

the **guardian****OBSERVER  
ORGANIC ALLOTMENT  
BLOG**

## Things to do in June

The expert's guide to gardening this month



Beans can be sown straight into the soil now

Even though all seems rosy in the allotment right now, it is a good idea to get into a regular summer care programme to keep things ticking over and to avoid trouble later. Go over the beds with a hoe once a week to top off the annual weeds, not least because they take up a lot of nutrients and water from the soil. The old rule to avoid damage is to hoe between rows and hand weed between plants. As each crop germinates, thin to the strongest. Try to anticipate pest or disease problems by checking crops regularly. Look under the leaves for colonies of aphids. Take counter measures.

Oddly enough June is known to be one of the driest months of the year – much drier than August. To save you watering time, incorporate plenty of organic matter into the soil to make it more water retentive. Keep all the beds well mulched to cut back weeding and keep in moisture. Research by the RHS came up with the surprising finding that even if the mulch is acidic (as are wood and bark mulches) the effect on the soil is to make it more alkaline. So if you need to mulch as acid loving crop like blueberries it is probably best to use an inert mulch like pebbles. Incidentally, if you use grass cuttings don't let them get too thick. Any deeper than 5cm and the clippings will heat up and start to steam.

Another water saving ideas is to make moats around plants to target water where it is needed. Sink pipes down to courgettes and other thirsty plants so the water goes straight down to the roots. Water early in or late in the day to avoid evaporation. Shade seedlings, avoid digging, cut out desiccating winds with windbreaks and water directly onto the soil rather than from overhead. Water less often but water well. Light watering evaporates without benefiting the plants and encourages plants to grow their roots near the surface where they will dry out quickly. Water according to the needs of the individual plant. Peas and beans are best kept on the dry side until they flower. On the other hand tomatoes need to be kept well watered throughout. Any lack can cause splitting or blossom end rot – a calcium deficiency caused by lack of water.



Keep peas on the dry

side until they flower

Tomatoes, sweet peppers, chilli peppers, sweet corn, French and runner beans and all the cucurbits – cucumber, marrows, squashes and courgettes – come from South America, having arrived in Europe with the Spanish Conquest. Being tropical, all grow fast, need loads of sunshine, gallons of water and masses of nourishment. Put them in rich soil and get in some high potash tomato fertilizer. Tomatoes enjoy baking on a south facing wall. Sow out marrows and courgettes a good 2ft apart in moist soil enriched with plenty of compost. If you haven't got small plants ready, there is still time to sow the seed directly outside. French beans are a classic and delicious late summer and autumn vegetable. They can be sown straight into the ground now. Try the yellow and purple varieties for a change.

For some vegetables though, June is just too hot. Lettuce won't germinate over 25°C/77°F, so move it along with your cut-and-come-again crops into the shade. Stop sowing rocket for a few weeks and Texcel greens as they bolt in hot weather.



Corn need lots of sun

and gallons of water

Thinking ahead to winter, put your spring cabbage, Brussels sprouts and leeks into their permanent positions. Although swedes are hardy they are not generally sown until this month. They like to be sown in situ. Although we think of them as root vegetables, they are in the brassica family, so need to be rotated with them. Sow maincrop carrots, like 'Autumn King' for winter storage, main crop 'wrinkled' peas and witloof chicory for forcing in January. If you sow beetroot at the end of June, instead of eating it fresh at the size of a golfball, you can let it grow to full size and mature into autumn to be stored with the other root vegetables for the winter. There is a theory that eating beetroot in winter helps beat the blues.

As crops go over, pop in quick growers like carrots 'Nantes 2' for autumn eating, peas, chards and greens, radishes and cut-and-come-agains. Kale makes an excellent 'baby' green. Keep going with herbs like parsley and coriander. Though it's easy to grow, you need to sow quite a bit of coriander to get a decent serving and it runs to seed quickly.

The trick is to sow seed every few weeks and pinch out the buds before they flower.



Enjoy the last of the

asparagus

June is the delicious [strawberries](#) and cream month. Make sure that the fruits are kept off the ground. If the traditional straw is difficult to get in small quantities where you live (you could try a pet shop) a synthetic mat made for the purpose will keep the mud off. If you see any grey mould (botrytis) on them pick off any infected fruits and increase the air circulation. Keep them netted against the birds and squirrels until they finish cropping. After that the nets can come off so that the birds can get at any pests. Then feed the plants well and peg down the runners (no more than five per plant) to get new plants for next year.

Enjoy the last of the asparagus this month before leaving the plants to gain strength for next year. New potatoes should be ready at the end of the month. Lift them as you want them as they don't store for long.

Trim up your mint so that fresh new growth will appear at the optimum moment. Get in some basil for your tomato crop. There are lots of delectable flavours including lemon and lime. [Basil connoisseurs](#) though say nothing compares with Genovese basil when it comes to Italian cuisine.

[Previous](#)

[Blog home](#)

[Next](#)

## Comments

1 comment, displaying Oldest first

 Staff  
 Contributor

Comments on this page are now closed.



**ianfischer**

2 June 2009 8:17AM

This time of year is wonderful in the allotment - so much growing and some of the early crops are ready for eating. I just wish it would rain to save me getting up at 5am to do the watering. Good advice on the watering - I think perhaps I overwater some plants according to your advice

Ian

<http://foodfrom4.com>

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)

Comments on this page are now closed.

© 2012 Guardian News and Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved.