TAX CREDITS which help families make ends meet are set to be cut by the new Conservative Government. They announced this in their Budget last month. Tax credits go to families on low incomes - most of them in work, but on low pay. The Labour government brought them in to try to lift people out of work and poverty, even though some people are working, they don’t earn enough to live on. And Tax Credits “make work pay” by topping up low pay so that people are better off in work than on benefits.

In Camberwell and Peckham alone 648 of families get Tax Credits. Even with the National Minimum Wage those families need the tax credits to make ends meet. The Government is going to put the Minimum Wage up - and that’s a good thing. But the cuts in the Tax Credits are much bigger than the increase in the Minimum Wage and so around the country 3 million families will be, on average, £1,000 a year worse off.

The Conservatives said before the election that they would cut £1.2 billion from the welfare bill. But they always ducked questions about cutting Tax Credits, inferring that they would be safe. They said they would not “balance the books on the backs of the poor.” That is exactly what cutting Tax Credits would do. They have no democratic mandate to do it. And they plan to do it in an underhand and undemocratic way. Even though this is a £3.6 billion cut which will effect around 3 million people they plan to sneak it through without proper scrutiny by the House of Commons.

They plan to cut tax credits in a Committee with no more than 15 MPs in a meeting in a room upstairs in the House of Commons lasting no more than 45 minutes. I’ve written to the Prime Minister saying:

* That it was not in their Manifesto
* That it is a big measure involving 3 million families and £3.6 billion

*That it is highly controversial - they say that families will not be worse off because of the increase in the Minimum Wage but we, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies dispute that, and so it should first be scrutinised by the all-party Select Committee for the Department of Work and Pensions and if the Government then intend to go ahead with it they should put it in a Bill that will be scrutinised by the whole House of Commons and the House of Lords before it becomes law.


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Y MID August summer growth in the garden has finished, and sunset is now noticed earlier.

But summer is not quite over - for the next few weeks perennials will continue to bloom as we move towards harvest time and the autumn flowering season. The weather during August has so far been cooler than usual with overcast and humid conditions. Rainfall has been below average so low through the summer months and some plants are not coping well with the dryer situation. Ensure pots and window boxes are watered regularly - at least once a day; food crops will need to be watered daily especially tomato plants. General watering in the garden should be done at least three times a week.

Work follows the familiar pattern and includes heading summer roses (except those that have decorative hips in autumn, such as Rosa roxburghii, multibracteata or carnea) perennials including Hydrangeas but the flower perfume is utterly exquisite. The deep pink petals have been used to make classic rose water and rose oil for centuries. Rosa damascena has many ceremonial and traditional medicinal uses; it is mentioned in the old herbs, the oil is said to be good for loss of appetite, grief, tension and anxiety plus headaches and migraine. The plant was used as a liver herb and gentle laxative. (Caution: Do not self medicate, always consult a qualified health care professional if you feel unwell).

To increase plant stocks, cuttings can be taken during August. Use the soft summer growth (slightly woody at the base) from Fuchsia, Geraniums and herbs such as Lavender, Rosmarinus and Sage. Put 4-6 inch cuttings (removing lower leaves) into small pots of sandy soil or multi-purpose compost. Ensure they do not dry out. In the vegetable garden sow winter greens such as cabbage, kale, spring greens and broccoli; all tolerate cool conditions and will crop when there are less other vegetables growing. Salad leaves can be sown through August and will crop until October and later if the autumn is mild.