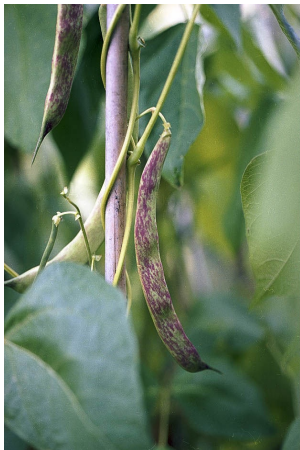


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August made easy peasy

Caroline Foley's expert's guide to late summer gardening

So summer is slipping and our thoughts turn to seed saving, crop storing and drying ... and to asking allotment guru [Caroline Foley](#) for her sage advice. So, here is her expert's guide to mid-August gardening:



Apart from the gorgeous Borlotti and other delectable Italian beans (like 'Purple Haze') especially grown for drying and winter stewing, any pea or bean can be useful for winter stores. At the same time you can save seed for next year. Mid-August is the ideal moment to start the process as the beans and peas should be ready for drying in about a month, before there is any chance of frost. Keep in mind, that when you stop harvesting, the plants will switch off flowering mode and production will cease.

'Leave the plants to mature, while continuing to water and feed as usual, until the pods begin to split. If you're worried you will miss the moment, tie a brown paper bag over the individual pods as they reach bursting point. If the weather turns, dig up the entire plants and hang them upside down in an airy, warm place. Once they are crackly dry, pick and pod them, spread them out to carry on the drying process under cover for about a week. You want the peas and beans to be so dry that you could smash them to smithereens with a light tap of a hammer. Store them in airtight jars. If you are worried about bugs - particularly the beastly bean weevils (detectable by the U shaped notches on the outer edges of leaves) - polish them off by putting the jars in the freezer for a minimum four hours. A little silica gel, available from chemists (or can be recycled from jars of vitamins and medicines), will remove the last traces of moisture. Kept bone dry and stored in the dark, the seeds should stay viable for a year or more for sowing, or last as dried pulses for a few more years after that. Next year, sow early to allow the maximum time for them to mature fully. For more information, click [here](#).



If we get a hot spell, chillis can be sundried in the old way.

Cut them in half and de-seed and lay them out on a tray in the sun. The Mexicans recommend laying them out on the roof of your pick-up truck for a good roasting! Cover at night to keep the bugs away and turn them over to bake the other side through the next day. Carry on in this manner for about four days or until the chillis crumble easily between finger and thumb. If you are less sure of the weather, get a big needle and strong thread and string them up whole (professionally done, the result is called a 'ristro') by the stalks in a warm airy spot like a doorway and leave for a few weeks. A more hi-tech method is to dry them overnight on the low setting (150C) in the oven deseeded and either cut in half or into rings. Once dry, they can be crushed and bottled. NOTE OF WARNING. Always wear gloves when handling chillis and avoid rubbing your eyes (or anywhere else) as the capsaicin in them can cause burning. When grinding, avoid breathing in the chilli dust!

Remember to keep watering vegetable plants steadily through dry periods. Erratic watering can cause blossom end rot in tomatoes. This shows as sunken leathery patches and finally, blackening. It is caused by the roots being so dry that the plant cannot take up the calcium essential for the cell structure. Discard any damaged fruits. A good watering after that will usually sort things out. Too much dryness will also cause root crops to split, celery to bolt and peas and beans to abort their flowers.



Cut out this year's fruiting canes of summer raspberries as they go over and tie in the most vigorous new young growth for next year's crop. Snip off any weak stems. Leave 8-10cm (3-4in) gaps between canes so that air can circulate around the canes. For more information, click [here](#). And remember to tie in new growth of blackberries, if you have any.

Summer pruning has a dwarfing effect, so this is the moment to tidy up any cordon or espalier fruit trees. Snip back the new side growths to 3 - 4 leaves. Last year's side shoots will have produced more shoots and these too need to be cut back more to just above the first leaf. This will encourage them to grow fruiting spurs for fruit next year. For more, click [here](#).



Lift up marrows and pumpkins from the ground and strip off a few leaves for better air circulation and more light and warmth. Feed up your pumpkins to make a good show at Halloween.

When harvesting, be sure to get every last potato out. Old potatoes left in the ground can result in bad soil borne diseases including the dreaded potato blight - cause of the terrible Irish famine of 1846.

There is just time to sow a quick green manure with an estimated 6 - 8 weeks before the first frost. Mustard can flower in as little as a month, and needs to be dug in before that. This shouldn't be a problem as it is not frost hardy. Mustard is a first class crop for adding humus and bio-mass to the soil. It also efficiently mops up wireworm so it is the ideal crop to follow potatoes. One fault is a susceptibility to club root so don't use it on the brassica patch. Another good candidate for now is the feathery Phacelia tanacetifolia. It will give quick cover, produce plenty of roots to help soil tilth while providing short term habitats for insects. It needs to be dug in before it flowers and self-sows as, if left to its own devices, it can become a nuisance. For more on green manure, click here.

And finally, if the sun comes out again (who knows?), this could be a good time to paint the shed.

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