

**ADDISCOMBE, WOODSIDE & SHIRLEY LEISURE GARDENS LTD  
GLENTHORNE AVENUE, CROYDON. CR0 7EZ.  
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**Janet Macdonald's tips for getting the best out of your allotment**

**July/August**

Courgettes and cucumbers – there should be plenty of both, so since in this country we don't have the option sometimes resorted to in America of dealing with gluts by driving round the district and popping them in mailboxes, here are a couple of recipes:

Cucumber mousse – this makes a nice light lunch with brown bread and butter. Chop half a cucumber or the equivalent quantity of cucumber and courgette into small pieces, add finely chopped spring onions, stir this into 500g of cottage cheese, with a tablespoonful of finely chopped herbs (mint, parsley, basil, chives or a mixture). Melt half a block of lime or lemon jelly with about 5 tablespoons of water and mix this in. Pour the mixture into a serving dish or several ramekins and put in the fridge to set. When it is set, you can decorate the top with nasturtium flowers and mint leaves set in a thin layer of more jelly.

Courgette omelette – (makes 4). Finely chop 2 medium courgettes and cook them gently in a little butter. Take them off the heat and stir in 2 tablespoons of thick yoghurt and 1 tablespoon of chopped mint or parsley. Make the omelettes in a separate pan. Melt a little butter and pour in 2 beaten eggs for each person, cook over a medium heat until the bottom is set, spoon in a quarter of the courgette and herb mix down one half, fold the other half over and turn it out onto a plate. You could add a little chopped ham to the courgette mix.

If you have a problem with bindweed that is climbing up your precious plants, pull the top free and lay it away from the other plants. Put a hole free rubber glove on one hand, add an old woollen glove on top, dip your fingers in glyphosate and run them down the bindweed.

A hoe is your best friend where large patches of weeds are concerned. Use it in sunny weather, and let the result lay for a day to dry up before removing it to the compost heap – but don't do this with flowering groundsel, which will promptly set seed – put it straight into the compost and bury it under other weeds.

**Cuttings**

- Buy a fresh supply of hormone rooting powder each year as it deteriorates once it is exposed to the air.
- Use flower arrangers' oasis block to root cuttings. Cut the block into small cubes, make a hole with a skewer or knitting needle, dip the cuttings in rooting powder and insert them into the block. Once you can see roots, pot them on, oasis and all.

**Edible flowers**

- Check identification before eating flowers and don't eat any that you are not sure about.
- Spice up your salads with nasturtium flowers (*Tropaeolum major*). Pick them before the flower is fully open and you'll be able to taste the nectar in the spur behind the petals. Or chop the flowers and mix them into cream cheese.

**TRADING CENTRE HOURS OF OPENING**

**Saturday 10.30am -12.15pm. 2.30pm - 4.15pm. Sunday 10.30am - 12.15pm.**

**Every Wednesday afternoon at 2.30pm to 4pm until the end of September.**

**The canteen is open Saturday and Sunday mornings 9.30am - 11.30am**

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- Pull the star-like blue or white flowers of borage (*Borago officinalis*) to add to summer drinks or freeze them in ice cubes.
- Use chive flowers to add a delicate onion flavour to green salads. Sprinkle these, or the flowers of other edible herbs over salads or omelettes.
- Add unopened buds of day lilies (*Hemerocallis*) to salads for a smoky taste, either raw or steamed.
- Dry the petals of pot marigolds (*Calendula officinalis*) and use them as a substitute for saffron in rice dishes. They don't have as strong a flavour, but they do colour the rice.

#### Watering

- In hot weather, it's best to water outside in the evening so the plants have the night to take up the water before the sun dries the soil.
- Water your greenhouse in the morning. Evening watering leaves moist conditions overnight which encourage red spider mite.
- A sequence of water butts are better than only having one as during hot spells one is insufficient when copious watering is needed. Rainwater is best if you are growing lime-haters such as blueberries.
- To keep the ground moist round any favourite shrub, fruit bushes or tomatoes, fill a plastic bag with water, tie the neck tightly, tie it to a stick so it is just above the ground, and make a pin-prick hole in the bottom. It should then take several days for the water to seep out. Add liquid manure when necessary.
- For an easy method of getting water to large vegetable or fruit plants, buy some watering spikes to use with plastic drink bottles and stick these into the ground close to the plants. You may need to loosen the spike a little to ensure it is letting the water out - you can see this by air bubbles rising. Unlike the plastic bag method, these are easily refilled as needed.
- Let the leaf-shape of your plants tell you how they want to receive water. As a general rule, leaves are shaped and arranged in such a way that they will shed water where the roots are – for instance, rhubarb channels it down the centre of the leaf where it can go down to the long root, while most trees shed water from leaf to leaf until it falls to the ground on the drip-line at the edge of its canopy, which is where the roots are waiting for it.
- When you freeze parsley, just put the whole stems and leaves in a bag, and when they're frozen, scrunch the bag to crush the leaves, then remove the stems – no need to chop the leaves when you want to use them.
- Grass cuttings make a good mulch, but should be spread out to dry a little before laying, as fresh cuttings tend to heat up and ferment.

As August progresses, start thinking which seeds you want to keep and mark the individual plants with coloured wool. Once the seeds have set and start to dry, pop a paper bag or old stocking round them so they don't dry completely and fall out.

Don't try to save seed from hybrid plants (usually marked F1 on the packet), or any of the cucurbit family (pumpkins, squashes, marrows, cucumbers) as they usually crossbreed with others round them, and you will just get tasteless pumpkin-like results. Beans of all sorts are easy to save, as are nasturtiums, rocket and other herbs. You can also save the seed of biennial roots, but rather than leave the plants in situ, you can move them over winter into somewhere out of the way.