

ADDISCOMBE, WOODSIDE & SHIRLEY LEISURE GARDENS LTD
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Janet Macdonald's tips for getting the best out of your allotment

May/June

Add elder flowers (*Sambucus niger*) to gooseberries to perk up a pie, or make a syrup from them, for instant elderflower fizz. Melt 500g of sugar in 4 litres of boiling water, add the juice of 1 lemon and twenty flowerheads, let them steep overnight, strain and bottle. Put about 2cm of syrup in the bottom of a glass and fill it with fizzy water. This syrup is also good with ice-cream. It freezes well. Don't be tempted to use a whole lemon instead of the juice alone, or the result can be bitter.

Egg Shells

- Dry off your egg shells in the oven, crush them coarsely, and sprinkle a ring round your tender plants to keep slugs and snails at bay. They hate to crawl over sharp things.

Herbs

- Confine the roots of mint or it will run underground and take over the whole garden. Sink bottomless buckets into the soil, or grow it in tubs above ground or use growbags.
- Start new mint plants by cutting long sprigs and leaving them in water until they produce roots – this can take as little as 2 weeks in the summer.
- Make an easy mint sauce to go with lamb by chopping mint leaves finely and mixing them with vinegar and sugar (or honey).
- Make herb butter to put on new potatoes. Just chop mint (or chives) finely and mix it into softened butter. Either use it straightaway, or form it into a roll and harden it in the refrigerator, then cut slices for use when needed. You can also freeze it.
- **If you have difficulty in growing parsley from seed, buy a couple of pots of growing parsley from a supermarket, separate the plants and plant them out.**

Magic words

- Encourage new plants to grow by telling them 'You'll like it there' when you plant them. If they don't obey you, and start looking poorly, it's time for serious stuff. Tell them 'Grow, you blighter – or it's the compost heap for you' !
- Detect the difference between pests and useful predators by their speed of movement. As a general rule, if it moves fast, it's a friend, if it moves slowly, it's an enemy.
- Keep blackfly off your beans by planting nasturtiums next to them. The blackfly prefer the nasturtiums and leave the beans alone.
- Ancient Roman gardeners said that to locate a wasps' nest, you should tie a coloured thread to a wasp's leg and follow it home.

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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- Save some seed potatoes to plant in June and you'll have more new potatoes in September.
- Don't leave it too late to sow lettuces – they will not germinate at temperatures above 70f(22 C)
- When sowing seeds outside in dry weather, make a furrow and water it thoroughly before sowing the seed. In hot weather, give the seed trench a thorough soaking before adding the seeds. They'll germinate quickly from lying on wet earth, and their roots will follow the moisture down. It doesn't matter if the soil you cover them with is dry, and the fact that you haven't wet it means it won't form a crust to impede the seedlings' route to the sun. Water again when the seedlings are showing.
- Prevent perpetual fruiting strawberry varieties from fruiting too soon and exhausting themselves by removing any flower buds that appear before June.
- Plant dwarf beans between your sweetcorn plants and let the beans provide the nitrogen the sweetcorn likes.
- Wait until after the 'June drop' before thinning apples and pears. Many excess fruitlets will fall off naturally, then you can thin the rest to leave just one or two fruits to each cluster.
- Thin gooseberries in late May by removing alternate fruits. These can be cooked and the rest left to develop into dessert fruit.
- Water outside in the evening, when the sun isn't so hot, so the plants have the night to take up the water before the next day's sun dries it up.
- Water copiously once a week rather than a little bit every day (except for new seedlings which do need to be kept moist). Sprinkles of water don't penetrate the soil far enough to do any good.
- Spot water individual plants such as tomatoes by sinking a flowerpot into the soil next to them and filling it with water. Alternatively, cut the bottom off a plastic bottle and sink that in the soil with the neck near the roots.
- Learn which weeds are edible, such as young stinging nettles or fat hen, and get some use out of them. Young fat hen plants are good in soup. The tips of young stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica*) make a good substitute spinach, but you'll need gloves to pick them. They lose the sting when cooked, and make a good base for a poached egg on toast.
- Hop shoots (*Humulus lupulus*) make a good substitute for asparagus. Pick the top 6 inches of each shoot, tie them in a bundle and steam them before serving with butter.
- Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) is edible and tastes like water cress. Wash it well and add it to salads.
- Grow white-flowered and seeded runner beans such as 'the Czar' and let some mature completely. Shell the beans out of the pods, dry or freeze them and use instead of butter beans.
- Runner beans need plenty of water to produce a good crop, so make a trench between the rows before erecting your canes, and just pour water into this trench instead of watering each plant.
- Pick beans and peas as soon as they are ready to eat. All the time you keep picking, the plant will produce more, but if you let them mature, the plant thinks it has done its job and stops production.
- When erecting canes for runner beans, cross them half-way up rather than near the top, so the beans hang outside for easier picking.
- Make your beans poles into separate tepees instead of a connected row. When it gets windy in autumn, the row of poles and beans will form a sail and blow over.
- Plant some sweet peas with your climbing beans to encourage bees to visit the plants, and to enjoy the scent while picking beans.