



# ALLOTMENTS & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

## August monthly planner of jobs to do

August rides in on the easy back of high summer, the days still long, the weather warm and the garden as rich in colour and produce as it possibly can be. But by the end of the month, it is starting to look a little tired. There is a faded, feel to things, which has a certain charm but also a melancholy. The holidays are ending, a new term awaits, and the days are noticeably shorter.

### BASIC GARDENING JOBS

- **Boost** soil biology, suppress weeds, retain plant nutrients and improve harvests in your vegetable plot next year by sowing a crop of green manure.
- **Buy** and/or order winter and spring flowering bulbs and seeds for sowing in autumn.
- **Store** seed collected from annuals and perennials such as poppy, marigold and love-in-the-mist in labelled paper bags in a cool, dry place for sowing next spring.
- **Carry** on watering, deadheading and feeding your summer containers to keep the show looking good into autumn
- **Hedges** including hornbeam and beech may need their final tidy of the year to keep them neat through autumn and winter. Check for late-nesting birds before you do this, and delay until the late chicks have fledged
- **Cut** back spent flower stems and foliage of early summer-flowering herbaceous perennials to neaten them up and encourage new growth
- **Remove** flowers and fruitlets from prize squashes so plants divert energy into fewer, larger fruits for showing.
- **Use** this season's non-flowering growth to take cuttings from *Hebe*, *Choisya*, *Cistus*, *Penstemon* and *Dianthus* to make new plants. Keep in moist compost, in a warm, bright place out of direct sunlight.
- **Hand-weed** and hoe off any weeds in borders, especially bigger plants, before they seed. Keeping on top of them now will mean less effort to manage them later on.
- **Take** the chance when water butts may be empty to clean them thoroughly. This will prevent dirt and get rid of unwanted insect larvae.
- **Even** if your lawn looks dry and brown there is no need to water; healthy turf will recover once autumn rain arrives and you will be saving valuable water.
- **Hasten** the composting process in your bin by turning the material; then cover it to keep in heat and moisture and encourage speedier rotting.
- **August** is the best time for the main cut if you let your grass grow long or have a wildlife patch, a task called the 'hay cut' when cutting a meadow. Set your mower to cut short, as low as 4cm (1½in) - or, better still, use a scythe or shears. Leave the cuttings where they fall to dry and for seeds of any wildflowers to drop to the soil surface. A few days later, rake the cuttings up (and add to your compost heap) to reduce soil fertility and encourage more wildflowers to grow among the sward.
- **Continue** to water plants this month during spells of hot weather.
- **Look** for weeds hidden by tall perennials or shrubs. Each thistle, dandelion or dock will shed hundreds of seeds, while bindweed establishes fast if ignored. Dig out as much of the root as you can when you find them. The bits of root left in the ground will shoot again and these can be treated brushing a glyphosate herbicide directly onto the tips of the plant but be careful not to touch your border plants.
- **Water** thoroughly, weed and deadhead before you go on holiday.
- **Continue** mowing the lawn regularly, with the blades set high if the weather's hot and dry.
- **Remove** decomposing foliage from ponds - as it breaks down it can poison the pond with harmful chemicals,

