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OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



Things to do in July

The expert guide to gardening this month



Time to trim the summer raspberries

Just keeping up with July harvesting is a demanding task, albeit a pleasant one. You could be picking tomatoes, peas, beans and courgettes every day along with globe artichokes and the early potatoes.

The summer soft fruits – late strawberries, raspberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants, white currants and gooseberries will be ready or ripening. July is the main month for preserving and freezing soft fruit.



ready or ripening

Once the soft fruits are spent, it's time to get pruning. Cut down the stems of summer raspberries and tie in new shoots as these are the ones that will bear fruit next year. Blackberries won't have fruited yet but are treated in the same way later on.

Once the strawberries are over, cut off any scruffy leaves, remove all the straw and hoe

Redcurrants will be

round them. It is generally recommended to start strawberries afresh every three years. If you have three rows, one row can be replaced each year, either from runners or by buying new stock. Interesting new home-bred varieties, developed at [East Malling Research](#), include disease-resistant 'Florence'.



When strawberries are finished, remove straw and hoe

It reaches its peak of production in mid-July and continues fruiting after that. Another new one worth a try is 'Irresistible'. It was originally developed for supermarkets but turned out to be too tender to transport. The result is that this deliciously sweet strawberry is for the home grower alone – always a satisfying characteristic in my view. Incidentally, don't plant strawberries where raspberries have been as they are prone to the same diseases.

The shoots of [gooseberries and red or white currants should be trimmed](#) back to about half the length leaving about five leaves. Unlike red or white currants, which grow from a main stem like a tree does, [blackcurrants](#) send vigorous shoots up from soil level. These are pruned when the plants are dormant in winter.

Thin out apples and pears to one fruit every 15cm (6 inches). In dry weather give the trees a good watering while the fruits are forming.



Dry your onions in the sun

[Shallots, onions and garlic are ready for lifting](#) when the leaves go yellow and start to droop. This is the signal that the leaves, which grow first, have piped off all their nutrients into developing the bulbs. Dig the bulbs up with a fork, taking care not to damage them, and spread them out to dry in the sun. If the weather is wet, they can dry under cover. Put them on racks so the air can circulate. When the skins are brown and papery you can store them in a net. Alternatively making an onion plait is dead easy to do.

All this fruitfulness can leave your plants exhausted. The slow release organic compost and manure applied in spring should see them through but keep an eye out for signs of

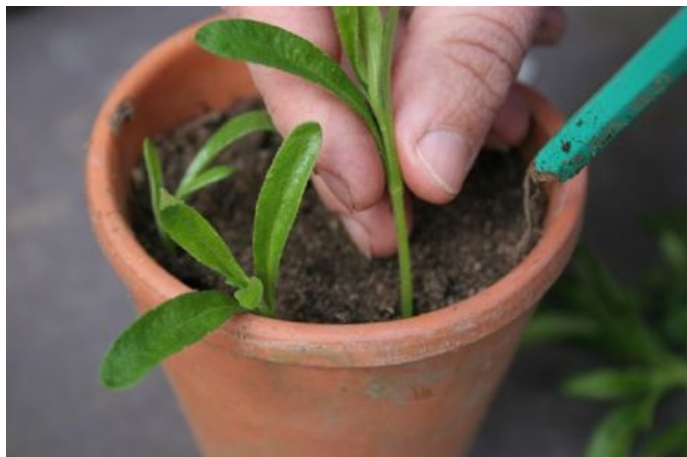
flagging and have a good liquid feed to hand. Liquid seaweed is an excellent tonic. You can buy it (at a price) or you can make your own brew though you can only legally collect seaweed if it is washed up on the shore. Comfrey fertilizer is a highly recommended alternative. With a single plant you will get at least three cuts a year.



Comfrey makes for fine fertiliser

If you ignore the usual advice to add water when you make comfrey liquid fertilizer you will get an equally good result while avoiding the atrocious stink it lets off when rotting down (the one true disadvantage). If you are buying a new comfrey plant get the Bocking 14 variety from Garden Organic. It was developed by Lawrence D Hills and is the only variety that won't spread and become a nuisance.

Nettles are also wonderful for fertilizer but most potent when collected in the spring. Wormery liquid is another good source. You can also soak chicken manure (your own or bought). A good old fashioned soaking of bovine or horse manure can also be excellent, though perhaps it is no longer considered to be safe and healthy to be messing around with cow or horse dung, quite apart from the fact that it might contain wormer or antibiotics. Coffee grounds and eggshells also have some value. Waste not, want not.



A good month for softwood cuttings

July is a good month to take softwood cuttings from shrubby herbs like sage, thyme, lavender or rosemary. Trim back or cut any down you want for dried flowers, and then take cuttings from the new growth towards the end of the month. Once the cuttings have rooted in four to six weeks, pot them up individually.

Early July is the latest moment to grow a crop of speedy carrots, little beetroots and turnips, French, runner beans or peas from seed. Even if you are a bit late I think it's worth taking a chance with peas. If you don't get a full crop, you will still get delicious pea shoots for salads or stir fries



Last chance this year

to grow beans from seed

Incidentally, if your rocket goes to seed in the heat of July try eating the flowers – they are sensational. You can still buy young courgette and tomato plants and these will crop prolifically if planted out now.

I would suggest that you relax a little in July and August. Apart from the harvesting, just keep things ticking over. Have a hoe and secateurs to hand for a little weeding and deadheading. Keep a ball of string in your pocket for tying in while pottering about in the sunshine. Pottering is such an enjoyable pursuit.

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englishhermit

1 July 2009 3:56PM



A gentle potter in this heat is about all I can manage.

I'm not quite sure how to make comfrey tea without water. Too late now, the stench is rising from the tea bin, but it is the smell from the large compost bin which is most prevalent. A drill down with the stirring rod leaves the metal too hot to touch.

Still its a veg feat tonight with the first courgettes, peas and spinach. Yum.

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allanjenkins

1 July 2009 6:13PM



Dear Englishhermit. Water-and-smell free tea recipe on the first comfrey link above. We used water too, but might go for stink-free style next, though six weeks a long time to wait.

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recipegirl

7 July 2009 7:07AM

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How about making delicious Eaton (Eton) Mess with those beautiful strawberries?

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