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OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



Digging in

Everything you need to know to ensure a fruitful July. By
Caroline Foley



Well, if the rain ever stops it will be high summer and time to crop till you drop. Here, allotment gardener and writer [Caroline Foley](#) offers her pick of tips for July:

'Pinch out runner beans shoots when they reach the top of the canes. This will encourage the plants to put their energy into making more side shoots (hence more beans) instead of growing ever taller. On the same principle, nip off the tips of the trailing stems of squashes - courgettes, pumpkins and cucumbers, so they can concentrate on their fruits.'



'Bush tomatoes don't need pruning but tall cordon varieties do. When four trusses have formed, leave them to ripen but take out any other side shoots. The reason for this is that, as British summers are shorter than Mexican ones where the wild tomato grows, four trusses are as much as can be expected to ripen before the frosts. Nip off the growing tip at the top of the plant for good measure. The effect will be to draw up plant foods to the highest truss.'

'Keep the fruiting vegetables (tomatoes aubergines, peppers and the marrow family)

fed weekly with a high potash fertilizer. The organic version is rock potash or specific organic tomato fertilizers. For stockists see [here](#) and [here](#).



'Harvest potatoes if you haven't already. Lift one to check the progress of the crop. If they are ready, dig them up as you want them for taste-the-difference freshness. 'Early' potatoes don't store well. If they are still marble-sized give them a good soaking to maximize the crop.'



'Dig up onions, garlic and shallots when the leaves turn yellow. If the weather is sunny, you can leave them to dry on the ground or - for better air circulation - make a platform out of chicken wire supported by four stakes. If the weather is wet, keep them under cover. When the skins are brown and papery, onions can be stored in a plait. Some people take the easy route and store them in old nylon tights. Garlic is usually dried hanging up.'



'When you have harvested the summer raspberries the plants are ready to be pruned. Untie all the scruffy old canes and cut them right down to the ground. Select the best and most vigorous new growth for next year's harvest and tie them in. Cut away any weak and unwanted stems.'



'When the strawberries are over, shear off the old leaves, clear away the straw and hoe off any weeds. If you haven't already done so, there is still time to make fresh plants for next year from the runners by pegging them down with hairpins or wire. They will put out roots and can then be severed from the parent plant. Ideally strawberries are grown on a three-year rotation. The standard method is to have three rows, one of which is replaced each year.'

'Harvest globe artichokes before the leaves open. If you miss this moment, leave them to flower for the bees to enjoy.'

'Keep picking herbs. When the shrubby ones - sage, rosemary and thyme - get lanky, trim them over with a pair of shears. Avoid cutting into the old wood as it doesn't regenerate well. Freeze the leaf trimmings for winter use, dry them by hanging them in a warm and airy spot or use sprigs fresh to flavour oils. The flowers of culinary herbs are edible (usually having a similar but milder taste to the leaves) and can be used to decorate summer dishes.'

'Switch salads to the autumn types. Look for the oriental spicy salad mixes that include interesting tastes like komatsuna, pak choi, winter radish, mizuna or mibuna greens. For stockist, see [here](#).'

Good luck and good harvesting.

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**rosanz**

1 July 2007 12:54AM

I am looking for meditations on gardening to read out at a funeral. The person the reading is for loved gardening and I am trying to find a quote that expresses this love. Any help would be great.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Share](#)**soundsofOregon**

1 July 2007 7:42AM

You might try, Stanley Kunitz' "The Wild Braid: A Poet reflects on a century in a garden."

n.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Share](#)**allanjenkins**

2 July 2007 6:22PM



Perhaps not perfect for your occasion but always loved this from Oberon in Midsummer Night's Dream:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight

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4 July 2007 11:04AM

DH Lawrence was a great lover of gardens and flowers. His Baravarian Gentians is a dark meditation on flowers and passing.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge also grew. His early poems have some lovely refernces to plants.

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4 July 2007 4:17PM

Here are the closing lines of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight'

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare
branch Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh
thatch Smokes in the sun-thaw;
whether the eave-drops fall Heard only in the
trances of the blast, Or if the secret
ministry of frost Shall hang them up
in silent icicles, Quietly shining to the
quiet Moon.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Share](#)**JaneLois**

5 July 2007 11:28AM

For I hold that the best purpose of a garden is to give delight

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and to give refreshment of mind, to soothe, to refine, and to lift up the heart in a spirit of praise and thankfulness. It is certain that those who practise gardening in the best ways find it to be so. Gertrude Jekyll. Taken from *In Praise Of Gardens, An Anthology of Enjoyment*. Compiled by Roy Hay, Published by Frederick Muller Ltd, 1959

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