

Gardening Notes for August

To me, August is the month that epitomizes summer. The days remain long, with the daytime chant of the cicadas and the evening chorus of the crickets. Rainfall in July varied by where you live, and on average was a bit lighter than desired. With irrigation and coupled with the warm temperatures, most plants including vegetables flourished. August typically has many humid days, but the temperatures are usually in the 80's, which is good for both the plants and the gardener! Remember to get outside during the cool of the morning or evening, use sunscreen, drink plenty of water and continue to take good notes of your endeavors.

Things to do:

Turf

- Continue to cut the lawn as growth and rainfall permit. Maintain a higher cutting height of 3" to reduce the stress from the heat and lighter rainfalls.
- The third and fourth weeks of August are the ideal time for reseeding or seeding new turf areas. The evening dew becomes heavier and helps to ensure proper growth and the warm soils allow proper root development throughout the fall before winter's chill. Supplemental irrigation will be necessary if rainfall is light.
- Wait to fertilize turf until cooler weather once again returns in late September through November.

Flowers

- Many annuals in containers may begin to look tired. For some, a light pruning accompanied by a weekly fertilizing and daily watering will breathe new life into the plants. For others, it is simply time for replacement. For autumn, consider *Salvia leucantha* (Mexican Bush Sage), pictured at right and *Leonotis leonurus* (Lion's Ear) as alternatives to the garden 'Mum'.
- Although frost is still 2+ months away, come months end you may wish to start taking cuttings of some annuals for rooting, potting up and over-wintering for next year's garden. If your rooting efforts fail, there is still plenty of time to get new cuttings.
- Gather and save seeds of various species annuals that are not named hybrids (the plants were not the result of a controlled cross but open pollinated) for seeding of new plants come next spring.
- Late August is the prime time to divide Iris (such as the German Bearded, Siberian and Crested Iris) and Peonies that have become root bound. Often, Peonies will last 30 years or longer without the need for division, so division is typically not necessary unless they were planted too deep. Iris typically needs



division every 6-10 years. When lifting Bearded Iris, check the rhizomes to make certain they are solid. If they feel hollow or spongy, they may be infected by the Iris Borer, in which case the borer will need to be removed if still present. Divide the rhizomes into sections that each contain one fan of foliage, cutting the foliage back to 4-6". Let the wounded or cut end of the rhizome callus over by letting it sit in the sun on a table for 2-4 days before replanting. When replanting, make certain the upper ½ of the Bearded Iris rhizome is above the soil and exposed to the sun. Also, orient the fan or growing point of the rhizome in the direction you wish the plant to expand or grow in the years to come. For fibrous rooted Iris, like Siberian Iris discard the central and oldest portion of the crown and cut the remainder into 4 to 6 pieces before replanting.

- For division of Peonies, lift the plant with a garden fork, which is less likely than a shovel to cut through or damage the tuberous roots. Tease the tuberous roots apart and replant such that the prominently displayed buds are very close to the surface. The peony foliage will wilt following division, but the plant will be perfectly fine come spring. The reason for fall division for Peonies and Iris is to prevent loss of flowers come spring.
- Late August is an ideal time to plant new perennials, shrubs and evergreens in the garden, as the soil will remain warm and promote good root growth!
- Try to keep up with the weeding, especially as the summer bloomers are starting to set seed. Remember, the average life span of a seed is 7 years and that equates to another 7 years of stooping over to weed!
- Continue to deadhead those repeat blooming perennials, roses and annuals to promote new flowers. For some, such as *Echinacea*, *Silphium* and *Rudbeckia*, you may wish to leave the seed heads, since they are an excellent food source for Goldfinches and other birds that value seeds.

