

Gardening tips for June

Vegetables

☞ 'Bright Lights' Swiss chard may be the most beautiful vegetable ever created. Its stalks come in a bright rainbow of colors. A member of the spinach family, the flavor of chard resembles spinach but is stronger.

☞ The easiest watermelons to grow are the yellow-flesh types. They are very early, sweet, and have few seeds. Try 'Yellow Doll' or 'Yellow Baby'. If you insist on growing a red-flesh melon, 'Sugar Baby' is reliable. 'Sweet Dakota Rose' is prized in the southern part of North Dakota.

☞ Do you have leftover seeds? Most vegetable seeds stay vigorous for three to five years. Store the seeds in a refrigerator or other cool place.

☞ The tomato is nicknamed the "love apple". The Puritans thought the tomato looked so sensual that it was evil. Thomas Jefferson was one of the first growers of tomatoes.

☞ Stop harvesting asparagus after 75% of the spears become thinner than a pencil. Allow the spears to develop into ferns. These ferns will generate energy for next year's crop.

☞ Pinch off the flowers of leafy herbs (basil, mint and oregano) to prevent the plants from going to seed. Pinching these plants will keep them producing more leaves.

☞ Mint for tea is best harvested when the flower heads are starting to be visible but before they bloom. The oils of mint (and other herbs) are at their peak when harvested in the morning hours just after the dew has dried from the plants.



☞ It's usually best to use a combination of both organic and inorganic (chemical) fertilizers in the garden. Organic fertilizers will improve the tilth of your soil while chemical fertilizers will provide nutrients to the plants when they need it.

Fruits

☞ Fall-bearing raspberries are easy to grow. Prune the canes down to the ground every spring and the new shoots will reward you with fruits in fall. The key for us is to get an early variety. 'Heritage' is the standard variety but you may not get a crop if we suffer an early frost. The best choice for us is 'Autumn Britten', which matures four weeks earlier.

☞ Keep your raspberries and strawberries regularly harvested. Overripe berries attract picnic beetles. These beetles are black with tan spots on them. Under severe infestations, an application of malathion may be needed to control the pests.

☞ Pick off blossoms and fruits on your Junebearing strawberry varieties during the first year. This will allow the production of a large vigorous plant and healthy runners instead of fruit. On day-neutral and everbearing varieties, remove all blossoms for the first 6 to 8 weeks after planting.

☞ Use netting to protect cherries from birds. Plastic owls, pie tins, and other scare devices are not effective—the birds quickly learn that these devices pose no threat.

Trees and shrubs


- ☞ Mugo pine shrubs are now sending out new shoots, commonly referred to as “candles”. Cut or pinch off two-thirds of the candles to give the shrub a formal appearance. Pine trees may also be pruned in this manner, although we usually do not recommend trimming evergreen trees in home landscapes.
- ☞ Japanese tree lilac is one of the few summer-flowering trees. The short, hardy tree has creamy white, fragrant (smelly?) blooms. It’s one of the toughest trees in urban landscapes.
- ☞ The arching branches of bridalwreath spirea are beautiful in full bloom. It’s so sad to see this shrub trimmed into a square hedge or a gum-drop! Instead, allow the tree to form in its natural shape. To do this, make your pruning cuts at the base of the shrub, trimming out as much as one-fifth of the canes during any single year. Limit further pruning to removing inward facing branches. A similar pruning technique is recommended for lilacs.

Lawns

- a The first lawns that turn yellow in summer are usually those that are mowed the shortest. Mow your turf at a tall height (preferably three inches). The taller your lawn in the summer, the better. A tall lawn develops a deep, drought-tolerant root system. The taller the grass blades, the more shade will be cast to the ground, thereby reducing heat stress.
- ☞ Let grass clippings fall to the ground. The clippings will act as a mulch to keep the soil cool and moist. The clippings also recycle nutrients to the ground—it is like getting a free fertilization every year.
- ☞ Most lawns won’t need fertilizer until Labor Day. The exception is with heavily irrigated lawns, which can benefit from a light fertilization in summer. Organic fertilizers (for example, Milorganite) are less likely to burn lawns compared to chemical fertilizers in summer.

- ☞ Mushrooms sometimes emerge in lawns. Don’t worry—these mushrooms are simply decaying old tree roots or other organic matter in the soil. When the tree roots are fully rotted, which can take five years or longer, the mushrooms will stop. For now, just rake the mushrooms. No sprays can control this.

Flowers and houseplants

- ☞ Caladium, canna and begonia bulbs are best planted in June after the soil has warmed thoroughly.
- ☞ Pinch chrysanthemums from now through the end of June to develop compact, bushy plants. Remove the tips of young shoots when they are about eight inches long.
- ☞ Morning is the best time to harvest cut flowers. If possible, immediately place the cut flowers into a bucket of room temperature water.
- ☞ Keep flowering plants beautiful all summer long by removing the old, faded flowers. The plants will be encouraged to produce new flowers, rather than wasting energy on producing seeds.
- ☞ Mulch your plantings to reduce weeds, keep the soil temperature moderate, and conserve moisture. Organic mulches such as shredded bark or cocoa bean shells work well.
- ☞ Houseplants can now be safely taken outside. Start them outdoors in a shady area to avoid burning the leaves. Over time, the plants will develop a waxy “natural sunscreen” layer over their leaves to protect them from suffering sunburn. After a couple of weeks you can introduce the plants to higher levels of sunlight. 

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