

# DAVID STEPHEN'S

with monthly guide by  
**PETER CUNDALL**

## ORGANIC GROWING CALENDAR

### TASKS OF THE SEASON

Start thinning when fruit is about the size of marbles, and as the fruit swells you will find that you have to thin again and again. For example, allow at least 15cm between peaches. A tree that has been weakened by overcropping in one season, readily falls victim to pests and diseases in the following season.

Where apple and pear trees reach seven years of age, their fruiting spurs can be thinned by cutting with secateurs, to avoid large clusters of small fruits forming. The purpose of thinning is to stop a tree from being overburdened with too much fruit.

### HINTS FOR DAILY LIVING

- **Stringless bean** varieties are less tolerant of cold conditions than traditional stringed types.
- **Pear slug** doesn't affect the **European plums** as much as the Japanese plum trees. The former are good for drying.
- **Tomatoes** left on the vine to ripen during the cooler conditions of autumn have virtually no flavour left. Hang branches with fruit still intact out of the cold night air. At the first sign of colour, transfer individual fruit to the warmth of a sunroom or kitchen.

### FAULTS WITH MODERN TECHNOLOGY

One of the disastrous consequences of this age of chemical stimulation has been the deliberate breeding of crops which are dependent on continuous dressings of soluble NPK salts and protective sprays. Tomato and broccoli are example of gross feeding crops. Enrich the soil and broccoli grows into oversize plants with undersize heads. A waste of space and time nurturing them! In 'ordinary' soil conditions, both plant and curd may be stunted. Give broccoli moderately rich soil to start with, then 'fast foods' every two or three weeks after the plants are half-grown. The resulting yields can make it all worthwhile. Similarly, if staked tomato plants are given all the food that they will require in one dressing of compost or manure, they will not flower till half way up the stake. Thus half of the potential yield is lost.

### HOME MADE LAVENDER PERFUME

Fill a jar with fresh lavender flowers, and cover with white wine vinegar. Let it infuse in a sunny place for a fortnight. Next, strain the vinegar and discard the flowers. Now fill the jar with more flowers and repeat the infusion for a further fortnight. Repeat the process a third time then pour the mixture into an attractive bottle. Use it as a facial perfume, final hair rinse, bath addition; or whenever you want to enjoy the soothing scent of lavender.

## NOVEMBER

### DISTINGUISHING PEAS

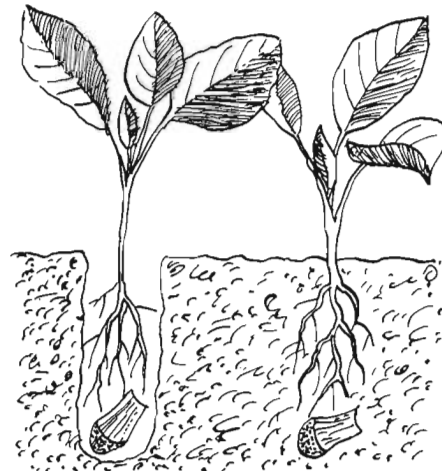
Snap peas are distinct from snow peas. The pod walls of the former are thicker and develop tightly around the peas, so the pods are round and firm. The peas can be shelled and eaten alone, or eaten together as with snow peas. As the pods grow toward good snapping stage, strings develop along the suture of the pod. Strip strings before cooking. Although stringless varieties exist, they are not yet as tasty or easy to grow as those with strings.

### ACID-FREE RHUBARB

You have a penchant for rhubarb pie but want to avoid eating too much damaging oxalic acid? Before cooking it, slice the stalks into 3cm pieces and cover with boiling water. Allow to steep for 10 minutes, then drain. Proceed with recipe. This blanching removes excess oxalates, with no sacrifice of flavour. In the garden, any seed heads of rhubarb should be cut off at the base, when they are noticed.

### CLUB ROOT

To mask the smell of brassicas, which attracts the fungus, some gardeners drop small pieces of rhubarb into the dibber hole before planting.



### PETER CUNDALL'S GUIDE

It should be warm enough this month to give these plants a tonic, by placing them outside, out of the wind and sun, whenever it rains. The rain has a marvellously cleansing effect. However, remember how fragile many of these plants are. Extra-heavy rain or unexpected gusts of wind will flatten them, so keep an eye on the weather. Never leave them in full sun if they have been accustomed to reflected light only.

### TOMATOES

Any well-developed fruit clusters of tomatoes can have their ripening process accelerated if the cluster is tied loosely in a brown paper bag. This bag traps ethylene gas, a ripening agent. This method will also give a measure of protection against fruit fly. Choose fruits that are well-developed and ready for ripening.

### CAPSICUM

Red and green peppers are not two distinct varieties. They are merely stages in the ripening of the capsicum, just like tomatoes. The immature green stage is crisp and juicy - ideal for raw salads. The mature red peppers are far richer in vitamin C, but have lost their crispness. Use them to add colour to stir fries. Place your pepper seedlings lower in the soil than normal and pinch out the top after one month to prevent them becoming top heavy. In dry weather, spraying the plants with water in the evening assists the flowers to set. Don't leave all fruits on the bushes until they turn red. If you do you will get fewer fruits.

### FOR CORN LOVERS ONLY

To keep **corn on-the-cob** fresh and sweet while you are away from home, cut the stalk above and below the ears, without disturbing the ears. Then stand the stems with ears still firmly attached in a shallow bucket of water. This will keep corn fresh for about five days.

### VERSATILE CAT LITTER

The highly absorbent nature of Kitty Litter (based on natural clay) makes it suitable for a potting medium to aid healthy root growth and drainage for a wide range of plants. Also ideal in the aviary on the cage floor to absorb moisture and bird droppings. Recycle 'soiled' litter as a mulch under grass clippings in the garden. If used under your vehicle to absorb oil or fuel leaks, the litter must be dumped.

### CODLIN MOTH REPELLENT

The common name of the bitter herb Wormwood (*Artemisia*) comes from its old use as a moth repellent - the worms being the moth larvae. Why not make up a spray of this or other bitter herbs (Southernwood, Tansy, Pine) to coat your apples and other fruits subject to caterpillar damage? The botanical repellent I used last spring was made by collecting enough Wormwood, Tansy and Wild Fennel leaves to fill a household bucket. Bruise and chop into small pieces before covering with water. Let it stand for a week or more for a strong brew. Strain, add a halftespoon of vegetable cooking oil per litre of spray and shake vigorously to disperse the oil before spraying the developing fruits.