

theguardian

OBSERVER
ORGANIC ALLOTMENT
BLOG

June made easy peasy

Caroline Foley offers sage advice on the 10 things every fruit and vegetable gardener needs to do in June



Peas, staked and flowering, only the pods to come. Photo: Howard Sooley

June is upon us and it is time to make the most of the longer days and shorter nights. But with so many fruit and vegetables to crop, to grow, to plant out and to plan, we have again turned to our horticultural heroine, [Caroline Foley](#), for her sage advice. Over now to Caroline:

Normally June is the ideal time to plant out the tender and semi-tropical vegetables to bask in the summer heat. These include French and runner beans, courgettes, marrows, pumpkins and squashes, tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, peppers, chillis and sweet corn. However, following the unexpected blustery, cold, wet spell with frost in some places at the end of May, hold off a bit and be cautious. Have cloches and crop covers to hand in case of emergencies. These plants grow at high speed and, for best results, need a weekly feed and plenty of water.



Nearly time to plant out chillies to bask in the summer heat. Photo: Howard Sooley

After cropping early peas this month, cut down the 'haulm', or top growth, but leave the roots to rot down in the ground. They will provide valuable nitrogen for the next crop in the rotation scheme - the brassicas. June to July is a good time to sow purple sprouting broccoli and kale for harvesting in November or December.

Grow them under fine mesh to prevent the birds, the cabbage root fly and the cabbage white butterflies enjoying them instead of you. Support the mesh so that pigeons can't reach your crops by pecking through it. On earlier planted brassicas check for colonies of yellow eggs of cabbage whites on the backs of the leaves. If they are not dealt with (rubbed or washed off) they will hatch out this month and can demolish the crop at speed. The large type of larva (*Pieris brassicae*) is easily spotted as it grows into a fat yellow caterpillar with black markings. The smaller type (*Pieris rapae*) is camouflaged pale green. Whereas the large ones eat the outer leaves, the small ones bore their way in unseen and gnaw at the very hearts.



Get hold of hazel to stake your

beans. Photo: Howard Sooley

Sow New Zealand spinach - the spinach that Captain Cook gave his crew on the Endeavour to protect them from scurvy. It is not a brassica but, being a leafy crop, it will enjoy the same conditions. Unlike real spinach, it has a laid back temperament and is a good plant for the heat of summer. Its sprawling habit is generally deemed to be acceptable on the allotment where there is usually plenty of space. It can be used as a 'baby' leaf for cut-and-come-again or grown to maturity in about six weeks. As you thin out the young plants, drop lettuce or radish seed into the gaps for satisfying, highly-productive, double-shot 'intercropping'.

If we get a dry spell, try to keep the moisture levels for cauliflower, rocket and spinach constant. Any shortage can have the effect of making them bolt and run to seed.



Procure a few hazel sticks to prop up dwarf runner beans. Consider getting permission from the management to grow a hazel tree, possibly to share around the allotment. A British native and the most undemanding of plants, it is perfectly happy in a shady corner. It can be coppiced to provide an endless source of rustic pea sticks, bean sticks and stakes - so much more aesthetic and pc than canes imported from China. For sources and more information, see the allotment forestry site.

Stop harvesting asparagus. Give the bed a good dose of general organic fertilizer or a manuring so the crop can build up strength for next year. Leave them to grow on (perhaps using a share of the elegant feathery foliage for flower arrangements in summer) and cut them right back in autumn.

Leave a couple of runners on strawberry plants for next year, but cut off the remainder to conserve energy for fruit production.



Hold off thinning fruit trees

until after the June drop. Photo: Howard Sooley

Hold off thinning apples, pears, cherries and plums until after the 'June drop' - a natural shedding of surplus, weak or inferior fruits. When you do decide to thin, take off any damaged fruits first.



As the days heat up ensure

there is water for wildlife. Photo: Howard Sooley

As summer progresses, make doubly sure that there is always a source of water for [birds](#) and other wildlife.

