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OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



Things to do in June

The expert guide to gardening this month



Time to plant out corn such as our exquisite Painted Mountain (above)

June is a turning point in the allotment year. As the delicious early produce is harvested, gaps appear and you have the chance to get in a second wave, or to plant out the tender vegetables from the Americas – tomatoes, peppers, courgettes, runner beans, sweet corn and aubergines (disputably from India) – that have been waiting in the wings for warm weather. If you haven't got young plants ready to go, you can still buy them (though be quick now) in markets, boot sales and garden centres. All grow with extreme vigour and speed and need masses of sunshine, food and water. Plant out basil and other herbs for a forthcoming feast.



Courgettes, marrows and pumpkins possibly do the greatest marathon of all in a season. To give them a good start, sow them in pots and transplant later or just sow them outside with cloche cover for a minimum 19°C/66°F. Find a sun trap position and either grow them on the compost heap or make planting pockets. To do this, dig a hole

about 30cm square and mix in a good helping well-rotted manure or compost. Allow around 60cm between bush varieties and 1.2m for trailers. Trailers can be grown upwards to save space, given a sturdy enough frame, or be trained into coils.

When planting, drop in a sawn-off plastic bottle, so you can water down to the roots. Mound up the soil for extra warmth and drainage. As they grow, protect the fruits from soil damage by getting them off the ground. Showmen put a piece of glass underneath the plants to keep skins of the fruits flawless. As courgettes are notoriously prolific, three or four plants are plenty for most families. It is best not to let them grow into tasteless marrows. If you want to grow a really good marrow, start with marrow seed. Varieties like the stripy 'Bush Baby' are recommended for flavour.



Construct the frame before sowing runner beans either as a ridge support or as a wigwam. Prepare the ground well, incorporating plenty of well rotted manure or compost. The sawn off water bottle comes in again as a collar on young runner beans for slug and snail defence.



Grow vine tomatoes up canes, tying them in as they grow. Pinch out or snip off the little shoots between the stem and the side shoots (the axils) for top quality crops. Remember to keep tomatoes well watered to avoid blossom end rot.



For the second wave of peas and beetroot, move from earlies to maincrop types. Maincrop peas will take roughly 16 weeks and be ready to eat around September. Though slower than earlies, they are known to produce the finest crops. They enjoy a little shade at midday in summer. Good maincrop varieties are 'Ambassador', which has high disease resistance, and the British bred 'Cavalier'.



Beetroot can be grown for summer eating by sowing a few seeds every two weeks. However, if you want beetroot for winter, the long rooted maincrop types, like 'Cheltenham Green Top', will be at the ideal stage for lifting and storing in October if sown now.



With winter in mind, start to sow purple sprouting broccoli and kale for transplanting at the end of August. If you have young brassica plants ready to go out, plant them 60cm apart and use the ground in between for salads leaves. Hold off sowing Chinese cabbage, pak choi and other oriental vegetables for a few weeks after the longest day on June 21 as they are sensitive to day length. For the same reason, harvest lettuce,

spinach and radish. As long day annuals, they are programmed to flower in mid summer and [likely to bolt](#).

Take precautions against the [flea beetle](#) by netting the brassicas and beets. Failing that, you can detect their presence by the appearance of neat round bites out of the leaves. Flea beetles have a jumping habit if disturbed and this can be exploited to your advantage. The trick is to smear a piece of card with car grease or slow sticking glue, run the card over the top of the plants and catch the beetles as they fly up and stick. If there are any chickens about, smear the card with treacle instead and give it to them.

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