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OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



Right as rain

Ten top tips to mid-July gardening. By allotment expert Caroline Foley

So despite the relentless rain, intermittent sun and the weeds growing faster than the crops (can feel like a race against a faster, fitter, leaner, meaner all-too-visible enemy, particularly if you dare take a few days off to remind yourself what life was like before you fell for an attention-seeking allotment), it is officially high summer and time for another plant-planning masterclass from garden guru [Caroline Foley](#):



The cane and briar fruits

should be in season now.

Raspberries are picked when still firm leaving the core, or plug, in the plant. Currants - black, white and red - are picked by the 'strig', or in little bunches. Blackberries are picked with the stalk still on. Blueberries ripen over several weeks. If they ripen too slowly for you to get enough for a decent serving, you can store them in the freezer until you do.

Propagate blackberries and hybrids fruits by tip layering. You do this by burying the tip of a vigorous and healthy stem. Calculate where the stem will touch the ground and prepare the soil to receive it by digging a hole about 10cm (4ins) deep in the right spot. Mix in a little grit and well-rotted organic material for drainage. Strip off the leaves and bury the tip in the soil. The tip will grow downwards first then do a complete U turn. After about three weeks new shoots will pop up. By autumn, roots will have formed on the bend and the new plant can be severed from the parent and dug up and start a new and independent life. For more information click [here](#).



This is the best month to try the tricky headed [Chinese cabbage](#), and [mustard greens](#) in cooler areas.

You can also sow also maincrop carrots, winter leeks, late Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli for winter and spring.



Despite the rain, there should be lots of vegetables to harvest now - tomatoes, peas, beans, courgettes, spinach, beets, shallots, garlic, potatoes and globe artichokes (to mention but a few) - as well as all the summer soft fruits. Take time to enjoy them.

This is a good month to take stock of the allotment at its most productive and to decide what changes you might like to make next year - if any.

Earth up or put sections of pipe or a roll of newspaper around hearting [celery](#) when the stems are about 30cm (12 ins) high.

Blanch [endives](#) by putting a plate on top, making sure not to trap any slugs or snails underneath.

If you see roots appearing around cucumbers cover with a top dressing of well-rotted manure.

Wrap the leaves over cauliflowers to slow them down and keep them white.

If you are planting winter brassicas, put collars of felt underlay around them to protect them against the cabbage root fly.

The mild wet weather has made plants prone to damping off diseases including botrytis, mildew and grey mould. Improve air circulation if you can and cut off any affected parts of the plants and burn or bin them. Avoid spreading disease frolant to plant on your hands and tools.

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