

## **Gardening tips for July**

The heat of summer has finally arrived (or not as the case may be). This is the time for those rarest of conversations that include the phrase “It’s warm isn’t it! The more usual “It’s cold isn’t it” being reserved for the other 50 weeks of the year.

Now the summer season is hotting up it is time to enjoy the garden rather than toiling away ever trying to improve your plot. So, unpack your wellies, get the parasol up to keep the BBQ chef dry, towel off the patio furniture and look forward to many a happy *al fresco* if not soggy dining experience.

### **The kitchen garden**

With the D-Day commemorations last month I thought I would see what “digging for victory” had to offer the gardener and if 80-year-old gardening advice is still useful and relevant for today’s gardener. Dig On for Victory by Mr C. H. Middleton was first published in 1942 with week-by-week instructions on how to manage the vegetable garden and very much looking forward to the time when the gardener can “sit on the old garden seat and listen to the birds instead of the (air raid) sirens”.

Mr Middleton tells us that “July is a busy month in the garden even though the bulk of the seed-sowing and planting is done. It is the time, too, when the vegetable garden normally looks its best, being filled with maturing and growing crops”.

Have you tried growing mint and been disappointed with the result? The answer from 1942 is to remove some new growth and plant up afresh every year, apparently the same is done for tarragon.

Dust your carrots with soot to deter carrot fly – I don’t think many of us have soot anymore. If anyone is willing to give it a go, please let my know if you had any success or just ended up with sooty carrots.

Use potash and phosphates to discourage mildew. A modern equivalent would be to use a high potash liquid fertilizer diluted accordingly.

“Attack weeks do not let them seed” – sound advice for any part of the garden unless you have gone native and embraced an eco-warrior wildlife friendly environmental activism lifestyle.

Don’t leave any spare ground, as vegetables are harvested plant winter greens, spring cabbage and occupy any spaces with salads. We probably take a more

relaxed approach to succession planting these days but the principle is the still the same.

The old controls for garden pests are now consigned to history, so no spraying with nicotine, sulphur, copper sulphate, arsenic (perhaps the demise of some of these is for the best!). Modern remedies are available but so is encouraging wildlife into the garden to do some of the work for you.

### Tomatoes

D-Day era advise for tomatoes is to feed them using well-rotted turf mixed with sand and compost. These days we are more used to using a tomato feed but top dressing is always a good idea as it gives extra medium for extra roots hence better tomato plants. Pinch out the growing tips two leaves above the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> truss, this helps to drag sap up the plant to the fruit.

### The flower garden

Eighty years ago, the flower garden had become the vegetable garden so digging for victory didn't embrace nicely tendered borders and stripy lawns, however if this is your thing then, please consider the following,

- Deadhead bedding plants and summer flowering perennials to ensure a succession of flowers.
- Clear blanket weed and plant debris from ponds and continue partial changing of the water.
- Feed dahlias, keep well-watered and stake the stems to support the heavy flowers.
- Feed and deadhead roses to keep them flowering.
- Keep watch for pests such as lily beetles, snails, aphids and vine weevils, and remove before they do too much harm.
- Keep feeding wild birds and consider adding a bird bath to your garden. A vital source of drinking water for bathing birds which are surprisingly entertaining but you do need to keep the water fresh and topped up, it disappears remarkable quickly especially if the starlings have paid a visit.

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Keep gardening.

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