



MAY

FULL MOON 5th NEWMOON 19th AV. TEMP. 11.8°C (53.2°F) AV. DAYLIGHT 5:09–21:02 (15hr 53m)

Make the most of May's warmer weather to start getting ready for summer. Your garden should be approaching its best, with colourful spring bedding and trees in full leaf. Plus, the flower-show season will give you even more ideas and inspiration for the coming months.

KEY TASKS

- Protect tender plants from late frosts.
- Trim any formal hedging lightly.
- Protect young plants from slugs and snails.
- Clear out spring bedding to make space for summer bedding plants.
- Move tender plants outside now for the summer.
- Sow and plant out tender vegetables, and continue successional sowing of vegetables.
- Ventilate any greenhouses or conservatories during warmer weather.

LAST CHANCE

If you're still planning to plant evergreen shrubs, sow grass seed, or lay new turf, do so now before the conditions become too dry.

AROUND THE GARDEN

With the freshness of spring and the promise of summer, May is a particularly lovely month to spend in the garden – and there's plenty to be getting on with.

GENERAL CARE

Preparing for night frosts

Even though daytime temperatures should now be mild, night frosts are not uncommon this month, especially after clear, bright days. Keep a sheet of horticultural fleece or even some old newspapers handy to cover any plants that are vulnerable to frost if night temperatures are forecast to fall.

Dealing with weeds

Hoe bare ground to keep down weeds as they germinate. Weeds are more easily killed off at this stage, rather than leaving them until they get bigger, as they won't have the chance to set seeds that will be spread around the garden. Hoe on dry, sunny days

and the weed seedlings can be left on the surface of the ground to dry out and shrivel up in the sun.

Keep the lawnmower in the shed

The grass is growing well by May, so it would traditionally be time to start mowing established lawns once a week. In recent years, however, May has become a time to let nature do its own thing. "No Mow May" encourages gardeners to forego this chore for the month to allow wild plants to thrive and give pollinators a much-needed boost. You might even be rewarded with some rare plants: participants have spotted orchids and snake's head fritillary, among others.

TREES, SHRUBS, AND CLIMBERS

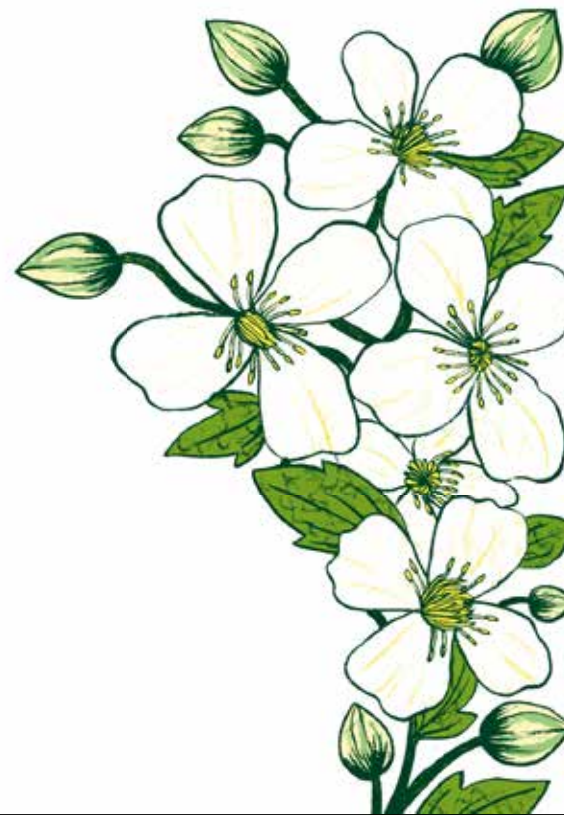
Water newly planted trees and shrubs

A few days of sunny weather accompanied by drying winds in May will dry out the soil surprisingly quickly, so water newly planted trees and shrubs regularly. You may need to water them on a daily basis. You can also apply an organic mulch, such as rotted manure or garden compost, around the base to retain water and help new, growing roots.

Prune early-flowering shrubs

The likes of *Kerria japonica* and *Spiraea* 'Arguta' will finish flowering about now on

wood produced the previous year. For *kerria*, prune all the shoots that have produced flowers back to young sideshoots lower down, and remove underground suckers if the shrub seems to be encroaching on other plants. Likewise, prune the flowered shoots of *Spiraea* 'Arguta' back to buds or shoots lower down on the shrub. Then cut out about one in three of the older stems completely to the ground; this encourages new growth from the base, keeping the plant vigorous and healthy.



