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OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



Things to do in August

Our expert guide to gardening this month



Time to lift and dry the onions

Alas, August is the last month of summer and on average there are eight weeks to go to the end of the growing season. With this timescale in mind, pinch out the tops of outdoor tomatoes when they have four trusses of fruit as any unformed fruits yet to come won't have time to mature and ripen. Thin the leaves around the existing fruits so that they get a little more sunshine.

For some high-vitamin greens next spring, sow spring cabbage by the end of the month. They are the easiest type of cabbage to grow perhaps because there are fewer pests on the loose in winter. Try some of the new cultivars which have had the bitterness bred out of them. New pointed varieties, good for both greens and hearted cabbage, include Advantage, Pyramid, and April, a small neat variety which also has strong bolt resistance. Sow them 45cm apart for full cabbages and 30cm for spring greens with closer spacing for April.



Aim to keep harvesting courgettes, cabbages, carrots, peas, summer cabbage, young

turnips, beetroot and globe artichokes while young and delicious. Pick cucumbers before they go yellow, courgettes before they turn into marrows, aubergines and peppers before they go dull and tomatoes while still firm.

Catch sweetcorn when the tassels go brown and the juice is still milky. Lift and dry onions. The sign of readiness is when the tops flop over naturally. Sort out any that have flowered and eat them fresh. Leave the others out to dry for a day or two before gathering them up.



The negligent harvester's dream plant is the French bean. Known in China and Japan as the 'three times bean', sandomame, it can be eaten podded out like peas after the bean stage or grown for dried beans for winter eating. If left for a few weeks after that it is a good candidate for seed saving.

Unlike broad beans and runners, French beans, along with peas, self-pollinate before the flowers even open so they are pretty much guaranteed to come true to type. They are 'inbreeders' so they don't lose vigour as a result of generations of breeding in a small gene pool. Leave them to grow on and harden for about six weeks after the normal harvesting stage. When they are dry and brown, they can be picked and will just need a bit more airing off before being stored. Other easy seed to save is that of tomatoes, peas, peppers and lettuce.



There is time to get in some speedy non-hardy green manures in spare ground. Mustard can be sown now and either dug in before flowering or left until frost kills the tops. It is ideal for the potato patch as it inhibits wireworm. Crimson clover and fenugreek (which fit in with peas and beans) and Phacelia, *Phacelia tanacetifolia* (which can go anywhere) are great weed smotherers and have beautiful flowers and foliage. Leave a few to flower for the bees. Fenugreek leaves are edible, though make sure that the seed hasn't been treated if you bought for green manure rather than for culinary use. All are borderline hardy but will perform well for two months at least and can carry on through winter in milder areas.

If you grow espaliers or step-overs or other trained trees, this is the last month for [summer pruning](#).



If August is hot and dry watch out for [downy mildew](#). If it's warm and humid we could get a 'Smith Period' with a heightened likelihood of tomato or potato blight. The Potato Council www.potato.org.uk/blight have good advice and will send out warnings to [allotments](#) and private gardeners. If it turns out to be damp there could be a burgeoning [slugs and snails](#).



This month also sees the fifth year of National Allotment Week, 9th – 15th August run by [National Allotment Gardens Trust](#) and National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. If your allotment hasn't entered, it might be a fun to see what is going on at other sites with a view to entering next time. NAGS also run a nation wide [Allotment of the Year competition](#) for the best plots.

A brand new venture to watch out for is the Master Gardener project organized by [Garden Organic](#). As a new recruit myself (one of 40 volunteers in my area) I spent an entertaining afternoon last month teaching children how to make origami seed pots out of newspaper (having muffed it up hastily the evening before) and sow seeds as part of the countrywide [Eden Project's 'Big Lunch'](#). Each volunteer agrees to help 10 households to grow their own vegetables over the period of a year and spread the word to another 50.

It is a pilot project operating in Norfolk, Warwickshire and London with more areas in the pipeline. So if you fancy showing people how to grow produce (anything from sowing a few seeds in a flower pot to helping with a school project) or would like some free-of-charge advice and support yourself, check the [website](#).

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[sparclear](#)

2 August 2010 1:43PM

Large numbers of Cabbage White butterflies in our healthy organic gardens = cover your cabbage seedlings with a mesh to deter the egg-laying! (She will find some other plants that are suitable.)

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