- **Get** the ground prepared now for growing grass seed or laying turf next month. Be fastidious in forking out any weeds, large stones or old tree roots. Incorporate some soil improver - compost helps all soils and grit is good for heavy clay soil. Apply a high-phosphate fertiliser and then rake the surface level. Consolidate it evenly by shuffling along in your gardening boots. Finally, rake the firmed surface to a fine, crumbly tilth.
- **Replenish** your pond water if levels drop a bit, which is likely due to evaporation. It is preferable to use rainwater. If you need to fill it by more than a third, do it in two stages, one day apart, so that any pond life can adjust to the changes in water temperature.
- **Do** a garden audit! What looks good and what doesn't? Note problems, planning any future treatment in your calendar. Check for plants that will need propagation this year to keep them going and plan fillers for any gaps.
- **Scarify** and aerate lawns, now is a better time for this vigorous treatment than spring.
- **Swap** gluts with other growers, so that you share out your collective bounty and enjoy a wider array of crops.
- **If** quick growing healthy veg crops are now maturing in growing bags, feel free to make a second sowing in the compost once they are removed. It'll still have some goodness.
- **Your** compost heap will be filling up with green sappy material - add straw or cardboard into the mix if it becomes too wet and slimy.
- **Creeping** buttercup as it's commonly known, can be a real pest, with tough roots that aren't easily removed from your borders. It spreads easily and needs to be kept on top of or it will take over everything else. Weed out leaves and mulch to suppress growth.
- **Keep** picking to ensure your fruit and veg carries on into the autumn, even if the August harvest appears to be overwhelming. Late varieties of soft fruit provide a welcome supply for summer desserts and preserves. Courgettes and beans must be picked small to keep the plant cropping. Water plants after picking to keep them in growth. If you can't keep up with eating the harvest, share it or start to bottle or freeze it for the winter.
- **Plant** bulbs now for a winter display. It takes between 8-12 weeks from planting to flowering and is different for each species. All bulbs can be forced but prepared bulbs have been treated to flower sooner so can be started later. Narcissi, hyacinths or tulips can be started now. Pot them up and place in cold dark conditions to allow the roots to grow, then bring them into the light and warm them up gradually to encourage flowering. Buy bulbs from the garden centre or bulb specialists by mail order, Force plenty to save pounds on cut flowers.
- **Collect** seed from plants for sowing next year when the flowers have faded, and the seed is set. It will save you buying seed and it's also fun to see some of the genetic variations that occur in the next generation. Collect when it is dry but before the seedhead opens. Cut the heads off and if the seed pours out freely, just save them in a paper envelope. Some seedheads take time to open so place the stems upside down in a paper bag and put them somewhere dry to release the seed into the bottom of the bag. Store the seed envelopes in a tin indoors, then sow in the spring.
- **Make** an effective liquid plant food from comfrey. This large herbaceous plant is unequalled in taking up nutrients and minerals that can be extracted from it and made into a potent liquid feed. Cut the comfrey right down to the ground and fill a bucket with the leaves and stem of the plant. Cram these tightly, cutting them up with a knife to increase the surface area and enable more to fit in. Then top the bucket up with as much water as will fit. Set this aside for three weeks, putting it somewhere well out of the way because the chemical content means that it will start to smell appalling as it decomposes. Next strain of the foliage and store in a container with a tight lid or cap. Dilute the liquid with water at a ratio of about 30:1 and feed weekly to keep plants healthy into autumn. The comfrey plant will regrow strongly and can provide two or even three supplies over a year, as well as the flowers being a superb source of nectar for bees.

## PESTS & DISEASES

- **Powdery** mildew can be a nuisance so remove badly infected leaves and mulch around plants to trap moisture.
- **Watch** out for the yellow and black caterpillars of the cabbage white butterfly that strip the leaves from any plant of the brassica family. Pick off any you find or spray with a suitable pesticide.
- **Spray** white fly and red spider mite if found in the greenhouse with insecticides.

- **Continue** to pick off the scarlet adults and black slimy larvae of the Lily beetle.
- **If** you spot blight on potatoes and tomatoes remove brown spotted or blotched leaves, try spraying the rest with a copper-based fungicide, but if it does not work remove all top growth on potatoes and destroy tomato plants.
- **It** is an ideal time to apply nematodes as a biological control to manage vine weevil, while the soil is warm and before vine weevil grubs have grown large enough to cause serious damage - particularly in containers.
- **Earwigs** nibble flowers like dahlias at night. Trap them in straw filled upturned flowerpots and rehome in a fruit tree where they will control other pests.
- **Set** up sticky traps in the greenhouse to capture large numbers of damaging whitefly.
- **It** can be disappointing to lift your onions only to find the base of the bulbs is rotten. The first sign of the disease is wilting of the leaves in dry weather as the roots are destroyed. Later the plants come free of the soil and may fall over. When you harvest them you will see white, fluffy growth at the base of the bulb and translucent bulbs. This is a serious disease and remains in the soil for many years so you mustn't grow onions or related plants, such as garlic, leeks and shallots in the soil again.

### WILDLIFE

- **When** deadheading plants that won't flower again, leave some seedheads as food for wildlife in autumn and winter.
- **Windfall** apples and pears are valuable food for many birds so leave a few on the ground or place them on bird tables.
- **Clean** birdbaths regularly to prevent the spread of disease, and keep them topped up with fresh water, especially on hot days.
- **Compost** pond algae but leave it beside the pond overnight to let any wildlife return to water.
- **Start** to look at ways to make an insect hotel for winter. Your hard work now will pay dividends next spring.

