



THE AMATEUR GARDENER

by Vanda Lawrence



- **Brussel Sprouts** - as your young plants grow look out for the Flea Beetle/Altise parasite which will rapidly devour the young leaves. They hate humidity so deter them by keeping your plants, especially the leaves, very well watered. You can also spread wood ash around the plants - it has a repellent effect.
- **Lettuce** can be sown from Jan-Sept but choose the correct variety for each season - it's now time to opt for a summer variety which can withstand heat, such as Batavia 'Great Lakes' or 'Marsala'. Remember to protect the young plants against slugs.
- **Sweetcorn, courgettes, peas & beans** are all good neighbours in the veg plot: Peas & beans turn nitrogen in the soil into a usable form, courgettes shade the soil and sweetcorn provides support.
- **Strawberries** - Begin harvesting strawberries as they ripen and, if you wish to increase your stock plants, encourage runners to root by anchoring with a stone or piece of bent wire. Remove runners if you prefer to grow isolated plants, because it's too easy for the strawberry bed to become overcrowded. Botrytis (grey mould) is probably the worst problem encountered with strawberries so be vigilant and remove affected fruit/foliage immediately. Of course, there are over-the-counter chemical controls available* but for those who prefer natural remedies it helps if you water the soil only, keeping the plant foliage dry, so that they are not in the midst of a very humid atmosphere.
*Bicarbonate of Soda can be used against fungal diseases too: 1 tbspbicarb+4cupsofwater+half-tspofliquidsoapmixedtogether. Spray every two weeks.

Here we are again, the month of June with warmer days and longer evenings. And we certainly need those longer evenings to fit in all the jobs. So gird your loins, mes amis, starting in the flower garden, here goes ...

- Lift your spring bulbs as the leaves turn yellow. Place them in shallow boxes and dry in a well-ventilated shed. Later you can remove the dead leaves, roots and skins and store in a cool, dry shed until Autumn.
- Once Irises have finished flowering it is advisable to cut the leaves down to about 6" to avoid their roots being loosened by the wind.
- Give roses a good feed after the first flush of blooms. Dead-head regularly and spray against blackspot, mildew and rust. Also against aphids, of course - greenfly and blackfly are a real pest but inter-planting roses with Alliums, Catnip, Parsley or Thyme will help deter them.
- Dead-head Delphiniums and Lupins to encourage a second flush of flowers later in the summer.
- Sow your Sweet Pea seeds in their growing position. When they come into flower remember to dead-head, because once the plants start to set seed flowering will be curtailed.

Now on to the vegetable garden:

- As the leaves turn yellow you can start lifting your garlic. Choose a dry day, then leave them to dry on top of the soil for 2 or 3 days before storing away somewhere dry and well-ventilated.
- Potatoes are coming up nicely, but it's necessary to spray them with Bordelaise (Bordeaux) Mixture to prevent mildew. This mix leaves a bright blue sediment on the plants so you can see where you have treated. It is also effective on tomatoes and strawberries*.
- Pinch out the side shoots on your tomatoes, and stake them to keep them upright and support the weight of the fruit. Keep them well-watered and feed regularly. Insert a 4" plant pot into the ground beside each plant. Fill with water each time you pass by and you will be rewarded with lovely plump tomatoes and no split skins. The same idea works with other plants and shrubs too, as well as window boxes and garden tubs: try cutting the base off a plastic milk bottle, remove the lid and sink the bottle, neck-first, into the soil next to the plant. Fill with water which then seeps into the ground close to the roots, encouraging roots to head deeper into the soil.
- **Beetroot** - sow seeds until mid-June for crops until November. Sow varieties 'Crapaudine' or 'Rouge Globe' if you wish to store your beetroots during the winter months.

Still with the vegetable garden in mind there are several herbs and flowers which will repel troublesome insects :

- Chives, Onions and Garlic repel ants, aphids and flea beetles
- Rosemary and Sage repel cabbage moths and carrot flies
- Basil and Borage keep tomatoes pest-free
- Radishes repel cucumber beetle
- French Marigolds repel whitefly, blackfly, greenfly, tomato hornworms, slugs
- Nasturtiums repel whitefly

After the 'June drop', which is the natural shedding of weak fruit on your apple trees, you will be able to judge where to thin out the rest. When developing fruits are about the size of a nut, remove the smallest of each group, keeping 2 or 3 apples per group. The same applies to your pear trees.

Lastly, the pond. Our fish are up looking for their food each evening and the water lilies are coming along. If you have a water lily or other pond plant in need of division, now is the time to do it - another little job to fit in during these longer evenings.

We have several local cats who love to come into our garden - no problem but they drive our two little Westies to distraction, so I was very pleased to find Coleus Caninus plants in the local supermarket with the sign saying that they deterred cats and dogs from the flower bed. To my nose they have quite a strong odour, but what a disappointment - I've seen one of the dogs cocking his leg up against the plants and the cats just wander past, quite unperturbed. I'll just have to keep trying - apparently, Aniseed plants deter cats, as does Lemongrass and Helichrysum Italicum (aka the curry herb plant). You can also spread the peel of citrus fruits in areas where you wish you discourage cats or dogs from lounging and flattening your plants. **Good luck!**