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OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



Things to do in June

The expert's guide to gardening this month. By Caroline Foley



Towards the end of June, the summer raspberries, gooseberries, and red and white currants will be in fruit, says [Caroline Foley](#). Thin out new raspberry canes to about seven per plant. Keep picking and freezing, juicing, preserving or giving away any that you don't eat. The more you pick, the more will come. Keep the birds off with netting.

June would also not be June without your own strawberries. To grow them to the peak of perfection, cut off the runners that appear this month. If left they will sap the plant's energy you will end up with smaller fruits. Wait until the plants have stopped fruiting to propagate from them. Then peg the runners down with hairpins of wire (an unwound paperclip will do the trick) until they root either in the ground or in pots of compost. Detach them from the parent plant when you see new shoots appearing.

Apart from the bush types, you can do the much the same with tomato plants. When their side shoots are about 10-15cm (4-6in) cut them off and plant them or leave them suspended in water and they will make roots in about two weeks. Take off the first set of flowers to allow the new young plants to establish.

Apples, pears, plums and other 'top fruits' shed some of their swelling immature fruits in the 'June drop'. Though it may seem radical, now is time to carry on the natural selection process and thin out the fruits further. Start by moving any that are damaged or misshapen by twisting them off between finger and thumb. Aim to leave one or two per fruits cluster. With dessert apples remove the 'king' fruit (the central one) leaving a fruitlet on either side. The idea is to leave enough space for each fruit to reach its full potential. Gooseberries also profit from thinning and the thinnings (which are bitter) can be used in preserves so nothing is wasted.

Though the rain at the end of May has been torrential, we still need to be sparing with

water. A key to conserving it is to avoid any temptation to sprinkle. Aim to get water right down to the roots. This will encourage plants to grow their roots deep down into the soil to search for moisture. Sink a section of pipe or a flower pot into the soil next to hungry feeders to direct water right down into the roots. If you have a large plot soak a bit at a time thoroughly then leave it for a week. If you have any worries make a hole about 15cm/6inches deep to make sure that the water has penetrated deeply enough. Water in the cool of the evening or early morning to avoid evaporation.

Seedlings are the exception to the no sprinkling rule. With their tiny roots they may need light watering with a fine rose twice a day. Alternatively, put the pots on a tray half filled with gravel and water, or on capillary matting (available in garden centres) so the plants suck up moisture by capillary action. Shade them in the heat of the day. If you are going away put any plants in pots on a piece of capillary matting with one end in submerged in a bucket of water.



Other measures. Keep weeds down as they drink up precious water. Collect as much water as you can. Put up windbreaks. Wind dries and tears, dehydrating plants and putting them under stress. Avoid digging in summer as, when you turn the soil over, moisture evaporates. When you do dig, add in lots of organic matter as it helps to retain water in the soil. Make channels and moats to direct rain to plants as they do in hot countries.

Peas should be ready about now. Cut them down when they finish leaving the roots in the soil. They will release nitrogen which will nourish the next crop, ideally the leafy brassicas. <http://www.tilthproducers.org/tfia/nitrogen.htm> There is time for another crop of peas. Go for a successive variety like the ever popular 'Kelvedon Wonder' (AGM) or the wrinkled maincrop types at this time of year. You can still sow quick growers for autumn like the fast growing carrots 'Nantes 2 'or New Zealand spinach.

If you have some unused ground, put in a green manure. Phacelia would be ideal for a quick turnover of one to three months. You need to cut it down before it flowers but leave a few around the edge for the bees and beneficial insects. Another hot favourite with pollinators is crimson clover which fixes nitrogen so would also be good for the next brassica patch.

New potatoes (first earlies) will flower in June, the sign that they are ready to harvest. If your onions are looking a bit droopy, they are probably telling you that they too are ripe for digging up. Lift them and let the skins dry in the sun or indoors.

Stop harvesting the asparagus so it can build up strength for next year. Watch out for asparagus beetle. It's easy to spot as it is patterned black and red. Give the asparagus a feed and let it grow on until the foliage fades to brown in autumn. Cut it back then and give the bed a mulch of well rotted manure or compost.

Seaweed is a great tonic for any tired plant. It has the full range of micronutrients and promotes strong growth - the best defence there is against pests and disease.

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