### VEGETABLES/HERBS

- **Finish** digging up early potatoes.
- **Lift** garlic, onions and shallots with a fork once leaves start to turn yellow - don't bend the tops over as this can cause neck rot. Dry outside if sunny or in the greenhouse. Store onions in net bags in a cool, dark, dry place.
- **Pick** cucumbers at least twice a week.
- **For** best flavour tomatoes pick ripe with the stalk intact and store at room temperature.
- **Remove** flowers and fruitlets from prize squashes so plants divert energy.
- **Encourage** a flush of new foliage on herbs such as oregano and thyme by cutting back now. Dry or freeze the trimmings to use during winter.
- **Give** your winter squashes and pumpkins a helping hand to ripen by cutting off any large leaves that shade their fruits from the sun.
- **By** August, you may have harvested many of the crops sown earlier in the season, leaving empty spaces in your productive garden that are great for sowing more seeds for a late-season harvest. Whether you want a catch crop of salad leaves that will be ready in a few weeks, carrots for Christmas or spring cabbages for harvesting next year, there are plenty of crops that can still be sown this month. The soil will be warm, so seeds soon germinate when sown directly into the ground. Remember to keep them well watered in hot and dry weather. **What to sow:** Oriental salad leaves, rocket, perpetual spinach, Pak choi, endive or chicory are quick crops to sow in smaller gaps in the vegetable plot and are ready to harvest quite quickly. Sowing them in late summer can also mean they are less likely to bolt, as often happens with rocket, salad leaves and spinach sown earlier in the year. A final sowing of flat leaf parsley and coriander will provide fresh herbs through autumn. You can also sow kohlrabi in early August; it should be ready in a few weeks. Early in the month try sowing quick-maturing cultivars of dwarf beans and carrots for harvesting through autumn. Spring cabbages, Swiss chard, winter hardy spring onions, winter radishes and turnips can also be sown now, ready for picking through winter and spring. **Varieties:** lettuce (vailan winter gem) and (marvel of four seasons), radish (black Spanish) and (April cross), corn salad (large leaves) and (vit), spinach (amazon) (perpetual), (winter giant) and (atlanta), endive (Natasha) and (pancalieri).

- **Now** is the time to plant onion sets for overwintering. They can be readily purchase from garden centres, online and the Allotment Trading Hut. **Varieties** are Senshyu, Electric and Shakespeare.
- **When** the curds begin to show on cauliflowers, bend the leaves over them to exclude light because too much sunlight tends to discolour them.
- **A** vegetable that needs blanching is endive. Tie the leaves together loosely, cover with an upturned plant pot and block the drainage hole to exclude light.
- **Try** to harvest crops as soon as they are ready. Runner and French beans in particular need picking when they are young and tender. If cauliflowers are not cut when they are at their best the curds soon begin to open. When sweet corn is ready for harvesting the silks at the top of the cobs turn brown. If you peel away some of the husk and press your thumb nail into one of the kernels, the liquid inside should be milky. If it is watery, they are not quite ready. Cabbages will keep for a while without harvesting so just take them when you need them.
- **Keep** harvesting or pinching out basil to make a bushier plant.
- **Allow** sun to reach ripening tomatoes by removing nearby leaves.
- **Plant** early potatoes now for a special addition to your Christmas feast. You'll need seed potatoes from a supplier that has had them cold stored for the summer. It's also possible to store seed potatoes from spring in the fridge yourself. They are best grown in bags or pots to be moved under cover when it gets frosty. Plant into a rich, soil-based compost. Keep well-watered and harvest on the day you eat them.
- **Swiss** chard is pretty much an all-year-round crop, and you can still sow some now for future cropping. Cut-and-come-again pickings are best, where you pick one or two outer leaves at a time from each plant for the kitchen leaving the plant to grow more leaves for a longer time.

