

T Online Buy three overwintering onion sets for £9.95 gardenshop.telegraph.co.uk

Down to earth

Too much of a good thing can be wonderful

How does your allotment grow? Don't let success with veg run away with you – every glut has a silver lining, says Lia Leendertz

My trug runneth over. Well, I don't own a trug, but my bags for life and Tupperware are being pressed into pretty frequent service, ferrying potatoes, courgettes, berries, beans, onions, tomatoes, lettuce and more from allotment to kitchen. You wait all year for a glut, and then 12 come along at once.

These are the good times, the moments of plenty. Long forgotten is the hungry gap when a couple of spears of purple-sprouting broccoli would be pounced upon, pimped and paraded. A spear and a half for each family member? Draped in a silky hollandaise, perhaps? Best plates, of course, and only allotted to those who promise to really appreciate them. The kids are relegated to the frozen peas.

But now the kitchen is laden with bowls piled high and bountiful with the freshest, loveliest stuff, and I have become a vegetable pusher, steaming them, frying them, whizzing them up and cloaking them in cheese sauce, anything to get through them.

A general glut-time rule is to prioritise harvesting, above all else. Yes it's nice when paths are edged and beds weeded, but not if that means you miss the moment when the French beans turn from tender to tough. I'm guilty of it myself: tending things all season only to let them go past their best.

I did it this year with cauliflowers, only noticing that they had come to anything when they were more flower than cauli, a week too late. It is frustrating – and faintly ludicrous – to put all of that effort, time and expense into growing organic matter for the compost heap, but that is where my cauliflowers have gone.

If you have an hour at the plot, the first half-hour – perhaps even three quarters of an hour – should be spent harvesting, nibbling, checking what stage crops are at. Your main job right now is to reap the rewards of an entire year's work, so make sure you are not so caught up in other maintenance that you miss it.

Lettuce

Successional sowing should be your first weapon in the battle of the gluts,

and lettuces are the successional sowing poster boys, taking to it so perfectly. Sow a short row every few weeks all summer long, rather than one long row that matures all at once and has you seeing lettuce leaves when you close your eyes at night.

It's straightforward in theory, tricky in practice, simply because we forget to keep sowing while things are bountiful, and summer slips by without a second or third sowing. Employ some means: diary entries, bleeping phone reminders set early in the season, whatever it takes to prod you into sowing even when the going is good.

There is still time to make a sowing now and another in a few weeks' time, so that you have lettuces for autumn. Switch to sowing hardier winter lettuces such as 'Winter Gem', 'Arctic King' and 'Valdor' from mid August.

Courgettes



A courgette glut is an allotment's rite of passage. Sowing six seeds seems modest in April, but come July when all six plants are pumping out several fruits a week it's alarming; you find yourself Googling "courgette jam".

Temperance early in the year is the key. I sow three plants at a time, to allow for one to fail. Two or three plants at full throttle is plenty for the average family, remembering that you won't want to eat them every day of the week. They do run out of steam as summer wears on, so sow another few around three weeks later. I like mixing them up, so I always have one yellow and one green courgette going.

You won't find tiny, sweet, firm courgettes just five or six inches long at the greengrocers, but this is when they are at their finest, so again, timing and regular harvesting is everything. A marrow glut is no fun.

Tomatoes

We are right on the cusp of the tomato season. I may not be able to call mine a glut yet, but it's coming. And the trouble with tomatoes is you can't space out their sowing to encourage them to ripen at different times. Like peppers, chillies and aubergines, they need as long a season as you can possibly provide in



MARK DIACON/FRESH FOOD IMAGES

Veg of heaven: clockwise from above, Lia's harvest; oven-dried tomatoes; courgette fritters; lettuce à la française; (inset) picking baby courgettes

order to grow, flower and fruit before the frosts kick in.

