

Things to do on the plot in August

Contributed by Behemoth

It's hot, so cool down at the plot.

Outside What to Sow Chicory and endive (see last month) Herbs: Basil, coriander, fenugreek, caraway and chervil in the bed or in pots. It's also a good time to sow parsley as the ground temp is high. Salad: Lettuces, radishes, onions. Sow hardy varieties of lettuce for a supply into Autumn; try Marvel of Four Seasons and Wonder of Winter Over-wintering onions – sometimes known as Japanese Onions. These grow over Winter, bulb up in the Spring and are ready in June and July. Japanese onions normally have to be grown from seed; they are not usually available as sets. Perpetual spinach/chard – sow now for Autumn use and as spring greens. Winter salad: Corn salad, winter purslane, rocket, land cress, mizuna, pak choi and Chinese mustards – sow in late August for Winter greens and Spring salads. Treat as cut-and-come-again and they'll crop for several months. Winter radishes General Water well but wisely. Lettuces, etc. may bolt if it gets too dry. If your potatoes get blight and you cut off the foliage, leave the spuds in the ground for two to three weeks to let the disease spores disperse. In this way, they will not be transferred to the tubers when you lift them and leave them out to cure on a fine day. Remember to turn the spuds once. A couple of hours should do it. Gather herb seed for cooking and sowing next year. Coriander, sorrel and caraway are easy to collect. Let them dry for about three weeks and then store in labelled envelopes. Pick and dry some herbs for winter use. Stake asparagus ferns. Watch for and deal with pests. Blanch endives with a pot over the top. Pollinate pumpkins and squashes: Sometimes you need to give nature a helping hand. Remove a male flower and present it to the female, giving it a good wiggle where it counts. You can tell a male flower by the long stem and the female by the swelling behind the flower. Feed pumpkins and squashes – they like this and will provide bigger fruits. Comfrey or tomato food is their preference. Plain water would help as well. Thin carrots. Pinch out side shoots on tomatoes. Water and feed them. Harvest sweetcorn if it is ready. Undercover Sow French beans for an Autumn crop. Turnip – to give roots in Winter Pak choi, perpetual spinach and winter lettuce. Beetroot – to give a small crop in Winter. General Keep tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, aubergines and melons watered and well fed. Ideally you should feed every 10 days to 2 weeks. Cut back leaves to allow air to circulate, keep ventilated and raise the humidity if you can. If you have limited space, nip out the growing tips of your tomatoes when you have four or five trusses going. You can leave them and let them go but the later fruits may not ripen. Pumpkins undercover will swamp other plants if they are not cut back. Do this after the fruits have set. Be ruthless. Move the stems to run where they don't cause a problem. Lift the fruit off the ground with a brick or a board to reduce the risk of rotting. Plant out seedlings sown the previous month. If you sowed some broccoli, interplant them between your ripening sweet corn if you have any. The corn provides shade for the broccoli and the stems can be cleared after harvesting. Fruit Now is the time to prune trained apple and pear trees. It is best to get this job done by mid-August at the latest for several reasons: - Encourages fruit buds and spurs to form - Reduces the vigour of the tree - Increases the size of fruits - Allows sun to reach the fruits - Reduces mildew risk - It's nicer to prune in the Summer Shorten all new side shoots growing directly from the main stems of cordons and the main branches of espaliers to 5cm (3 inches). Shorten shoots growing from existing spurs to 2cm (1 inch). All shoots should be pruned back to a leaf. Side shoots from the main stem of espaliers should be pruned off completely.

Plant summer-fruiting strawberries.

Prune plums after fruiting only in dry weather. Pruning in damp conditions will expose your trees to silverleaf and other airborne infections.

Cut out raspberry canes once they have fruited and tie in the new canes.

Protect fruit from birds.

Support heavily-laden bushes if necessary.

Harvest.