

# SUNSHINE, SWEAT, AND HOSEPIPES

**Fergus Dowding** looks at navigating baked topsoil, thirsty wildlife, and late-season vegetable planting.



*The polytunnel with melon Emir, heaviest one so far 2.7kg, productive Golden Sunrise tomatoes and butternut squash beyond. We don't usually grow squash inside but had spare space. Is it too dry for blight this year? I haven't got any, although much leaf roll after hot days, even so production is magnificent. As each crop finishes we will be planning true spinach and oriental salads, perhaps carrots and in November pea Douce Provence for April harvest.*

**T**he sunshine has made the summer crops so productive, my dwarf French beans have cropped heavily three times and our tomatoes started cropping in June, Sungold cherry varieties in late May.

For many years we have been asking for traditional sunny summers. Now we've had two in a row we are still moaning!

We have been endlessly attached to our hosepipe. Despite all the compost mulching my topsoil, it is like concrete below. One wonders if Wessex Water getting 75% of its water from boreholes and springs has anything to do with this.

Last year's autumn rains sent all the vegetables into paroxysms of productivity using energy they had somehow stowed away and we ate well all winter.

Starting all seeds in modules gives a perfect start to all vegetables. Sowing carrots direct into the soil has worked well if the watering can pampers them until they germinate. From then on how fast they grow depends on watering, which can backfire on you as wildlife is so keen for moist soil to scratch in for food—there goes your crop. The only crops that don't need water once established in our

garden are sweetcorn, beetroot and parsnips.

Apple and other fruit trees have done well, their established roots and mycelial networks go further than vegetables. But even they are dropping fruit early, quite a lot good to eat already. If it rains what is left on the tree will bulge with delight.

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By September outdoor sowings are limited but warm autumns of late make it possible to sow true spinach, coriander and oriental vegetables. If you're lucky you get a good crop, if not you get a green manure. In October sow garlic, the bigger the bulb the bigger the clove next year, and if you want to be full of beans next May/June then sow broad bean Aquadulce in November.

How does a doctor diagnose a healthy person? He shakes you, if the beans in you rattle you are healthy.