PRUNING CLEMATIS

The vigorous climber *Clematis montana* should be pruned after flowering. The amount of pruning will depend on where it is growing. Not much will be needed if it is scrambling through trees or up a wall, but in more confined spaces some pruning will be necessary to prevent it taking over the whole garden. Pruning is easy, although the untangling can be tricky; all you have to do is prune out any dead or diseased wood and cut the remaining stems back as far as you need to. This encourages young growth to take place and flowers to come next spring.

PERENNIALS, ANNUALS, BULBS, AND BEDDING

Take cuttings from tender perennials

Cuttings taken now from the likes of argyranthemums, pelargoniums, and fuchsias will provide plants for flowering well into autumn, but you must have somewhere frost-free to raise them until all danger of frost has passed. Trim the cutting immediately below a leaf joint and dip the end in hormone rooting solution. Put the cuttings into pots containing cuttings compost and water. Place a polythene bag over the pot, and put it on a shady windowsill so they don't dry out. They will root in three to four weeks, when they can be potted up ready to plant out in June.

Thin out hardy annuals

If they are not thinned, annuals will become leggy and won't flower well. Thin out to leave one seedling at least every 15cm (6in). The taller the plants, the more space they need. Simply choose the one you want to keep and pinch out the others. Measure the gap to the next one, and do the same until the job's done. Most hardy annuals don't transplant well when they grow taller, so if you thin them out as soon as the seedlings can be handled, they can be transplanted to fill gaps or you can put them in other parts of the garden.

Sow half-hardy and hardy annuals

The likes of clarkia, calendula, and candytuft (*Iberis*) can all be sown early this month to produce flowers in late summer and autumn.

TEN-MINUTE TASKS

- Prune evergreens to remove any frost damage, and tidy any wayward shoots.
- Check roses for aphids, picking off any you find.
- Deadhead spring-flowering bulbs that are still going. Snap off tulip heads and leave the stalks. Leave the foliage intact for at least six weeks after the last flower to help replenish the bulb.

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Ornamental borders will be brimming with colourful late-spring flowers, the sound of birdsong will fill the garden, and insects will be pollinating flowers.



CONTAINERS

Remove spring bedding

Make room for summer bedding in pots by discarding the spring bedding. It's also worth removing some of the old compost if it has been in the container since last year and adding fresh peat-free compost to give the new plants the best possible chance to thrive.

Water and feed containers

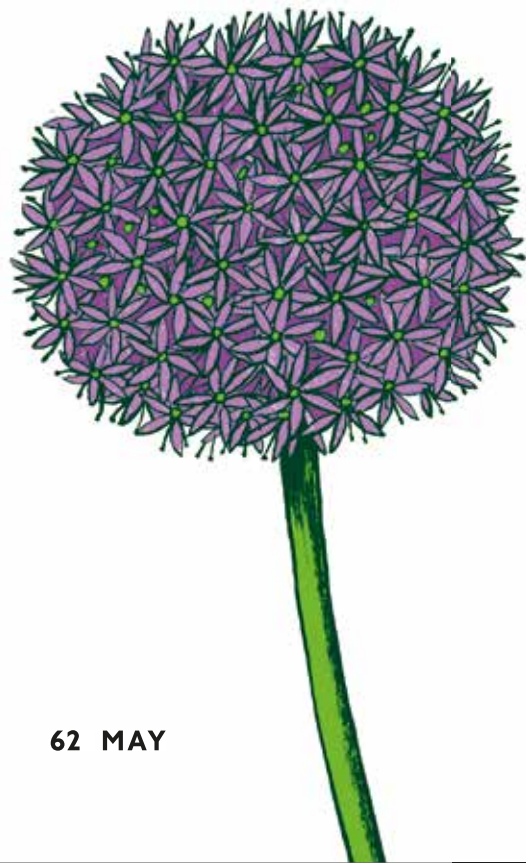
As the weather starts to get warmer, watering containers can become a daily or twice-daily task – especially for hanging baskets, which are prone to drying out. Remember to feed plants too; a high-potash feed is best for the production of flowers and a prolonged display.

Watch out for vine weevils

These can wreak havoc when they multiply within the close confines of a container. To avoid introducing them when you add new plants, knock the plants out of their pots and check for the small white grubs, which eat at the roots. Apply an organic biological nematode to all containers in your garden to keep the pest under control.