Vegetables

- The heavy rainfall followed by the soil drying during sunny days has caused some tomatoes to exhibit Blossom End Rot, whereby the base of the tomato turns brown. It is due to a lack of calcium caused by fluctuations in soil moisture. It can be prevented by mulching the plants and giving the soil a deep soaking. The mulch will help prevent fluctuations in soil moisture.
- Crops that have finished producing should be removed, the soil top-dressed with an inch or so of compost, and the area replanted with a crop that will mature within 70 days or by October 15, the average date for frost in NJ. Suggestions for a 2nd crop include:

<u>Root Crops</u>	<u>Leaf Crops</u>	<u>Other</u>
Beets	Lettuce	Broccoli Rabe
Carrots	Mache (like lettuce)	Broccoli
Fennel (bulbous)	Mesclun Mixes	Peas
Scallions	Pak Choi	
Kohlrabi	Salad Greens	
Leeks	Spinach	
Radishes	Chard	
	Kale	
	Cabbage	

- A friend and fellow gardener of mine, Bob Mellert mentioned that the days to maturity on seed packets should be multiplied by 1.5 to account for the slower growth time due to the shortening days of autumn as compared to spring.
- Arugula, Spinach, and Lettuce are best seeded out near the end of August when the evening temperatures consistently drop into the 60's and upper 50's. These crops will endure the early frosts and the spinach actually becomes sweeter as the temperatures become cooler!
- The length of harvest time for the crops listed above can be extended by erecting low tunnels in October, as pictured at right, to mitigate any issues from the earlier frosts. Low tunnels consist of hoops placed about 5' apart and covered with a fabric like Agribon, allowing air to pass through but protects the plants from early frosts. You may wish to look into making or buying the hoops and the row cover fabric now, so you will not be rushed come October.
- Squash plants may be wilting from squash borer. If so, discard the plant (best placed in garbage to remove the borer and any eggs) and plant one of the crops mentioned above.
- August is the time to get your orders in for the fall planting of Garlic!



Trees

- Make certain plantings from this spring as well as trees planted last year continue to receive weekly irrigation during periods without rainfall. Remember, for a newly installed tree, every inch of caliper size (the diameter of the trunk 6" above the soil) will equate to 1 year of additional care and watering. Hence, a tree with a 3" caliper will require 3 years of additional care.
- Resist the urge to vigorously prune shrubs and trees. Heavy pruning during August and September will result in the robust growth of new shoots that will not become 'hardened off' by the first frost, resulting in not only their death, but potentially the death of the plant! Removal of broken branches or light pruning or shaping is still healthy for the plant.
- Many tree limbs will gradually hang down lower following the flush of new growth as seen above right. If you did not do



this pruning back in July, early August is still okay for pruning. Removing the lowest tier of branches on a shade or small tree (as seen above and at right) makes the Garden look more open and able to 'breathe' again. It also allows more light to reach the plants or turf grass beneath the tree.



- Just as with perennials, late August is a great time to plant new trees and shrubs, allowing good root development before the advent of next summer's heat. There may even be sales occurring at your favorite garden center!

- If planting a containerized tree in August or this fall, make certain to break up the root mass before planting. Often, the roots will encircle the soil which will most likely lead to a girdling root condition.



Girdling roots literally choke the trunk of the tree, leading to premature death. As brutal as it sounds, simply chop up the root mass with an ax or soil knife, and plant the tree at or just above the soil level. Water the tree weekly and cover the root mass with 2-3" of mulch. It is typically not necessary to stake the tree and they typically respond better by developing a sturdier stem without staking.

Bulbs

- It is time to start to think about ordering bulbs! Bulb orders should be placed for September or October delivery. If you are interested in any of the autumn blooming *Cyclamen*, *Crocus* or *Colchicum* (as pictured below at Wave Hill), early August is the time to place your order for a September delivery and planting, since many bulbs are quickly sold out, as early as late August!
- One bulb that has been overlooked by many gardeners for an August bloom is *Prospero autumnale*, previously known as *Scilla*



autumnalis as seen above at right. Although the light pink flower spikes only reach 8-10" tall, the clumps readily grow in size and slowly produce seedlings that appear nearby the original plants.

- Another great plant that is overlooked by many is *Lycoris squamigera*, commonly called Naked Lady, as seen on the left. Ordered now from various bulb distributors and planted to 6-7" deep, the plants produce Daffodil like foliage in spring, but no flowers! Just like Daffodils, the foliage gradually flops and turns brown come June. As late July and August approach, a stalk suddenly appears from the ground without any foliage and yields numerous pink trumpet shaped flowers. The common name originated from the simple fact that they bloom naked or without foliage! In addition, just like the *Colchicum* pictured below, the plants are deer resistant and unfortunately, too little used! The image above was taken at Chanticleer Gardens in Wayne PA.



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