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## OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



# Things to do in May

The expert guide to gardening for the month ahead



Runner beans are ready, rewarding and easy to grow now

Fruit bushes and trees are generally fertilized this month but avoid being too generous. Overfeeding can have the effect of leaf growth at the expense of the fruit.



Most recommend that raspberries and the other cane fruits, if producing well, should only need one barrow of well-rotted manure (or two of compost) per 10 sqm every other year in spring. A fortnightly spray of seaweed extract – a bio-stimulant rather than fertilizer – through to July, however, seems to have a remarkably good effect, boosting fruit production and good health. For maximum yield, keep well watered at the critical stages of flowering and fruiting. Clear weeds and grass around them as they will compete for nutrients in the soil.



Gooseberries usually produce the earliest fruits of the season. Some may even be big enough to pick by the end of May. If the crop is prolific, thin out up to half of the berries. These will be sharp tasting but are excellent for jam and spring puddings like gooseberry fool. The remainder will grow in sweetness in the next few weeks.

In May the budding fruits of strawberries will weigh the plants down, bringing them into contact with the soil. Lay down straw or strawberry mats under the plants. If you have a slug and snail problem, use mats or grow through woven polypropylene.



Protection against soil-born pests is also essential for brassicas. The first generation of the cabbage root fly emerge from the pupae in May or as soon as the weather warms up. Even if you didn't have them last year, the chances are that they will fly in from someone else's plot. The problem is great but the solution is simple. Make up 15cm/6in collars from roofing felt or even cardboard or buy some proprietary ones.

While you are at it, you might as well go for the belt and braces approach and grow them under fine netting or horticultural fleece. Brassicas are targeted by many flying pests as well as the soil borne ones – cabbage whites, root flies, aphids and pigeons can wreck your crops. The same goes for the carrots and the carrot fly. Net them too or create a vertical barrier as the carrot fly flies low and in straight lines.



Thinking ahead towards the end of summer, sow sweet corn now to plant out in June. It will germinate happily on a windowsill. Drop two seeds in a pot, thin to the strongest and harden off having checked any possibility of frost in your area.

There are some interesting cultivars worth a try. Specially bred to fruit in a brief summer, there is sweetcorn 'Northern Extra Sweet Early Sweet' and 'Sundance' (recommended by the Northern Horticultural Society). Other interesting ones to try are the albino, 'Mirai White' and the delightfully named gold and ivory, 'Honey Bantam Bicolour'. Unsurprisingly 'Butterscotch' is said to melt in the mouth. The joker in the pack is sweet corn '[Red Strawberry](#)'. It is a miniature popcorn type with kernals that look like strawberries in shape, size and colour. It is also claimed to be the 'dynamite' bait for carp and bream.



Runner and French beans are one of the easiest and most rewarding crops of all. If you can't be bothered to set up bean poles for the runners, you can grow the dwarf or bush cultivars. They produce almost full sized beans and need little support, other than twigs to keep the beans off the ground. 'Pickwick' only reaches 30cm. 'Rotbluhende' (nicknamed the 'Teenie Beanie') is claimed to produce an endless crop, 'Hestia' has red and white flowers like the and famous 'Painted Lady' (1633) while the dwarf 'Purple Teepee' has near black pods that grow above the foliage for ease of picking.

Carry on with sowing maincrop beetroot, winter cabbage, sprouting broccoli, kale and swedes for winter eating, as well as autumn and winter cauliflowers and early and late leeks. Move onto maincrop varieties of carrots and broad beans. Add early bunching turnips to your successional plantings. Keep going as always on all sorts of salad leaves.



Don't forget to sow some flowering plants to draw in the predators that will deal with the aphids. The rich colours of [nasturtiums](#) which vary from 'Peach Melba' to 'Strawberry Ice' to 'Cherry Rose' to plummy 'Black Velvet' set off the dark green leaves of vegetables while being useful as well.

Nasturtiums are the most accommodating of plants, easy to grow and thriving on neglect. Graceful twining climbers, they also come as edgers and carpeters. Another bonus is that [you can eat them](#). The peppery leaves make a punchy addition to salads and the flowers can be stuffed. Even the seeds can be enjoyed if pickled and eaten like capers.

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[Next](#)

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2 comments, displaying Oldest first

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**mothmoth**

30 April 2010 8:52AM

Beautiful, fresh-looking beetroot,

reminded me that the quickly grown top leaves are good added to stir fried veg, although their colour does tint the whole panfull.

My efforts at growing nasturtiums were sabotaged by Cabbage White butterfly larvae, who decimated them almost overnight. Butterflies generally once mature get ambushed by the bluetits later around the Buddleia flowers. For now the birds rid my tree and shrub twigs of aphids, but I don't know which predator would protect things from those caterpillars.

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**TopVeg**

2 May 2010 7:08PM

Can't wait for the gooseberry season to arrive! Thanks for the link to gooseberry fool!

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