

# Onward and upward

With the weather getting warmer and the danger of frosts passing, it's time to harden-off plants and direct sow tender seeds

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Candy-striped  
'Chioggia' beetroot

**PRACTICAL JOB**

## Sow some beetroot

Fast becoming my favourite crop for ease, variety and tastiness, sow beetroot straight into the ground now for baby beets in six or seven weeks time, or fully mature roots if left longer. I grow candy-striped 'Chioggia' (shown above), yellow 'Golden' and 'White Detroit' alongside traditional dark red cultivars, sowing short rows every month so there are always sweet little roots to be had. I'm also growing beetroot leaf 'Bull's Blood' for purple-red baby salad leaves. All from Chiltern Seeds ([www.chilternseeds.co.uk](http://www.chilternseeds.co.uk)).

**PRACTICAL JOB**

## Planting out

Mid-May is the time you can be confident that frosts have passed and you can put your bedding plants and tender vegetables out of doors. Don't rush it: a few hours in the daytime is enough at first, building slowly up to all day and all night, before finally planting out. You might even pin fleece over the transplanted plants for a little while, to lessen the shock.

## THINGS TO DO

If you haven't got much time, just do these essential tasks...

*As gooseberries start to swell, thin them out (using the small unripe ones for cooking) to allow space for the remainder to grow.*

*Put a net over developing strawberries to keep the birds off and put straw around their bases to lift the fruits off the ground.*

*This is a bad month for carrot fly. Cover sowings in fleece to keep them out.*

**THREE GREAT...**

## Plants for moths

Night-flying insects are attracted to pale, highly fragrant flowers that they can find in the dark. Fill your plot with those and you'll be making the evening garden a more attractive place for both wildlife and yourself.

***Cestrum nocturnum***

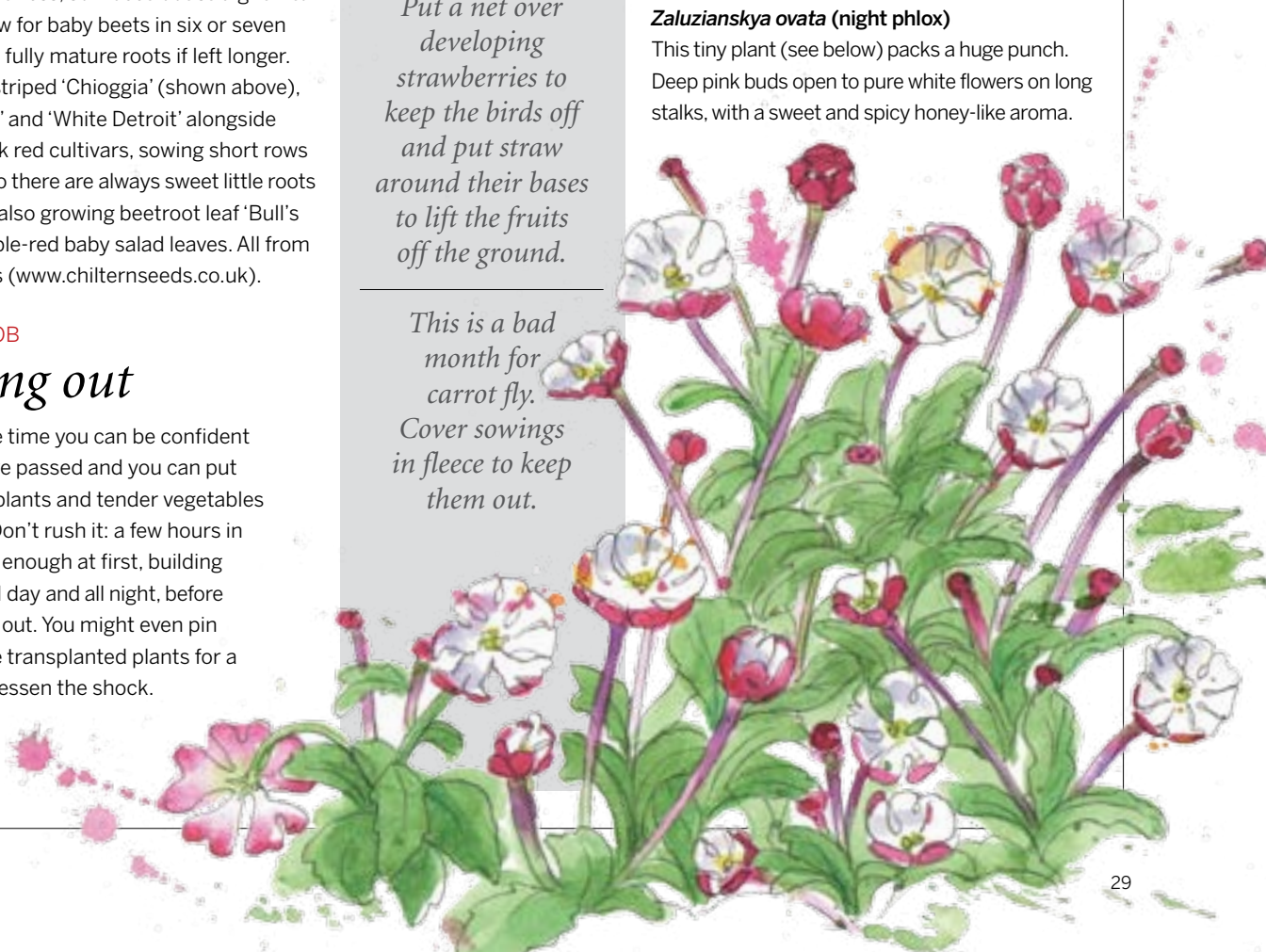
Night-blooming jasmine is a West Indian plant that must be grown as a houseplant but can be moved outside in summer. It will fill your evening garden with a spicy, tropical fragrance. It has small white or greenish-white flowers against dark leaves.