[Previous](#)

[Blog home](#)

[Next](#)

Ads by Google

[INSEAD M&As Strategy Prgm](#)

Strategic management know-how in a Nutshell: Taught by senior experts!

www.insead.edu/exec/M&As

[Plan a Vegetable Garden](#)

Online garden planning tool - plan, space and rotate crops

www.GrowVeg.com

[Solicitors in Torre Vieja](#)

Speak to a Solicitor Today. First Consultation Free...

www.myadvocatespain.com/lawyers

Comments

3 comments, displaying first

 Staff

 Contributor

Comments on this page are now closed.



soundsofOregon

3 June 2007 4:48PM

I'm made curious by Caroline's referrals to repeated feeding of plants once they're in the ground. Does she garden organically, I wonder? And if she is side-dressing, what's she using? Even if we use an "organic" booster, her recommended approach really does smack of treating the soil as a matrix to hold the plant while we pour inputs in upon it. The repeated feeding notion seems largely a product of the conventional, as distinct from organic approach in my, admittedly, limited experience. A half-way decent approach to soil management, even in a first year garden, should suffice. And if you begin on poor soil, and your plants struggle, adjust expectations and focus on the longview - add organic matter to your soil as you are able. 'Feed the soil, not the plants,' is about as basic and reliable an organic principle as it gets.

(A couple of notable exceptions perhaps - side dressing modern varieties of hybrid corn - about the least ecologically-resilient crop there is - a very heavy feeder and a somewhat finicky persona, is common, as is side-dressing garlic in the spring once it has overwintered. Composted chicken manure is favored by those seeking a big, fast hit, though the 'beyond organic' crew tend to regard it as an industrial approach in sheep's clothing. It is very high in nitrogen (it can burn plants if you are not careful) and tends to be 'powerdery' which lends it to thin scattering off a shovel, along a row, unlike some of the lumpier manures.)

And beware the dangers of fertilization. I once had a plant go down suddenly to tremendous aphid pressure. When I brought my confusion to a knowledgeable bod, his first question was, "Did you just feed it?" I had. Lucious, green growth may give the appearance of health, but it also means thin cell walls and, essentially, a plant on steroids and weaker, fundamentally for it. Fertility, as the deep gardeners know, can be an enemy of life. (Look at the health issues of the western world - they are all largely the result of surfeit.)

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)

If you are going to feed, why not try a tea made of the dynamic accumulators comfrey and/ nettles, which works very well? Cut a bunch up, stuff in a bucket, and leave. Stir each day. Just as your brew begins to really smell (10-14 days for me, depending on the weather), pour it, diluted if you like, around plants. A comfrey patch will allow 4 (!) major cuttings a season - lotsa tea and/or greens for your compost pile. When you plant comfrey, expect it to be there in perpetuity. Don't plant it all over your garden, unless you want to be a comfrey gardener in perpetuity, too. Never run a rototiller through it or close to it (the roots fan out close to the surface and are thick, fragile, and each segment wants to create a new plant) otherwise you will have comfrey everywhere. Undisturbed, however, it is very well behaved even as underground critters may very occasionally carry a root segment off somewhere for it to volunteer.

Compost teas are very popular hereabouts, too - people use fish tank bubblers to aerate buckets of a 'water-and-good-compost' mix for two to three days. The techniques for making compost teas are incredibly varied (large, expensive machines are sold), but many simple approaches appear to work even as the science of this art is largely anecdotal. You ain't gonna get a compost tea any better than your compost.

The biodynamic crew have all sorts of esoteric teas they put on their gardens, depending on the impulse they wish to call forth. My experience would seem to suggest that you don't need to be bought into the anthropop trip (I don't use them myself) to see it work. Wild stuff.

At heart, fertilization philosophy has a great deal more to do with the inner ecology of the gardener than it does with the plants themselves, I sense. Fundamentally, the organic approach grew out of a wish to reassert a balanced, intrinsically regenerative approach to raising food - by falling back on an authentic, co-evolutionary dialog with the Garden. But, as most of us know only too well, it is actually very easy to bring to our own veggie plots precisely the same 'more is better' mindset upon which old-school, dominant paradigm conventional agriculture is modeled. Simply because we are fastidious about using 'organic' everything doesn't mean our approach honors the elemental organic ethos - as the rise of 'industrial organics' only too readily confirms. At heart, organic gardening ain't about wot's on the label, but rather about bringing an entirely different set of values to the culture of the soil. And this, fundamentally, means bringing an entirely different set of values to our own inner lives. This, perhaps, is where the real conversation with our carrots occurs.

