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OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



Caroline Foley's expert guide to things to a few things to do in June

What should be going on in your garden this month



You can carry on sowing runner beans until around the first week in July

It's been an exceptionally dry and warm May in the southern three-quarters of the country and the forecast is that this will continue for the next two months.

So unless you live in the far north, where the weather is predicted to be a little cooler, this could be the ideal year to experiment with some interesting tender crops. The markets and plant centres are full of young plants that have been grown in heat earlier in the year and ready for you to plant out and grow on.

The melon is a tropical cucurbit in the same family as courgettes, cucumbers, pumpkins and the like and has much the same needs but also requires a minimum soil temperature of 21°C/70° F.

Melons do well in a cold greenhouse or a coldframe, and they will luxuriate contentedly if planted in the compost heap in a sheltered, sunny spot where they can stretch out.

If you don't have any of the above, make a generous hole and half fill it with compost or well rotted manure. Aim for a gently sloping mound a few centimetres high in order to keep the stem clear of the ground and avoid rot. Warm the ground for a few days with black polythene and cover it with cloches to catch the sun. Sink a sawn-off plastic bottle into the ground next to the plant to get plenty of water right down to the roots. Always water melons at root level to avoid rotting off. Feed once a week.

When in flower, take off any covers to let bees pollinate them. When fruits start to form, protect them from contact with the soil by laying them on a board or a bed of clean straw. Alternatively you can grow them upwards on strong supports. You will need to net the fruits to take the weight. Alternatively, you can encase them in old tights which will expand as they grow, or make the tights into slings. Ripeness is

judged by weight, their grey-green hue, their fruity fragrance and the ease with which they twist off the stem. The best varieties for our climate are the smaller, fast growing types. The cantaloupe is probably the hardiest variety and therefore the safest choice for the UK.

Another exotic fruit which can be grown successfully as an espalier against a warm wall of south facing structure is the kiwi. Kiwi 'Hayward' has been bred for cooler climes.



Should be lots of tomato plants around now

There should be plenty of tomato plants to purchase now and grow on, though the selection is inclined to be limited in the markets and garden centres. For a wider choice – such as the delectable cherry varieties, 'Sungold', 'Tomato Berry' and 'Black Cherry', it is worth checking on the internet.

Another trend, seen at Chelsea this year in the remarkable gold-winning B&Q show garden are the newly available grafted vegetables. The idea of grafting vegetables in a big way took off in Korea and Japan in the 1920s. Since then it has been widely used for intensive cropping (81% of Korean and 54% of Japanese vegetable cultivation) and has spread around Asia the USA and Europe. The idea is to produce stronger more pest and disease resistant plants. The rootstock will be selected for health and vigour and the fruit for its taste. The most commonly available grafted vegetables are the cucurbits, as mentioned above, and the solanaceae family which includes tomatoes, aubergines, peppers and chillies.

Among others, Dobies and Suttons have produced a collection of grafted vegetables and fruit, including the aptly named Tomato 'Turbo Conchita', a trailing tomato of exceptional vigour and good looks. They also do a grafted Melon 'Sweetheart' – Britain's favourite cantaloupe.

Less tropical but still on the tender side are your runner beans. Construct a ridge support or wigwam for them if you haven't already done so. Far better than canes are hazel bean poles. They are much sturdier, look more engagingly rustic and will give you the satisfaction of knowing that you are supporting Britain's coppiced woodlands and our ancient forestry crafts. If you can't find any in your local area search the net for coppice-products.

You can carry on sowing runner beans outside until about the first week in July and harvest them until mid-October. My favourite is C19th 'Painted Lady' otherwise known as 'York and Lancaster'. It is as delicious as it is pretty with its red and white flowers. 'Scarlet Emperor' is another golden oldie, said by many to have the best flavour of all. It was developed in 1905 and is still going strong. Newer introductions include 'Lady Di and 'Desiree', prolific producers of near string-free beans.

Don't forget to water this month, but do it wisely. Word has it that hose pipe bans are

more than likely this June.

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DaneilMartin7

1 June 2011 12:10PM

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ToadNo1

3 June 2011 2:22PM

That's it... I've now got the the point where 'growing my own' is less a hobby and more an essential for healthy living and survival in these dark and financially depressed times. And to think I used to snigger at my parents and their penchant for digging up the lovingly sewn lawn to grow potatoes!

Anyhow, thanks for the advice, I'm now slowly getting my head round all these techniques for growing and articles like this definitely help. For a newbie like me it's hard to get to grips with all of this information but I guess I'll get there in the end!

In my business (I retail [hammock](#) and garden accessories), it's quite hard for me to accept that there has been a massive swing from the garden as a place to relax to a working environment, but the evidence is all around - infact my local supermarket has now started selling a whole section of vegetable and herb seeds and there seems to be an explosion of interest in the local allotments.

I'd love to see an article on splitting the garden up into workable areas and 'play' areas - I'm sure if more people knew how to do this effectively then we could reverse all the damage done over the years with junk food and lack of exercise.

Thanks again.

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allanjenkins

3 June 2011 4:58PM



Just quick note of thanks to Caroline Foley for brilliant piece as always, Howard and I faithfully follow and thank our stars to be in position to share sage advice

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nahema

4 June 2011 12:56PM

Thanks Caroline, Allan is quite right! Great posts ,proper information and now that I have learnt to click on the blue it is even better!

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