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**OBSERVER
ORGANIC ALLOTMENT
BLOG**

Things to do in May

Everything you need to know about sowing and growing this month



Time to tuck straw under your strawberries

As the weather gets warmer, the sowing options widen. In May many tender plants can now be sown outside. By the time they will have emerged from the soil, all danger of frost should be over. As the seed propagated inside will grow faster than that sown outside, you can stagger the ripening of crops.

The same effect can be achieved by moving plants in containers from sun to shade. A further refinement of this is to slow things down selectively by shading, or to speed them up by covering them with cloches.

You can keep one step ahead of weeds by making 'stale seedbeds'. Cover the land where you plan to sow next with cloches. Any dormant weed seeds will germinate and you can pull them out before you sow your seed to give it the advantage of a head start.



Sow early and late potatoes at the same time to ensure a continuous supply

The classic way to have a succession is to sow early, mid and late season varieties, often at much the same time. Potatoes are a good example as some take many more weeks to mature but will then store through winter while the 'earlies' that will be ready in June need to be eaten quickly.

Some vegetables - leeks, parsnips or carrots - can be harvested over many weeks, while others need to be lifted as soon as they are ready. As a general rule the fastest growing ones are the first to go over. Lettuce, salad greens of all sorts, many of the oriental greens, texcel greens, spinach and peas are best eaten in the brief moment of their perfection. To get a good supply of these, sow a few seeds every three weeks. Keep the rows short. Some highly organized gardeners have a small prepared seed bed at the end of each row. As one set of seedlings gets transplanted out, the next few seeds go into the nursery bed.



Sow runner beans two

at a time

A good conjuring trick for a continuing supply is to sow some vegetables as seed and plant some as 'plugs'. The plugs will race ahead to give you double the length of harvest. Incidentally, for those who have little time, no greenhouse or don't need huge yields, plug plants can be a boon. Most of the large seed companies do them now, e.g. [Suttons](#) or [Marshall's](#).

The [RHS range](#) even does a full 'basic' (whole year's) easy-to-grow, tried-and-trusted vegetable collection of 41 plug plants. These will supply you with fresh salads and tender vegetables throughout summer and autumn with plenty of winter greens to round off the year.

For easiest pest protection, netting is unbeatable. For the belt and braces approach, plant your brassicas through a [porous membrane](#) or a [paper mulching sheet](#) to deter the cabbage root fly and keep down weeds. Protect them from aerial attack by the cabbage whites by covering them with horticultural netting on top. It's worth splashing out on the heavy duty meshes as they will last for years and more or less eliminate pest problems. If you're stuck, even old net curtains will do the job - at least for a while.



Check catalogues for

seed rather than the garden centre

Sow sweet corn in a block formation as it is wind pollinated. Start outdoor cucumbers, marrows, squashes, pumpkins and courgettes in the greenhouse to be planted out next month in a warm sheltered spot. Station sow French and runner beans two at a time (for insurance) at the base of their supports. Cover them with plastic water bottles with the bottoms off and the tops left open for air circulation.

http://www.youngrowgirl.com/garden/pop_cloche.php If you need to go round a support with a bottle, slit the sides and wrap them round. Push the bottles right down into the soil to protect the young plants from slugs, snails and mice. When the plants begin to grow well, select the strongest.

Net developing fruits against the birds. If you have new fruit trees pick off the blossom so they can put their energy into establishing themselves. Tuck straw under your strawberries. Fluff it up to let in air. Take off the runners so the plants concentrate on the fruits. Water from the bottom in the mornings and protect them against slugs. Pick off alternate berries on gooseberry bushes for large fruits. Prune and tie in fans and cordons. Prune plums and peaches as the danger of silver leaf disease will have passed with the milder weather.



The asparagus season

is here

If you have time it's worth looking through the catalogues for seed rather than just going down to the garden centre. There are always new and interesting varieties. A couple that caught my eye were Sweetcorn 'Northern Extra Sweet' designed for cool climates and runner bean 'Wisley Magic'. It won 'Best on Trial' with its 'heavy yields, old fashioned taste and bright red flowers'. Another, for anyone who shares my penchant for novelties and pretty vegetables, is runner bean 'Summer Medley'. It has red, white and pink flowers all at once. Though not large, it keeps going for weeks on end.

Enjoy your first crops of lovely spring vegetables. The asparagus season has arrived at last.

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