OLD LORE REMINDER

A reminder that British weather can still throw in a chilly evening - don't pack the fleece away just yet!

In full bloom!

July is the garden at its most giving – borders brimming, evenings that never end, everything buzzing with life.

July rewards the patient gardener. The hard graft of spring is behind us, and now the garden gets on with it – blooming, ripening, producing. Our job is to keep up, water deeply, harvest often, and find a moment to enjoy what we've made.

Harvest the garlic

When the lower leaves yellow and topple, it's time to lift your garlic. Lift the bulbs up with a fork on a dry day and lay them in an airy spot to cure for a fortnight. Properly dried, they'll see you through to spring.

Prune summer herbs

Rosemary, thyme, sage and oregano all benefit from a tidy-up after their first flush of flowers. A light trim keeps them bushy rather than leggy. Bundle the trimmings and hang them to dry – free seasoning for the kitchen.

Take softwood cuttings

This is the sweet spot for propagating shrubs like hydrangea, lavender and penstemon. Snip non-flowering shoots, strip the lower leaves and pop them into gritty compost under a plastic bag. Six to eight weeks later, new plants for nothing.

Feed the tomatoes

Once the first trusses are setting fruit, switch to a high-potash feed once a week. Consistent watering matters as much as feeding – irregular moisture is what causes split skins and blossom-end rot.

Net the soft fruit

Currants, gooseberries, blueberries and late raspberries are irresistible to blackbirds and thrushes. A fruit cage is ideal, but scaffold netting over canes works just as well - keep it taut so birds can't get tangled.

Order autumn bulbs

It feels odd to think of spring while the garden is in midsummer glory, but the best suppliers sell out by August. Order tulips, alliums, narcissi and treasures like camassias – your February self will be grateful.

Keep an eye on the greenhouse

Damping down the floor in the morning raises humidity and keeps red spider mite at bay. Shade paint on the sunniest panes prevents scorching, and yellow sticky traps make excellent early-warning sentries for whitefly.

PLATINUM EXPERT

Alan Coxon

Food and heritage expert, and curator of projects from *Roaming the Paths* to *Alan's Almanac*, Alan is Platinum's gardening voice. With a passion for the land and a gift for unearthing timeless wisdom, Alan is our guide through the year – sharing know-how, inspiration and a few winks of humour along the way. Find out more at *roaming-the-paths.co.uk* and *alans-almanac.co.uk*.

ALAN'S TOP TIP

Pick courgettes small, around 10-15cm, when they're sweetest. Check every few days – they hide under leaves like green submarines – and grate any escapee monster into a cake.

Smaller courgettes are the sweetest

Book of the month

How Does Your Garden Grow? **by Milli Proust (Quadrille)**

West Sussex flower grower Milli Proust distils four years of learning into a warm, process-led guide for new gardeners. Beautifully photographed by Eva Nemeth, it showcases planting combinations, propagation and seasonal care.

Did you know?

- A single sunflower head isn't one flower – it's hundreds of tiny florets, each producing a seed. What looks like one bloom is really a whole community working together, which is why they're such a magnet for bees.
- Sweet peas have been cultivated for more than 300 years – the first sent from Sicily to a Middlesex schoolmaster in 1699. Today's frilly varieties are worlds away from that rough purple original, yet the heady Victorian scent remains.
- Swifts scream through July skies at up to 70mph, and barely land for 10 months of the year – eating, sleeping and even mating on the wing. One of nature's great spectacles, gone again by early August.
- Moths outnumber butterflies in the UK by around 40 to one, quietly doing much of the night-time pollination. Evening-scented plants like honeysuckle and night-scented stock exist almost entirely to reward them; a whole garden economy after sunset.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

RHS Badminton Flower Show

8–12 July 2026, Badminton Estate, South Gloucestershire
A new RHS show, taking Hampton Court's summer slot this year while it rests until 2027. Expect ambitious show gardens, a Great Pavilion of specialist growers, and expert talks from Adam Frost, Arit Anderson and Rachel de Thame. *rhs.org.uk/badminton*

Henry Moore: Monumental Nature at Kew Gardens

Throughout July (runs 9 May – 31 January 2027), Kew Gardens, London
The largest outdoor Moore exhibition ever staged, with 30 monumental sculptures set across Kew's 320-acre landscape. A once-in-a-generation dialogue between art and nature, with 90 further works inside the Shirley Sherwood Gallery. Included with garden entry. *kew.org*

The Big British Garden Survey

Now until end of September 2026, gardens across the UK
The National Garden Scheme invites everyone with a garden, allotment or balcony to help build a national picture of where wildlife is thriving. Record the butterflies and insects visiting your patch and contribute to real conservation science. *ngs.org.uk/the-big-british-garden-survey*