.net](http://www.theplantbasedpodcast.net)) have a simple bit of guidance that is reflected in the popularity of their show, namely 'think about what your audience wants to hear, engage with them and ask for feedback'.

Really great advice, something I've never done, and something I'm sure a lot of podcasters would benefit from. Don't be afraid to hear what your listeners have to say.

**Fay Edwards** presents her 'Gardenhead' podcast ([www.fayedwards.com](http://www.fayedwards.com)) and offers some cautious advice with regards to time and planning; something quickly learnt from her meticulously researched first episode about peat use in horticulture. Namely, things will take a lot longer than you think .

Fay says 'To figure out how long your episode will take to produce, carefully calculate how long it will take you to: research, pitch for, and secure interviews with guests, conduct those interviews, write and record your script, choose and add your theme music and sound effects, edit the episode together, write the accompanying show notes and show description, and get the show listed on all the relevant podcasting platforms. Now multiply that by about 3, and you'll have a rough estimate!'

It sounds daunting but as with all things enjoyable it'll never seem like hard work.

**Saul Walker** who co-presents the 'Talking Heads' podcast ([www.talkingheadspodcast.co.uk](http://www.talkingheadspodcast.co.uk)) with **Lucy Chamberlain** stresses that 'the quality of the audio is the most important thing, always listen to your edited podcast on your headphones from a phone as this is how the majority of people are listening to your podcast. If it doesn't sound good work on improving the audio'.

The importance of sound quality again being reiterated by Paul. I've even heard it suggested that it's a good idea to listen on your car audio system as that is another common way for your listeners to tune in. Note: Paul ignores my advice about shying away from condenser mics and gets excellent audio from his AKG C1000 (£100) microphone.

**John Jones** is relatively new to podcasting having launched his 'Master My Garden' podcast this year. ([www.mastermygarden.com](http://www.mastermygarden.com)). His advice is to experiment. 'Trial length, times, and content etc to see what your audience is looking for'.

I think that's important information and follows on from what was said by **Michael and Ellen Mary**; for a successful show 'Know your audience'.

Well done for getting this far. I'm sure at this point I've answered a great deal of questions you may have had. I'm also aware however that you now have another 50 you'd like to ask! Almost every paragraph I've written could grow more arms and legs and ultimately I'd end up with a book. At this stage I want to keep it simple so that if you're new to podcasting you won't be overwhelmed with information.

For now, make a list of your questions and contact me. You can email me on [contact@joffelphick.co.uk](mailto:contact@joffelphick.co.uk) If questions come up repeatedly I'll update this pdf with that information for others to read.

Good luck. I look forward to listening to your first episode.

**Joff**