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## Things to do in August

Caroline Foley's expert guide to gardening this month



Fill gaps left by potatoes with courgettes or squash

As you harvest and enjoy the delicious August glut, bare patches will appear demanding your attention. To prevent weeds taking advantage and the nutrients in the soil being washed away by winter rains, it makes sense to keep the ground covered as much as you can with crops, green manure or mulch.

The keen and efficient gardener aims to be one jump ahead and to have new plants waiting in the wings. So as the onions come out, there are likely to be some young leeks in the seed bed, 10 - 15 weeks old, just ready to be planted out. Failing that there should be some on the market to buy.



[Click on the link](#)

below for Monty Don's video guide to growing leeks

Water the young leeks well the night before transplanting, then ease them out gently.

There are two schools of thought about whether or not to trim the roots and the tops. My personal view is to leave them alone. Either way, make a hole about 15cm deep with a dibber and drop them in. This will be a deeper planting than before and will help to blanch the stems.

Follow this with a good slow watering to 'puddle' them in but don't fill the hole with soil. If you have too many and are not concerned about size, you can drop two or three into each hole. This way you will get more but smaller leaks which will come to the same quantity in the end. The old way to blanch them is to draw the soil up while taking care not to get it into the layers of leaves. A good cheat is to slide over small sections of pipe, the cores of kitchen roll or even just rolled up newspaper tied into tubes with string. Keep leeks well watered, the theory being that the more you water them, the bigger they will grow.

As the summer cabbages are harvested the fast growing oriental greens make an excellent replacement. All are highly nutritious being packed with vitamin C, beta-carotene and iron. They have a tendency to bolt in the heat and long days of high summer. Sown now, they will have germinated into young plants in the comparative cool of September. Given cover later, when the cold bites, they will carry on through winter, either as seedling crops or as full grown handsome winter greens which are delicious cooked in the traditional way in oyster sauce.



Dan Pearson fills

August spaces

Mibuna, with its ragged leaves, and mizuna, with its spoon shaped ones, add a bit of spice as well as good looks to salads all year round. Komatsuna is a five-star oriental. Joy Larkcom, the pioneering gardener who undertook a demystifying vegetable study tour in China in the 1970s, reckons that komatsuna deserves an award as the most under-rated vegetable.

A naturally healthy, racing green (seedling crops in 20 days and small plants in 35), they are something between a giant pak choi and a turnip. Chinese broccoli can also be sown in August. The young white or yellow flowering stems in bud will be a delicacy to look forward in winter when it will crop for weeks on end.

Gaps left by potatoes are ideal for the marrow family – courgettes, summer and winter squashes and pumpkins. They don't come into the main rotation programme and like plenty of space, fertile soil and water. In fact, if you don't want to plant them where the potatoes were, they would be supremely content growing in the compost heap.

Squashes are fun to grow and full of character. Small plants should be available to buy and you would need to get them in soon. Fortunately, they grow at speed and are prolific once they get going. One or two plants will probably give you as much as you and the family can eat. If you don't have the space for them to sprawl, you can grow them up a sturdy frame or train them into coils.

The summer squashes, including courgettes, don't store for more than a few days and

should be eaten when young. Generally they need to be harvested within four days of flowering, picked almost every day when the plants are in full production, so don't turn your back. The winter squashes and pumpkins are left to mature as long as possible before the frosts so there is time for the skins to harden for storage.



Green manure

Phacelia, *P. tanacetifolia* is intensely attractive to beneficial insects

The whole plant is edible including the flowers and seeds. Summer squash – the pretty patty pans, scallops and custard types - can be steamed, roasted or sautéed. Courgettes can be eaten raw when tiny and are good with dips. In the Middle East they are customarily stuffed with rice, cous cous or meat fillings laced fragrant herbs and spices.

A classic combination is to cook them with tomatoes and garlic - handy as tomatoes, courgettes and garlic mature at much the same time. Courgette flowers are an Italian delicacy deep-fried in batter.

Pumpkins, always the joker in the pack, are mostly grown for Halloween Jack o' Lanterns or for the biggest vegetable competition. Grown as big as they can get renders them watery and tasteless but there are cute varieties like 'Sweet Dumpling' which can be dished up with maple syrup, American style.

There is still quite a wide selection of green manures to sow in August. For an easy no-dig life, you could try mustard, *Sinapsis alba* or phacelia, *P. tanacetifolia*. Both will grow at speed and smother weeds. As annuals they will die later and lie on the surface providing a mulch. This will be taken down by the worms, so they will need little or no digging in come spring. Mustard is also said to reduce soil born pests and disease.

Phacelia, *P. tanacetifolia*, has gorgeous forget-me-not blue flowers that are intensely attractive to beneficial insects, particularly honey bees. So keep a few seeds back to sow again in spring, this time for flowers - some for the bees and some for you.

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**sonicslice**

4 August 2009 3:18PM

You have mixed up your 'bunas and 'zunas mizuna has the ragged leaves and Mibuna spoon shaped leaves.

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