Move tender perennials and shrubs outside

In most regions, these plants can be moved outside at the end of May, but you may want to wait until early June in northern areas. The sooner these plants can be put outside the better: the fresh air and rain after their prolonged period indoors will do them the world of good. Larger-leaved shrubs, such as bay, can have their leaves wiped with a damp cloth. This will remove dust and dirt accumulated indoors. Be sure to keep up with watering and feeding, too.



THE KITCHEN GARDEN

With longer, warmer days, May often brings a foretaste of summer. You may even get to harvest your first spring crops this month.

Tidy up fruit bushes and canes

Weed carefully around fruit bushes and canes; then, after a spell of rain, spread a layer of organic mulch over the surface to help retain moisture and suppress the growth of weeds. Keep an eye on raspberry canes, too: they tend to be over-eager in throwing out new shoots and suckers. Pull or cut some out to avoid a dense thicket.

Protect plants against frosts

Late frosts are still a possibility in May. If you take the risk of planting out tender plants, keep cloches, tunnels, fleece, or even newspapers on hand to cover them at night if the weather worsens.

HARVEST HIGHLIGHTS

Rhubarb

The stalks are ready to pick when they reach about 30cm (12in) in height. Much taller, and they'll become stringy.

Radishes

Summer radishes are fast-growing, and if you sowed or planted out some seedlings last month they may be ready now. Pull them up and eat them before they grow too large.

Turnips

The first baby turnips of the year should be ready now. Lift them while they're still young, small, and at their very best.

DON'T FORGET

- **Weed** as often as you can.
- **Thin out** seedlings ruthlessly.
- **Earth up** potatoes so the tubers growing underground are not exposed to the light.



1 *Clematis montana* var. *grandiflora*

10x4m (30x12ft)

A vigorous climber for quick cover and attractive summer foliage. White flowers with cream anthers are produced for about four weeks in late spring and early summer.

GROW IT in sun or dappled shade against a wall, fence, or large tree, but keep the roots in shade. Plant in fertile, well-drained soil enriched with organic matter. Prune after flowering (see page 59).

2 *Paeonia daurica* subsp. *mlokosewitschii*

90x90cm (36x36in)

A clump-forming herbaceous peony with lemon-yellow flowers and bluish-green leaves, ideal for a mixed border.

GROW IT in full sun or part-day shade in deep, fertile, moist but well-drained soil enriched with organic matter. Shelter from strong winds.

3 *Allium hollandicum*

1mx10cm (3ftx4in)

With drumstick seedheads that look good long after the flowers fade, this bulb is the perfect highlight in a sunny, mixed border.

GROW IT in any fertile, well-drained soil, ideally in full sun, though it will tolerate light shade.

4 *Digitalis x mertonensis*

90x30cm (36x12in)

A perennial foxglove loved by bees, with tall spires of tubular, pinkish-buff flowers in spring and early summer.

GROW IT in partial shade and humus-rich soils if possible, although it tolerates most aspects and soils if not too wet or dry.

5 *Papaver* (Oriental Group) 'Cedric Morris'

90x90cm (36x36in)

A showy perennial poppy with bowl-shaped, satiny, soft-pink frilled flowers with dark centres.

GROW IT in full sun, in deep, fertile, well-drained soil. Cut back hard after flowering to produce fresh foliage and more flowers.

GET AHEAD

SOW BIENNIALS FOR NEXT YEAR'S SPRING BEDDING

Biennials are sown one year and flower the next, meaning that forward planning is key to getting the most out of them. The easiest way to remember when to sow next spring's biennial bedding plants is to do it when this year's ones are beginning to fade and are ready to be cleared away.

WHY NOT TRY?

Forget-me-nots, wallflowers, sweet Williams, winter-flowering pansies, and *Bellis perennis* can all be sown this way. They'll add a burst of colour wherever you choose to plant them.

1.

Find a corner to sow the seeds (avoid re-using the same piece of ground for wallflowers, as this can lead to clubroot). Rake the soil to a fine tilth and level off.

2.

Create shallow drills about 15cm (6in) apart. Water the area if the soil is dry.

3.

Sow the seeds thinly along the row, cover lightly with dry soil, and firm gently. Label each row.

4.

In a few weeks' time, the seedlings will need to be thinned or transplanted to grow on with more space between them, before being planted in their final positions in autumn.

