



ALLOTMENTS & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

May monthly planner of jobs to do

It is easy to luxuriate in May and bask in the growth and fulfilment that surges through the days, but it is also a busy time in any garden or allotment. Much of this is because there is a distinct shift in the weather. For most of us, frost becomes increasingly unlikely as the month progresses and most tender plants can be put out from their winter protection by the middle of the month; although still keep some fleece to hand to cover them if the temperature plummets.

BASIC GARDENING JOBS

- **Check** containers to see if they need watering
- **Stake** emerging growth in borders before it grows to tall
- **Acclimatise** tender annuals before planting out later in the month
- **Cover** currant and gooseberry bushes and raspberry canes with taut anti-bird netting if you don't want to share your harvest.
- **Weed** around vegetables, especially onions, leeks and garlic, preferably by hand, so the young plants are not disturbed. To save time later on, aim to pull weeds before they flower and set seed.
- **Take** softwood cuttings of Fuchsia, pelargonium and osteospermum. Pot up, put the cuttings in a propagator if you have one, or place a clear plastic bag over the pot, remembering to take the bag off for several minutes every few days for ventilation.
- **There** is still time in early May to over-seed patchy lawns. Rake the soil so the surface is fine and crumbly before sowing seed. Keep seed and seedlings watered during prolonged dry spells.
- **To** maintain shape cut back the flowered stems of Forsythia and Ribes to shoots lower down.
- **Plant** up hanging baskets and containers with bedding if you have a bright frost-free place to keep them until they go outdoors after the last frosts
- **Hardy** annuals such as sunflowers nasturtiums and nigella can be sown direct into the ground. You can also carefully move self-seeded annuals to alternative positions.
- **Paths**, drives and patios can be kept weed-free by spraying with a path weedkiller. Many of these prevent weeds returning for several months after they are applied.
- **The** grass will be growing strongly by now, so if you want a neat-looking lawn you'll need to cut at least once a week. If you would like to encourage more flowers in the lawn instead, either raise the height of the blades or cut it less frequently so that plants, such as daisies and clover, can bloom and help pollinators.
- **Still** time to sow annuals, such as cosmos and zinnia, for colour this summer.
- **Start** sowing biennials such as hesperis, foxgloves and wallflowers, for blooms next year in late spring. Sow in module or seed trays and plant out later in the summer.
- **May** is a good time to trim evergreen hedges, such as lonicera, box and yew; it will get their edges looking crisp and neat. Small hedges can be trimmed with shears. Larger hedges are best tackled with a hedge trimmer. It is illegal to disturb nesting birds, so be sure to check the hedges for signs of nests before you start the job.
- **A** dry day is the perfect opportunity to kill weeds by hoeing them. Sharpen the blade of the hoe beforehand so that it will efficiently cut through thick stems. Hoe regularly, even if you can't see any weeds, as it will disturb even tiny weed seedlings and stop them in their tracks.
- **Any** veg or flowers planted this spring will need regular watering while it settles in and puts down roots into the soil, especially during dry weather. This also applies to any new turf you may have laid.
- **A** quick trick to get your lawn looking smart if you don't have time to mow is to cut the lawn edges.
- **Finish** erecting runner bean supports ready for planting out beans grown in a greenhouse or directly into the ground in late May

- **When** you sow salad crops such as lettuce, or Brassicas such as cabbages and cauliflowers it is important to sow in small batches, a few at a time to stagger the cropping.
- **Put** up brackets to hang your baskets on. Choose a sheltered site where the basket looks good and is accessible for watering. Use a strong cast iron or steel weather-proof bracket. Baskets get heavy when watered so make sure it is securely fixed using masonry plugs for brickwork and thick screws into firm wood on fence posts or similar. Where brackets need to be high, use a retractable hanger to lower the basket down for watering.
- **Monitor** areas of wildflowers for vigorous plants that can out compete the more gentle growers. Weeds like nettles, creeping thistle and couch grass all have the potential to swamp everything else-some species are just more successful on your soil so may need to be controlled to keep a balance of flora. Catch them young and lift them out from between the plants taking their roots with them.
- **Collect** waste vegetation in a compost heap to make your own soil conditioner or ingredient for a potting mix. Composting depends on soil microbes so make the heap on the ground. The rotting microbes need air, moisture and warmth to work. Use a mix of ingredients. Covering the heap and turning it will speed up the process.
- **Tie** in summer climbers frequently as their new shoots extend.
- **Cover** any areas of bare soil with mulch, but water first so you trap some moisture in.
- **Dig** out lawn weeds rather than using chemicals. An old kitchen knife works well to remove long tap roots.
- **Take** photos of your favourite tulips and combinations in flower, to help you decide what to plant in November.

