

## **Gardening tips for May**

Keeping a look out on the weather is something most gardeners endure but May is a month requiring a certain vigilance. As the spring growth get going and the tender bedding plants bought at considerable cost from garden centres have been given their place in the borders, along comes a frost and you start again, weather eh! – it all makes work for the working man (gardener) to do. Watching the weather closely and applying suitable precautions should ease the gardener through May and to look forward to the bounty of the months ahead.

### **Gardening and wildlife**

Before you get started slashing and burning, concreting new paths, replacing your lawn with artificial grass, buying tons of compost and not knowing what to do with all the plastic bags or the pile of plastic posts accumulated from the garden centre shopping sprees, spare a thought for the wildlife. As we live in one of the worlds most depleted countries in terms of wildlife, perhaps we as gardeners should be doing our bit to give nature a helping hand. As for artificial turf, it smells of plastic and turns blue with age so persevere with the real stuff (see lawns). Plastics including large compost bags and builder's aggregate bags can now be recycled. As for large scale pruning or any other work around the house and garden particularly hedges spare a thought for nesting birds. Hedges are not usually cut until August at the earliest however the law is on their side. According to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 it is an offence to intentionally take, damage or destroy a nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built.

### **The kitchen garden**

Plant out broad beans, runner beans, peas, onions, garlic carrots, salad crops, and strawberries. Protect carrots from carrot fly by companion planting with lots of coriander.

Keep banking up soil over emerging potato shoots, protecting from late frosts and to encouraging a larger yield.

### **Tomatoes**

Always look for new varieties and try something different for a change. You can always go back to Ailsa Craig, Moneymaker and Alicante next year. There are new varieties claiming blight resistance which should be considered as there is more chance that the summer will be wet than hot and dry. Choose

the original Crimson Crush or try Losetto F1, Cocktail Crush F1 or Merrygold F1.

### **The flower garden**

By the end of May it is time for a 'Chelsea chop', this means cutting back perennials to improve flowering. Suitable perennial plants for the chop include phlox, achillea, campanula, aster, echinacea, rudbeckia, sedum, penstemon, helenium nepeta and helianthus. Pruning will remove the growing tips but you will get more flowers later in the year. To spread flowering, don't chop the whole plant, by selectively pruning you will extend the flowering period.

Sweet peas are a good choice for cut flowers. They can be planted out now as they are hardy enough to put up with a late frost. Plant against a frame positioned in the flower border or against a fence and with a bit of care and attention will flower until October. Sweet peas like a lot of moisture so keep them well watered to help fend off mildew. Lining the planting hole with old newspaper will help retain moisture. Remember to cut the flowers regularly, the more you cut the more will come again and to help get long straight stems first choose an old-fashioned spencer variety (if you like blousy pink try Alan Titchmarsh) and secondly cut the tendrils off the climbing plants if they get anywhere near a flower bud.

### **Lawns**

The mowing season finally got off to a late April start. If you haven't fired up the mower yet you may as well wait until June and see out No-Mow-May! By the end of May, your lawn will be more like a prairie it will be buzzing with wildlife so better leave mowing until all the wildflower seeds have dropped in mid-summer. So, you should be able to get a last cut just in time for winter.

If you take pride in your stripy lawn, perhaps if there is room, some of the lawn can be left to grow longer to encourage the weeds to flower.

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Keep gardening.

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