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OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



Crop assistance

Everything you need to do in the allotment in August. By Caroline Foley



Well, although it is hard to credit it when you look out the window, shelter from the monsoon in the shed or attempt to plant seeds knee-deep mud, it is almost August. And time to harvest your ripening crops and to plan and plant for autumn/winter. Time, too, for more advice from allotment writer [Caroline Foley](#):

August is the month to relax a little, enjoy any rays of sunshine that come our way during this tempestuous summer and gather a few of the fruits of our labour. Hopefully, our worst worry will be to keep up with the harvesting. Catching crops at their peak of perfection is one of the more pleasurable challenges of keeping a plot. If you are going on holiday in August, persuade someone to keep up thing going by continuing to harvest for you. Offering the produce as a reward sometimes does the trick.



Ripening this month will be tomatoes, aubergines, peppers and cucumbers, young turnips, summer cabbage, beetroot, the first Brussels sprouts, Hamburg parsley, cauliflowers and baby leeks - also the stone fruits and apples and pears. Pick aubergines and peppers while they are still shiny and cucumbers before they go yellow. Sweet corn tells you it is ready to eat when the 'silks' turn brown.

As you harvest you will get gaps. Ironically, at the height of summer, it is time to start thinking about winter, particularly the 'hungry gap' of the early New Year. The idea of sowing now and in September is to avoid ending up in January with nothing more exciting than kale, winter cabbage and sprouts.



This month sow seed of [winter spinach](#) and spring cabbage.

[Spring cabbage](#) is a useful crop for winter as it does a double act as spring greens and hearted cabbage. Spread your bets by doing a couple of sowings two weeks apart. The aim is to get the young plants big enough to survive the winter but small enough not to bolt when the frosts come - always a gamble.

[American land cress](#) is a well-kept secret. An all year round crop, it is especially useful in winter for soups, salads and garnishes. It was much grown in the 17th century in England but fell from fashion and richly deserves a revival. It tastes like watercress but, unlike it, doesn't need any special conditions. Give it a sheltered and lightly shaded spot with moist, fertile soil. Sow the seed this month in drills and thin to about 10cm (6ins) apart. Start picking in autumn and carry on right through winter. If you give it some cover in the depths of winter the leaves won't toughen up. Then, providing you leave some to flower, it will seed itself for a further midsummer crop. At the same time you could collect seed to sow again the following August to keep the ball rolling.

More info on these and other types of [cress](#)



[Corn salad](#), lambs lettuce or mache, for autumn eating will carry on through winter with protection.

Try a few seeds of [chicory](#), [endive](#) and radicchio in modules. Given a little cover later, they stand up to winter much better than traditional lettuce. When the heads are cut off at the base, they will re-sprout for more tender pickings. The bitterness can be removed by blanching them for a few days.

[Oriental greens](#) are great addition to the winter kitchen to ring the changes and flavours, especially if given the protection in winter of a mini polytunnel.



Maincrop turnips should be sown under collars in situ as they don't appreciate being moved. Select a cool spot for them in part shade. Thin when they are only 2.5 cm (one inch) high and harvest when the size of tennis balls. The tops can be used as greens.

Sow some [Welsh onions](#) for next spring. Coming from Siberia, not Wales, they are truly hardy. Like coarse chives when young when they appear in early spring, they can grow to leek-like proportions. [Welsh onions](#) can be picked at any time for a spot of onion flavour and need no attention whatsoever.

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TopVeg

28 July 2007 11:48PM

Thanks for the reminder about cress. It will make a nice change from sprouts! TopVeg

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dalesfire

30 July 2007 8:58AM

A word of warning though - American Land Cress will set seed very easily and before you know it it's sprouting up all over the place! I've been hoeing off a green carpet of it this weekend thanks to a previous allotment holder not keeping it under control (it is tasty though!).

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**Askhanja**

30 July 2007 12:15PM

After all the rain of recent months, having a sense of humour is almost as important as having a decent allotment. I printed off Aidan Dowling's cartoon from last week showing an Inuit child saying to his parent, "Apparantly the English have over 150 words for rain"! It's on a cartoon website www.aidandowling.com so you can print it off or whatever!

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