PESTS AND DISEASES

- **Viburnum** beetle grubs can leave viburnum foliage in tatters. They will be active this month, so keep an eye out and squash any you find.
- **Place** pheromone traps in apple and pear trees to monitor attacks from codling moth that cause 'maggoty' fruit.
- **Vine** weevils become active in late spring, so check your containers for the distinctive C-shaped white grubs.
- **Sawfly** grubs can strip the leaves of vulnerable plants, such as gooseberries and Solomon's seal, very quickly. Remove any grubs you find.
- **Slugs** and snails are busy eating new growth at the moment, so remove any you see and use organic slug pellets or a biological control (slugs only) to kill them.
- **Aphids** can seem to appear overnight, so keep an eye out and squash any that you find.
- **Lily** beetle are able to decimate lilies in just a few days, so check your plants regularly, and remove any of the black grubs and red adult beetles that you find.
- **Check** peaches and nectarines for peach leaf curl.
- **Check** brassicas for caterpillars of the cabbage white butterfly.
- **Look** out for leaf miners. Their winding trails on leaves are caused by insect larvae, hatching from eggs laid on the leaves. Damage is mostly cosmetic but picking off the marked leaves can help reduce the problem.
- **Control** pests with a watered-in nematode biocontrol solution

WILDLIFE

- **Shop** for those summer seasonal plants that are attractive to pollinators, such as Antirrhinum, Calendula, Heliotrope, Nicotiana and single poppies.
- **Plant** Buddleja Davidii to attract butterflies. The nectar-rich flowers attract red admiral and peacock butterflies. However avoid planting near countryside because buddleia can self-seed and compete with native plants
- **Put** up nesting boxes for birds that are still to nest in late spring and early summer, such as finches and swifts.
- **Check** your pond for tadpoles and for newts laying eggs. Make sure there is a shelf, stone or ramp for wildlife to enter and exit the water.
- **Remove** duckweed and blanket weed from ponds but, before composting, leave it to dry out at the side to give aquatic life the opportunity to get back to the pond.

- **Let** areas of the grass go 'wild' and mow paths and patches of grass for picnics and sunbathing instead so you can enjoy the wildflowers normally hidden in the turf. Even where grass is mown regularly, leave dandelions, daisies and clover to flower to attract bees and other insects.
- **Hedgehogs** are breeding in May so before you start strimming use something like a broom handle to poke about in long grass or dense foliage to check for sleeping hedgehogs or nests with hoglets.
- **Look** out for young ladybird larvae with their distinct six legs and orange markings on their elongated bodies. Watch them at work and wait for them to pupate and turn into adults.

VEGETABLES/HERBS

- **Squash** plants raised under cover can be planted out into a sunny spot after the threat of frost has gone, where there is space to grow them up a trellis or wigwam. Enrich the soil with well-rotted homemade compost and dig a hole for each 90cm apart, the depth of a spade's blade, then plant into the centre, so the seed leaves sit just above the surface. Firm in and water well.
- **Continue** successional sowing of carrots, beetroot, spinach and other salad crops. Many herbs can be sown direct outdoors in late May, such as parsley and coriander.
- **Sow** climbing, runner and French beans under cover for planting out in June, in milder areas sow them direct into the ground later this month.
- **When** the new stems of potatoes reach about 20cm, draw up the soil to cover the lower half of stems. This helps protect young growth from late frosts and prevents young tubers from turning green and poisonous in the light.
- **May** is the month to remove fleece covers from your veg, but have some at hand to cover newly planted or tender plants if frost is forecast. The later into May the less likely it will occur, but a late frost could strike and blacken foliage and flowers.
- **Tomatoes** and Peppers can be planted outdoors later in May when the danger of frost has passed.
- **Leeks** that were sown last month in modules can be planted outdoors. Allow around 30cm between rows to make weeding easier, and space plants at 15cm intervals for full size leeks. If you are short of space, plant closer together and harvest alternate plants as baby leeks, leaving the rest to grow on to maturity.
- **Finish** planting maincrop potatoes by early May for crops in late summer/early autumn. Plant the tubers 40cm apart in rows that are 60-75cm apart.
- **Harvest** established asparagus (third year onwards) the spears can be cut about 2.5cm under the soil for six weeks from mid-April.
- **Make** the most of the space in your veg garden by sowing quick-growing crops, such as salads, between longer-term residents, such as brassicas, while they're establishing.
- **You** can still plant onion sets and shallots if you haven't already done so.
- **Split** pot-grown herb seedlings and grow them on to keep you supplied with fresh herbs for the rest of the season. At this stage, they will just need a bit more root room in richer compost. They can be grown on in containers or planted out into the garden.
- **When** feeding your plants check the dilution rate then use the measure provided to add the right amount of feed to your watering can. Add it before you put the water in, then it will be evenly mixed. Otherwise give it a good stir.
- **Harvest** asparagus spears by cutting them just below soil level once they get to 15-20cm high. Check them for cutting every day. It's a crop that tastes better fresh. Newer crowns should be picked for a short time to allow them to strengthen, but once a bed has matured you'll be cropping most days from April until June.

