

DAVID STEPHEN'S

with monthly guide by
PETER CUNDALL

ORGANIC GROWING CALENDAR

TASKS FOR THE SEASON

This is considered the best time of the year for renovating existing lawns and sowing new ones. As a precaution against corby grubs damaging your grass in the future, incorporate plenty of humus-rich material into the top 15cm of soil - deep litter based on sawdust or other wood waste is ideal being long-lasting in effect. Grass grubs are a symptom of an impoverished soil.

As warm weather crops are removed, entire beds will soon be empty but don't leave them that way. Plant a cool season crop while the soil is still very active. Alternatively, plant some oats, ryecorn, blue lupins, annual clover, or tick beans as a protective **cover crop** that will eventually become a compost/mulch ingredient.

Long-keeping **onions** are harvested during early autumn and thoroughly dried off on wire mesh in the sun, or hanging recycled mesh orange bags. Store them for the winter in a dry area where air can circulate freely.

WHITEFLY

Slightly damp autumn leaves tossed over a well lit small fire in the greenhouse is a great idea for suffocating white fly and some other insect pests before setting out the crops in spring. Once you allow these sucking pests to multiply, even the recommended sprays make controlling them difficult.

CHINESE CABBAGE

This oriental specialty combines the thin crisp texture of lettuce with the mustardy tang of juicy cabbage.

Unlike lettuce, Chinese cabbage grows with great vigor, sizing up fast even into cold weather. It does best when sown to mature in late autumn/early winter. For warm temperate climates, sow July - March, and all year round in Northern Australia.

Gradually decreasing daylength and temperatures of late summer encourage beautiful heads. For spring planted early crops, variety selection is critical otherwise premature bolting may occur. Seedlings are infamous for running to seed. Choose a bolting-resistant variety and sow where they are to mature.

CLOCHES PREVENT BOLTING

A plastic tunnel (or cloche) has its uses where many kinds of row crops are growing. An igloo made of protective plastic can save rows of beetroot, chard, celery and Chinese cabbage from prematurely running to seed in early spring and autumn. When exposed to a week or more of cold weather (below 10 degrees) these crops are most vulnerable to bolting at the seedling stage. It's heart-breaking to see your hard work come to nothing, so cover up!

A P R I L

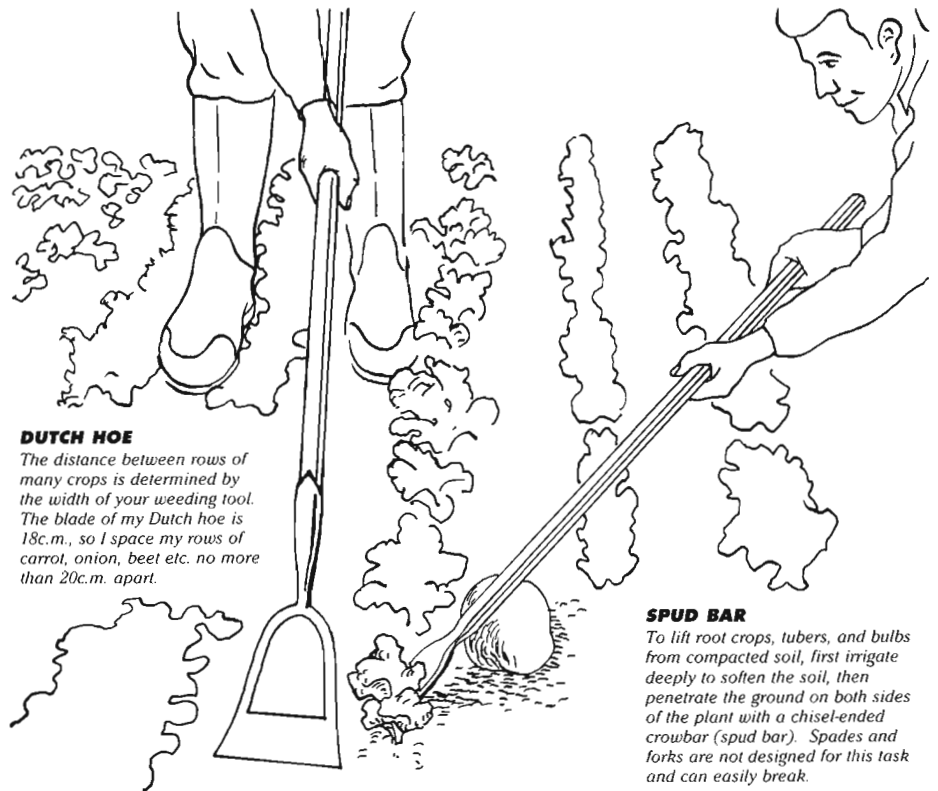
USING SEAWEED

To rinse or not to rinse, that is the question! For the purpose of compost making, seaweed (as distinct from seagrass and rockweed) pulled dripping wet from ocean beaches and piled into compost heaps may be very slow to decompose. Speed this up by half by hosing off the salt water and sand which may have a sterilizing effect. Long thick stems of kelp etc. need to be cut into smaller pieces - the smaller the better - to allow more surfaces for decaying organisms to work on. As the compost pile is being built, dust each

15cm layer with blood and bone meal. Not only is this an ideal activator, but it supplies extra nitrogen and phosphorus which all seaweeds lack in luxury amounts. The finished matured product would represent the best all-purpose plant food and soil conditioner known.

The small, lightweight varieties of seaweed are suitable for mulching, with the optimum depth for best effect at 12 - 15cm. A surprising number of vegetables are salt tolerant: only immature lettuces object to the leached sea water, but they don't die.

Give your asparagus bed a generous coating of seaweed during early autumn. By spring, the new shoots for cutting will be easily seen growing through the resulting compost.



DUTCH HOE

The distance between rows of many crops is determined by the width of your weeding tool. The blade of my Dutch hoe is 18c.m., so I space my rows of carrot, onion, beet etc. no more than 20c.m. apart.

SPUD BAR

To lift root crops, tubers, and bulbs from compacted soil, first irrigate deeply to soften the soil, then penetrate the ground on both sides of the plant with a chisel-ended crowbar (spud bar). Spades and forks are not designed for this task and can easily break.

PETER CUNDALL'S GUIDE

Spray peach and nectarine trees, as leaves are cast, with Bordeaux for controlling leafcurl. Prune all stone fruits as fruit is harvested. Apply limestone or dolomite around stone fruit and those apple trees which have been showing signs of 'bitter pit' in the fruit. Prune berry fruit by removing all old canes of raspberry and bramble bushes. Loosely tie together the new canes for next year's crops. Prune blackcurrant bushes by cutting out all old, dark coloured branches to leave younger ones. Clean up strawberry beds.

AUTUMN INDOOR PLANTS

If your plants have been in the same container for more than two years and have started to look pale and anything but vigorous, repotting could be the answer. Repotting consists of scraping away much of the old soil from the roots. Trim the roots, thereby reducing the size of the rootball by about one-third. Next, prune back some of the foliage, - always cutting at a junction or leaf node to prevent die-back. Now place it back in the same pot or another slightly larger container, with a fresh potting mixture and slow release fertiliser.