The trick is to grow a number of different varieties. Three plants of 'Sungold' (lovely as it is) will mature at a similar time while a plant each of 'Sungold', 'Gardener's Delight' and 'Cuor de Bue' will be slightly staggered. If I were going to grow 10 tomato

plants, I would make them 10 different varieties. While courgettes are picked young and perky, tomatoes should get the opposite treatment: left to ripen in the sun, on the vine, and to fully develop their flavours. Again, you won't find them like that in the shops so this is where the trouble of growing your own pays off.



Three recipes for gluts

Courgette fritters

My kids love fried food, and they love cheese. They are not great fans of courgettes but they eat these. I wonder why.

Makes six fritters

About 250g (8oz) courgettes
One large egg
2 tablespoons plain flour, plus more for coating
Half a packet of feta cheese, crumbled but still chunky
A handful of chopped mint, parsley and chives

Grate the courgette onto a clean tea towel then squeeze it into a ball over the sink to get all the excess moisture out. Tip into a bowl and mix in all of the other ingredients and heat some oil in a frying pan. Place a dollop of the mixture into the flour and coat on all sides, then fry until golden.

Oven-dried tomatoes

As there are so few tricks to stretch out the tomato season, I like to preserve a batch. These don't last forever, but placed hot into sterilised jars and covered in warmed olive oil they keep for a couple of months. Use them then for a memory of summer in autumn salads, or just remove the skins and mix them into pasta. They dissolve into a rich sauce.

Slice cherry tomatoes in half and larger tomatoes into

quarters and place on baking trays, cut sides up. Put them on its lowest setting and slide the oven on, leaving the door slightly ajar. Leave for at least four hours, checking regularly. You want to drive off a good deal of the moisture to concentrate the flavour, without browning the edges too much. When they are crinkled but still juicy inside tip them into small, sterilised jars and cover with warm olive oil.

Lettuce à la française

Faced with a row of maturing lettuces I'm a big fan of the cooked lettuce. They collapse down on cooking, so you can use a whole bolt-threatening lettuce per dish. I add whatever green vegetables are also ready to this classic side dish.

1 onion
1 lettuce
Peas
Mange touts
Broad beans
250ml (8fl oz) vegetable or chicken stock
Chopped mint

Steam the broad beans then throw them into some cold water and remove the skins. Meanwhile, fry the onion in some oil until soft. Chop the lettuce and add it, frying until it starts to wilt. Then just pour in the stock add the peas and other vegetables, and bubble it all down until everything is cooked, mixing in the mint just before serving.

Willow Wheelie-bin Screening



single £44.99
double £59.99
triple £79.99

Attractive screens hide unsightly wheelie-bins as well as deterring unwanted visitors

These natural willow wheelie-bin screens can help disguise the common wheelie bin, and even hide them in an attractive fashion! Made from woven willow with a strong metal framework, they have hinged side panels for easy access in and out, ideal when you're in a hurry. As well as hiding the unsightly bin, they also help deter rodents such as foxes, rats and scavenging dogs, and can also cut down on fly tippers. We have 3 sizes of wheelie-bin screening available:

Single (measuring 115cm x 64cm x 80cm), designed for one wheelie-bin Double (measuring 115cm x 121cm x 80cm), big enough for 2 side by side and Triple (115cm x 180cm x 80cm), designed for 3 bins in a row. All arrive boxed, with no assembly required.

Single Wheelie-Bin Screen	GF1984	£44.99
Double Wheelie-Bin Screen (pictured)	GF1985	£59.99
Triple Wheelie-Bin Screen	GF6500	£79.99

Phone **01305 848725** Selections, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 7YG

www.selections.com



Name & Address _____
 Postcode _____ tel _____ email _____
 credit / debit card no. or cheque to 'Selections' _____
 code _____ item _____ Qty _____ TOTAL _____
 CV2 no. _____ expiry _____ valid from date _____ issue no. _____
 P&P £4.99
 TOTAL _____

SHOPS
 Guarantee: Return your order in its original packaging for a full refund if not satisfied.
 Shops guarantee only applies to advertised products.