TREES/SHRUBS/BULBS/FLOWERS

- **Prune** early flowering clematis such as *C. alpine* right after they finish flowering
- **Plant** out sweet peas once roots are well formed pinching tops out after three pairs of leaves to make the plants bushy and train them up supports.
- **Deadhead** tulips to improve the size of next year's bulb and feed them with tomato feed therefore giving them the chance to produce a good flower, because much of the plant's energy will go into producing seed if you leave them on the plant.
- **To** make a dramatic summer display in large pots try ginger lilies, or *Hedychium*. They are hungry thirsty plants so need a mix of half potting compost and the other half of leafmould and grit. They will grow to 2m or more with their sweetcorn-like leaves and orange plumes of flowers. Underplant them with cosmos, marigolds or nasturtiums and the combination puts on a dramatic and trouble free display for months on

end. They die down in winter, and through the cold months keep them in a large plastic pot in a cool dark frost free shed and by mid-May they are putting on new growth and are ready to plant out again.

- **From** mid-May, dahlia tubers can be planted outside. Put in a sturdy stake so you can support them as they grow, and make sure to mulch around your plants. Watch out for slugs and snails, which love dahlias young growth.
- **If** your borders are looking a little dull at the moment, try planting any of the following: *Geranium pratense*; *Galega officinalis*; *Ceanothus 'Concha'*; *Astrantia*; *Geum*. Make sure to water them in well and keep watered during dry spells over the coming months.
- **Peonies** dislike dry weather in spring, so give them a good soak during spells without rain.
- **Gladioli** should be planted now if not done in April.
- **Plant** out both dahlia and chrysanth cuttings at the end of May after they have been hardening off in a cold frame. They both need "stopping" by pinching out the tops of the plants when about 6 inches (15cm) tall. This causes the plants to produce side shoots, called laterals, which carry the flowers. Before planting rake a general fertiliser into the ground and always put in the canes first then tie the plants to them. Watch out for slugs and snails.
- **Pot** grown spring bulbs can be saved for replanting next autumn by knocking them out into trays or on newspaper and spacing them out somewhere airy to dry out. Take off the dried leaves and store the bulbs in labelled paper bags somewhere cool and dry. They will stay firm and can be replanted or potted next autumn.
- **Cut** back and divide pulmonarias and doronicums after flowering to boost next year's display.

FRUIT

- **Citrus** plants that have spent the winter in the greenhouse can be brought outside at the beginning of May, but still keep some fleece to hand to cover them if the temperature plummets. As well as acclimatising them to life outside, this is also a good time to prune them, cutting back any damaged, straggly or untidy branches. Oranges and Lemons are very forgiving of hard pruning and need reinvigorating, so look to remove a few of the older stems every year that can be replaced by new shoots.
- **Regularly** check gooseberry bushes for gooseberry sawfly caterpillars and pick them off the leaves as you find them.
- **Remove** excess raspberry suckers which spread underground as they emerge.
- **In** late May thin developing gooseberries to encourage large dessert fruits.
- **If** you haven't already done so mulch strawberry plants to keep fruit off the ground to retain moisture and suppress weeds. Cover with netting to protect against birds
- **Prune** apple and pear cordons, espaliers, step overs and dwarf pyramids if getting too big.
- **Protect** gooseberries, currant bushes, damsons, cherries and plums by netting them before birds can take the small unripe fruit.
- **Tie** in the shoots of wall-trained peaches and plums with sturdy ties.

GREENHOUSE/COLD FRAMES

- **Keep** an eye on how hot or cold your greenhouse is getting by using a max/min thermometer. It's useful to know as then you can make sure you are ventilating or insulating the greenhouse correctly. Also reduce the sun's glare by either applying white shading paint to the glass or installing shading netting.
- **Continue** to use your cold frames to harden off plants before you plant them out. Still keep an eye on the weather forecast in case there is a frost.
- **Greenhouse** doors and ventilators should be opened during the day.
- **In** the greenhouse, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and aubergines should be planted if not done already.
- **Plant** cordon tomatoes in grow bags or 20L pots in the greenhouse.
- **Tomatoes** for the greenhouse can be planted at the start of May. They can be planted direct into the border, pots or growing bags. Plant them deeply as they'll make roots from the lower stem.

HOUSE PLANTS

- **As** the weather gets warmer, house plants and conservatory plants that like a humid atmosphere will benefit from regular misting or being grouped together.