

# DAVID STEPHEN'S

with monthly guide by  
**PETER CUNDALL**

## ORGANIC GROWING CALENDAR

### AUGUST

#### SOME POTATO FACTS

It is not true to say that potatoes like to grow in very acid soils. They simply tolerate them better than other crops. Blueberries, however, do prefer very acid conditions. Conditions low in pH will result in reduced yields, or poor quality spuds; or both. Potatoes to be stored for a lengthy period should be allowed to dry off exposed to the air, and in darkness, for up to 2 weeks before being placed in dry bags or boxes. Galvanized iron storage sheds are not satisfactory because they can warm up too quickly on sunny days and the tubers will dehydrate.

Many varieties, particularly the 'earlies' (Pinkeye, Bismark, Kennebec and Pontiac) have a short storage life and start to sprout 2-3 months after harvest.

**Planting:** Other main crop varieties may need refrigeration for 2-3 weeks to induce sprouting. Sprouted tubers grow faster and are especially recommended for early or very late crops.

Save your own egg sized tubers grown from healthy stock. Choose the variety to suit your cuisine from white, pale cream, or yellow flesh; with a waxy or floury texture; round, oval or long; for boiling, baking or frying.

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Passionfruit vines, especially 'Nelly Kelly' black passionfruit, can also be pruned about now, for the same reason as with the citrus. Most vines have a relatively short life, usually about six years. Although some will live much longer, their production rate drops sharply and disease becomes chronic. Pruning helps to overcome this problem to a limited extent by giving the vines a longer, healthier life.

Pruning can be carried out with a pair of hedge-shears, using secateurs to finish off the difficult-to-get-at areas. Simply cut away the main bulk of leaves and small branches to leave the main arms of the plant untouched. Once the main tangle of growth has been cut off, the ends can be further shortened to the nearest side-shoot. The effects of this pruning will be lots of new growth and a later crop of high-quality fruit. Watering, as with the citrus, is absolutely essential during spring and summer, while regular feeding ensures steady growth and a good crop.

#### ORCHARD JOBS

As soon as the sap starts to rise, grafting can take place. Apple, pear and some European plums can be grafted now. Remove scion wood from its wrapping in the fridge. Even if the trees are already coming into leaf, they can still be grafted, if the scion is still dormant.

Spring rainfall exacerbates fungal diseases in the orchard especially peach leafcurl. If it were possible to have some kind of rainproof cover over peach and nectarine trees during the next three weeks 'Leaf Curl' would not be a problem. Traditional controls are

**Bordeaux, Burgundy, or Lime-Sulphur** sprays. Apply before leaf-burst.

Citrus scale, immobile sucking insect needs to be controlled by smothering with a spray of white oil emulsion (or try some cheap cooking oil blended with water).

#### HINTS ON SOWING SEEDS

- The greatest influence on soil warming up quickly for rapid seed germination is its water content.
- Water saturated soil takes a lot more heat to warm even the shallow surface layer where seeds germinate.
- Too much moisture and too little air will cause the seed to rot.
- Never sow seeds too deeply. If in doubt, drop your seeds along the drill and tap them gently into a firm bed with the edge of your wooden row marker

#### A REVOLUTIONARY NEW GRAFTING TECHNIQUE

Two Californian men, independently of each other, have discovered a fascinating new idea for grafting scions onto fruit, nut and ornamental trees. Scions are short pieces of pencil-thick wood (with 3 or 4 buds) of last season's growth. Grafting takes place during the dormant winter months.

The plug method allows reshaping of an established tree with new branches potentially stronger than any existing ones. The traditional "approach" graft, where the scion is taped to the side of another branch, often continues a very steep, undesirable angle, whereas a plug graft can be set at right angles to the ground forming a strong crotch that grows stronger over the years.

Here is how to start a plug graft: make a fresh cut on the scion wood and select a drill bit the same diameter as, or smaller than, the woody portion of the scion - without the bark and cambium. After sterilizing the drill bit and a knife in hot water, select a site on the tree's trunk or on a branch. Drill the hole 10-12 mm deep - no more. Marking the desired depth on the drill bit with a piece of masking tape is also a good idea to prevent drilling too deeply. The freshly cut scion must be turned the right way: buds should point outward from the grafting area. Using a very sharp knife and without touching the fresh cut with your fingers, carefully whittle the bark and cambium off the scion's end until it fits snugly in the hole. The proper fit is important. It should slip in and out fairly easily with some friction. This ensures ample cellular contact between the two sapwoods. As a result, the scion doesn't dry out too quickly. It may take several tries. It means checking the angle at which bark and cambium are carved off - until there's good contact all around. When the fit is right, push the scion in firmly and paint the contact area with a tree sealant to keep air out until healing is complete.



#### RESURRECTING THE PEA TRENCH

If you've had a few bags of leaf litter hoarded away since the autumn leaf drop now is the time to put them to good use to grow drought resistant legumes (peas and beans) this spring.

Firstly open up a trench 30-40cm wide, 40cm deep and as long as practicable. Then line the bottom with partly decayed autumn leaves (or shredded gum leaves) 30cm deep. Dust each bucketful layer with an organic fertiliser rich in potash and lime - equal parts of dolomite and kelp meal is my choice. Tread this down and cover with soil 10cm in depth. Irrigate and allow up to two weeks to settle before sowing seeds.

In a light, sandy loam which is very porous due to lack of a subsoil layer, an artificial subsoil of multi-layered newspapers underneath the leaves can help overcome irrigation problems by trapping the downward movement of water if the leaves don't. This pea trench is an idea resurrected from a past generation. It requires a spot of digging - terrific therapy for those of us who love hands-on (and in) gardening!

N.B. As an alternative to leaf litter, grandad used rotting vegetable refuse as well.