"Introducing... The Fragrant & Ruffled Pansy 'Frizzle Sizzle'! For Colourful Displays Of Non-Stop Brilliance!!"



JUST 18p PER PLANT!

Set your Winter garden ablaze with these ruffled & scented Pansy 'Frizzle-Sizzle' & be the 'talk of the town' - all for just 18p per plant!

If it's colourful impact you're looking for, then these exquisite 'decoupage' pansies will really brighten up your beds, borders and patio containers this coming Winter and Spring, and for many more years to come. Pansy 'Frizzle-Sizzle' provides enormous 'Flower-Power' - you can expect hundreds of blooms from each and every one of your 66 plants. Whatever the weather they will flower beautifully, even in the deepest winter days, and what's more they are delightfully scented too!

Stock is limited, so pre-order now to secure yours for delivery mid-September.

- Sensational, fragrant, ruffled, 'Decoupage' blooms
- Fully Winter hardy
- Incredible 'Flower-Power' every year from Autumn right through to Spring!
- A full palette of stunning, vibrant colours
- Easy to grow - perfect for all gardeners
- Great Value For Money - Just 18p per plant!
- Limited stocks pre-order now for mid-September delivery

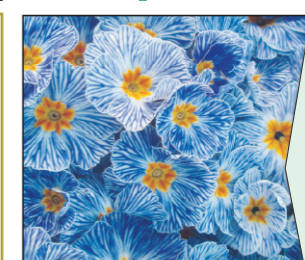
PANSY 'FRIZZLE SIZZLE' (66 Plants)
JUST £11.99
 + SH&I
 ITEM: 401902

3 EASY WAYS TO ORDER YOUR PANSY 'FRIZZLE SIZZLE'

1. Visit: GardenBargains.com
2. Telephone: 0871977 55 55
3. By post using the coupon

GardenBargains.com, Ideal Home House, Newark Road, Peterborough, PE1 5WG. Delivery is normally within 21 days. Offer only available while stocks last.

OUR DOUBLE GUARANTEE TO YOU!
 "If you're not completely happy with your purchase, return it within 30 days for a FULL REFUND. Should it fail to thrive, thereafter we'll replace it FREE OF CHARGE. You just pay SH&I!"



EXTRA BONUS OFFER!
 As a Special Thank You, when you buy Pansy 'Frizzle Sizzle' why not add the following to your order:
Primrose 'Blue Zebra' Collection (24 Plants) - A new & unique dazzling blue and white striped variety with large, long lasting flowers. Fully Winter hardy & easy to grow, flowers February-May. Order now for delivery mid-September. JUST £14.99

Post to: GardenBargains.com, Ideal Home House, Newark Road, Peterborough, PE1 5WG.

Item	Offer Description	Price	Qty	Total
401902	Pansy 'Frizzle Sizzle' (66 Plants)	£11.99		
401901	Primrose 'Blue Zebra' Collection (24 plants)	£14.99		
Add SH&I (Delivery to UK mainland only*)				£4.99
Total order value				

I enclose a cheque/PO (name & address on the back) for £ _____ payable to GardenBargains.com or charge my Visa / Mastercard / Maestro

Card Number _____ Expiry Date _____ Maestro Issue No. _____ Security No. _____
 Start Date _____
 Mr/Ms/Miss First Name _____ Surname _____
 Address _____
 Daytime Tel _____ E-mail _____

SHOPS
 GardenBargains.com is a trade name of Lead The Good Life Ltd. Company number 06482520. Some items may be supplied by Lead The Good Life (Jersey) Ltd.
 Registered office Brunel House, 3 Old Street, St. Helier, JE2 5RG. Company number 105402. © Copyright Lead The Good Life Limited, 2010.

YET ANOTHER AMAZING OFFER FROM GardenBargains.com