



THE AMATEUR GARDENER

by Vanda Lawrence



Tomatoes © Wikimedia Commons/Frastly

Turn the compost heap regularly and if the weather continues to be very hot and dry you will need to give it a soak occasionally to aid breakdown.

If you have a greenhouse you will need to damp down the floor each morning to create a humid environment for the plants inside. Do not damp down in the evening.



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Harvest blackberries, raspberries and loganberries and cut back the fruited canes. Tie in new canes as they appear ready for next year. As strawberries finish producing

remove old leaves and any straw mulch around them to prevent a build-up of pests and disease. If your plants are 3 years old pot on new plants from runners ready for next year.

If you have fruit trees now is the time to summer-prune and tidy up. Remove diseased/damaged fruit; not only will this stop the spread of disease but it takes the weight off heavily-laden branches which might snap in high winds. Sun and air can also circulate around the fruit. If the tree is particularly heavily laden it's worth removing the smaller fruits so the tree's energy goes to improving those remaining. As you pick the fruits you will notice what needs pruning. Remove dead wood and crossing branches, also new shoots growing into the centre of the tree or straight up in the air. Keep new fruiting branches and those that have fruited this year but remove those of 3+ years. This will let the sun in and air circulate and if you do the job during dry weather any cut edges can seal themselves quickly.

Your grape vines will be looking good now – but remove some of the foliage to allow the sun to ripen the fruit and air to circulate to avoid mildew. I think there are special bags available which you can use to protect each cluster of grapes from birds and insects.

In the May issue I mentioned the French 'Calendrier Lunaire' for gardening according to the phases of the moon. Since then I've done some research. Apparently, this idea goes back to ancient times when the sun, moon and stars were used to gauge the different seasons and farmers noticed that certain plants grew better when planted during different phases of the moon. Plants appear to respond in the same way that oceans respond to the gravitational pull of the moon. Moon phases are divided into four: first quarter, second, third and fourth quarter. The first two phases are known as 'waxing' and the third and fourth the 'waning' phases. During the waxing phase of the moon water levels rise and plants absorb nutrients from the ground, therefore an ideal time to plant; the waning phase is the best time for pruning and weeding.

This planting-by-the moon cycle is known as the Synodic Cycle but there is another method of lunar planting, namely 'Biodynamic', which relies also on the 12 zodiac signs. There is far too much information about all this for me to explain here, but you can look on-line and find much more information if you are interested - try www.the-gardeners-calendar.co.uk

Stay cool everyone - happy August!

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While I'm writing this article in July we are having the heatwave of heatwaves! I never complain about being too hot but at the moment I'm admitting defeat and looking forward to a (slight!) drop in temperatures. And our poor vegetables - it's an absolute necessity to get out there in the evening or early morning to give them all a drink. Having said that, they are repaying our care with lots of pickings.

However, often in the vegetable patch as plants get bigger, it's a job to get between rows to water everything. Try using lengths of plastic guttering. Make small holes along the bottom and put between two rows of plants. Pour water into one end and the water will run along the gutter giving each plant a soak.

Keep harvesting peas, beans, cucumbers etc – regular picking encourages plants to keep producing. Pinch out the growing tips of pumpkins and squash to keep them under control, otherwise they will take over the garden, never mind the vegetable plot! Runner beans also need to be pinched-out once they reach the top of their supports.

Raise marrows off the ground to prevent them rotting underneath. Protect ripening marrows from birds and other pests by pulling tights or stocking over each marrow and tie at each end; (now ladies - there's a novel reason for saving old tights ... waste not, want not!).

Tomato



Compost heap © Wikimedia Commons/Fae

side shoots must be kept in check otherwise the plant will waste energy making unnecessary bushy growth. Here also you should pinch out the growing tip once the plant has reached its optimum height according to the variety. Also, as the tomatoes develop you can remove the lower leaves from the plant to allow light and air to get to the fruits. Feed with high potash fertilizer.

Earth up celery by putting paper between the stems and the soil. Also, as the leaves of your onions, shallots and garlic turn brown and wilt you can lift them and leave to dry off before storing.