***Wisteria floribunda***

Most wisterias are scented but this one is particularly strong at night. It has long sweet-smelling pendant racemes of flowers.

***Zaluzianskya ovata* (night phlox)**

This tiny plant (see below) packs a huge punch. Deep pink buds open to pure white flowers on long stalks, with a sweet and spicy honey-like aroma.



READ THIS

## Blogging from Blackpitts

It's always a good time to read James Alexander-Sinclair's blog, but this month is a better time than most. As the grand circus that is the Chelsea Flower Show rolls into town, garden designer and RHS council member James is on hand to give us the inside story and the important details, such as which committees get the best sandwiches. Throughout the year he gives us glimpses into the nuts and bolts of garden designing, from deliveries of thousands of bulbs to be distributed around the country to the digging of great big mysterious holes. It's always funny, and the best-loved garden blog by far. [www.blackpitts.co.uk/blog](http://www.blackpitts.co.uk/blog)

PRACTICAL JOB

## Grow three sisters

Some plants rub along well together, and the 'three sisters' are a great example. Corn, beans and squash were traditionally planted together by Native Americans. The corn supports the beans, the beans provide nitrogen to the soil and the squash acts as a mulch. Growing all three can make harvesting fresh beans and corn tricky (traditionally they were grown for dried corn and beans and the whole tangle harvested together) but either of the tall crops will be happier growing with squash at their feet than without. Plant out beans and squash plants and direct sow sweet corn mid-month.



ONE TO MAKE

## Green garlic soup

A real gardener's treat, green garlic is the same stuff you pull up in midsummer, but cropped now in May, before it has fully ripened. The result is a fresher, sweeter, milder bulb without the heat and pungency. It won't store, so use it immediately for a delicious, pale and creamy soup.

INGREDIENTS – serves 6

- 6-8 heads green garlic (use the bulb, which is still small, and the first, white, part of the stalk)
- 1 litre chicken or vegetable stock
- 4 small, waxy potatoes
- 4 tbsp single cream
- handful of parsley
- sea salt, pepper,
- crème fraîche and chopped chives for garnish
- vegetable oil for frying

Boil the potatoes until soft. Gently heat the oil, chop the heads of garlic and cook them slowly over a low heat until soft and translucent. Add the stock, cooked potatoes and parsley and whizz up in a blender. Add cream, season and garnish.