### TREES/SHRUBS/BULBS/FLOWERS

- **Cut** prune the current year's growth on wisteria back to five or six leaves.
- **After** flowering, cut back lavenders to about 2.5cm (1in) below the flowering stems, but don't cut into old, brown wood. You can dry the prunings and make your own lavender bags or potpourri.
- **Camelias** and rhododendrons in pots need regular watering as they are setting flower buds for next spring. If they dry out it means fewer flowers in next year's displays.
- **Dahlias**, Chrysanthus and gladioli will benefit from liquid feeds this time of year.
- **Plant** Madonna lilies for next summer.
- **Prune** rambling roses now they have finished flowering - unless of course, you expect a good show of hips. Start by thinning out the branches that have flowered, selecting young replacements to tie in for next year's structure. It's a good idea to mulch your rambler with rotted manure afterwards, to break down and feed next year's new spring growth.
- **Plant** daffodils for spring - it's not too early if you have the space.
- **This** is a good time to propagate evergreen shrubs by layering - a simple technique where low-hanging stems are pinned to the soil and left to root.
- **Feed** potted flowering plants like amaryllis and eucomis with tomato fertiliser.
- **Prune** pyracantha now to keep it neatly trained against a wall or hedge to reduce its spread. This plant is very tolerant of pruning. Cut back the new shoots, the berries on last year's growth and thin out branches from the base.
- **Make** the most of edible flowers: scatter calendula, chive, borage, nasturtium and lavender flowers over salads to pep them up.
- **Take** heel cuttings of box plants by gently pulling off 10cm long side-shoots. Remove lower leaves and insert into gritty compost.
- **Tulips** have a reputation for not blooming the second year, but if you lifted them in spring you can sort through them and clean them up. The larger bulb should be big enough to bloom next year, so keep these for replanting. Any smaller bulbs will need growing on for a year in a nursery bed. Keep your saved bulbs in a dry place until planting time and keep them out of the reach of rodents.
- **Harvest** everlasting flowers with scissors in dry weather, selecting the strongest and longest stems for preserving. Papery flowers of helichrysum, statice and bracteantha preserve well. The flower heads must be perfect. Next remove any leaves and put into small bunches. Tie each bunch by the ends of the stems and hang them upside down somewhere cool and airy. The stems dry in a few weeks and can be used right through the winter to provide a welcome flower display.

- **Sweet** peas are long-day annuals, which means that they respond to light more than heat. So as the days get longer in spring they are triggered into growth and flowering but as the days start to shorten after 21 June, the same response urges them to set seed as fast as possible before winter comes. So, by August it is important to remove any seed pods as soon as you see them, as they will deter flower production, and to pick the flowers regularly before they have a chance to set seed.

### FRUIT

- **Harvest** early apples, peaches, nectarines, cherries and plums.
- **You** can prune apple cordons, dwarf pyramids, espaliers and step-overs this month but soft shoots are best left until September, and any shorter than about 23cm are best unpruned.
- **On** summer fruiting raspberries it's time to cut out canes that have finished fruiting and tie in new ones to supports.
- **Plant** up strawberry runners from healthy parents. Avoid disease build-up by choosing a new plot and replanting every three years.
- **Don't** pull up calabrese once the main head has been harvested - numerous small side-shoots will appear to give a second crop.
- **Blueberries** and raspberries ripen periodically rather than all at once, so pick over canes and bushes every few days to ensure you get everyone.
- **Early** maturing grape varieties, such as 'Chardonnay', should be protected from wasps as their sugar levels rise. Set traps or cover bunches with nets.
- **Early** apple and pear varieties should be picked and eaten as soon as they are ripe to avoid spoiling.
- **Summer** strawberry varieties can now be tidied up post-harvest; trim off all old leaves and cut off runners unless you want to make more plants. Weed the bed well then water and feed the plants with a general fertiliser to boost growth and strengthen the plants for next year.
- **Potted** orchard crops are often grafted onto dwarf rootstocks. If any suckers (shoots at ground level) appear, pull these off to maintain a compact habit to suit you space.

### GREENHOUSES/COLD FRAMES

- **Keep** summer cuttings in humid conditions with a mist spray and cover.
- **Remove** shading at the end of the month to give plants maximum light.
- **Check** greenhouse heaters are working now before you need them.
- **Pick** off yellowing and dead leaves from plants and keep floors and benches swept to reduce homes for pests
- **Control** red spider mites before these tiny mites take over and reduce your plant's health by sucking sap. In established populations webbing can be seen. Spider mite prefers a dry atmosphere so watering the greenhouse floor will help. You can buy bio-controls from organic catalogues to use now and make sure you thoroughly clean the greenhouse this winter.
- **Pinch** out cucumber side-shoots and remove any lower, yellowing leaves.
- **Begin** drying off chilli plants at the end of the month to ripen fruits.
- **Always** ventilate the greenhouse during the day to cope with high daytime temperatures. Automatic roof vents are ideal but also leave the door and side vents open for extra airflow. At this time of year night temperatures begin to drop so the difference between day and night temperatures gets wider and can cause stress to your more tender plants. Make sure the greenhouse is closed up over night and do your watering in the morning to avoid cool humid air at night which can lead to fungal rots.

### HOUSE PLANTS

- **Continue** feeding plants inside your home, too. Once a month, leafy house plants benefit from a general feed; for flowering specimens use a potassium-rich fertiliser.