I got baby plants to water. I'm outta here!



allanjenkins

4 June 2007 9:47AM



As a wise gardener once said to me 'soil is the glue of life'. We at the allotment are not using much in the way of feed: intermittent spraying of three biodynamic preps: 500 (horn

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)

manure), a few grammes of horn manure buried over winter and stirred in rain water before being broadcast over the plot in the evening; 501 (horn silica) ground up-quartz similarly prepared and sprayed over the growing and fruiting plants in the early morning (did this for the first time on Saturday and have to find a better spray), and CPP, the 'cow pat preparation' which we are mixing at the moment. There is a patch of comfrey on site so will make use of that and the nettle tea. Missing the nettles a lot at the moment, decimated in the war on slugs. Speaking of which after seeing them slaughter Frank's Ourtredgeous Romaine, finally bought the ferrous phosphate and have scattered it (packaging and Dan Pearson says it is organic and biodegradable), but doesn't yet sit happily with me...



soundsofOregon

5 June 2007 3:10AM

Wow, Allan. You're really embracing the biodynamic (BD) gestalt there. I wonder if others have any idea what we are talking about, wot with yer "horn manure buried over winter and stirred in rain water" calisthenics.

Exploring this current certainly has its challenges. For one, until very recently, most BD literature has been utterly impenetrable to all but the most eccentric intellects - the patois owes a good deal, I think, to the High German much of it was originally sourced from. Plus, of course, the schtick has got that doubleplus esoteric woo-woo thing going on. All told, not exactly easy-listening, especially for 'seculars' wanting to try just a nibble to see wot all the fuss is about. I always used to point people at Wolf Storl's "Culture and Horticulture: A Philosophy of Gardening", a definitive BD text which was (partially, at least) written in southern Oregon and which makes a solid effort of describing gardening's evolutionary role from a BD perspective. A prior empathy for the cosmology and associated vernacular is pretty much a prerequisite for wading all the way through it, though. Cor blimey, it's dense.

Then I stumbled into, of all things, the Oregon Biodynamics Group website which, wouldn't ya know, is home to one of the most approachable demystifications of biodynamics anywhere. Some BD tech geek webbed it years ago and it hasn't been bettered yet, online or in print. Lotsa useful diagrams and colorful piccies and animated graphics go a long way toward helping. Though it is still strong on the quasi-religio-magical vernacular (for 'cosmic forces', read 'light, warmth and seasonal rhythms') their online intro amounts to one of the more coherent syntheses of the archetypal dimensions of the plant-human nexus, and how this relates to sticking yer hands in the dirt. It's crafted to allow for the quick scan, or for the opp to browse further.

A quick pointer, then. Go to Oregon Biodynamics Group website, click on their "Introductory Class On-line", then "BD materials, compost" and search on "Summary of BD materials" and it will take readers to a quick summary of the BD sprays you have just described.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)

I once collared the then prez of the Oregon Biodynamics Association and told him of my reluctance to follow a BD investigative line because the overarching BD cosmology was getting in the way. I was both suspicious and irritated. I was just getting into composting at the time and the prospect of building a decent pile was quite intimidating enough, thank you, without being told that I had to incorporate all sorta weirdass preps n' stuff into the mix if I woz gonna do it right. Methinks my populist edge was taking umbrage with what I perceived as a compost priesthood holding court. I might even have been a leetle heavy- and off-handed with mutterings about Teutonic cultism and the like. And he was enormously affable and practical with his counsel. "Oh, just take what works for you and leave the rest," he said. And so I did.

One of the unique aspects to the Eugene-based Food Not Lawns avant-gardening collective which saw its heyday around the turn of the millenium, was its effort, unusually, to marry permaculture (the horticultural 'school' significantly influencing the emerging 'Paradise Gardening' movement) and biodynamics. BD, you see, has traditionally been practiced by farmers rather than gardeners, and so most of the associated knowhow and literature centers around the notion of 'the farm as organism.' Which is all very well. But how many of us can put a cow's tummy at the heart of our urban allotment organism? My strong sense is there are probably very few allotment plots, if any, that are applying BD practices. I'm very curious to see how the Observer's experiment evolves the BD metaphor.

One more thing. That wise BD hand, an organic farmer, who told me to take wot works? He also insists that "farming is in the hands of the gardeners." I hear this notion being increasingly voiced Stateside. The salvation of the world, some are claiming, is to be found in the hands of urban gardeners. Bizarre as that may sound, I'm inclined to agree. Hop to it then, Allan! Spray those preps as if the future of the world depended on it! It might.

Comments on this page are now closed.