

Gardening Notes for September

September marks the start of getting the garden – and the gardener – ready for a long winter's rest. I know it seems too early to think of winter, but it is time to start planning for winter and the year to come. To this end, consider how best to overwinter and to make room for your favorite non-hardy plants indoors. Fortunately, we still have several months remaining for plants to grow, so there is no rush! Continue to take good notes and pictures on how you weaved together your perennials and annuals this year, since after the first frost these pictures will be all that remains of this year's favorite combinations!

Things to do:

Turf

- Continue to keep your lawn mower blades set high for cutting your lawn. Rain has been rather sporadic and mostly light. The temperatures look to be average or above average for the start of the month, sustaining summer's stress on the turf.
- September is a great time for reseeding bare spots, or for the installation of sod. The upcoming cooler temperatures, heavy dews and typically consistent autumn rainfalls combined with warm soil temperatures promotes good root growth and turf establishment.
- September is a good time to fertilize your lawn. If you wish to fertilize once a year, September is an ideal time as it aids in developing a good root system throughout the winter for next summer's heat.
- If you have portions of the lawn receiving excessive foot traffic or have otherwise developed compacted soils, September is a good time to core and aerate the turf. The special equipment needed can be rented at local rental facilities and the effort does improve the quality and health of the turf.

Flowers

- If you have yet to start, take cuttings of your favorite annuals that you wish to overwinter and are easy to root, such as Coleus. The cutting will have rooted out and be ready for up-potting in 4-6 weeks. It is far easier to over-winter a small plant that should be free of most insect and disease than lifting a large plant from the ground or outdoor container and bringing it inside.
- Harvest and clean the seed from those annuals and heirloom vegetables that come true from seed. Allow them to dry and store them in small paper pouches that are properly labeled and place them in the refrigerator (not the freezer) until next spring.
- Remove those annuals that look excessively tired or leggy. Some look excellent right up until the first frost while others, such as the *Cleome* pictured at right, are ready for the compost. A note of caution too on composting some annuals like *Cleome* – the seeds will continue to sprout once the compost is spread for years to



come!

- Keep removing annual weeds such as crabgrass and stilt grass. Annual weed seed will continue to germinate and appear as long as the temperatures are warm. Remember, on average a seed lasts for seven years and one plant going to seed equates to seven years of additional work!

Bulbs

- Send in your bulb orders now for an October delivery! October is a great month for planting bulbs. For autumn blooming bulbs like *Crocus speciosus*, the Autumn Crocus (pictured at right), it is too late to order on line and you will need to look for them in your favorite garden center. They bloom in mid-October into early November and will slowly naturalize, providing well over 30 years of autumn color for sunny or woodland gardens.
- As a reminder, don't order just 6-12 bulbs if you are looking to make an impact. For minor bulbs (bulbs that measure close to ½" in diameter), you typically need 50-100 bulbs to just begin to make an impact and obviously, the more plants the better. These bulbs include Snowdrop (*Galanthus*), Squill (*Scilla*), Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari*) and Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa sardensis*) as pictured at right. These and other minor bulbs are typically found near the end of bulb catalogues. For major bulbs, measuring 1-3" in diameter such as Daffodil (*Narcissus*), Tulip (*Tulipa*) and Flowering Onions (*Allium*) species, 25 to 50 bulbs will begin to make a nice impact on the Garden.
- For both major and minor bulbs, I like to cluster several bulbs in a hole to create a more mature appearance. For 'minor bulbs', clusters of 3-8 work well. Pictured at right are tubers of *Eranthis* that will give rise to a display similar if not larger than the image below at right. For major bulbs, clusters of 2-3 will give a more mature appearance from the start. These are all things to certainly keep in mind as you put together your bulb order!



- When planting bulbs, place them in a hole as deep in the ground as three times their diameter. In other words, a ½-¾” diameter minor bulb will be planted 1½-2” deep with the ‘pointy end’ oriented upward. For larger ‘Major Bulbs’ measuring 2-3” in diameter, they will require 6-9” deep holes, so only layout what you can comfortably plant in one day, as they can be work intensive. There is always tomorrow! If major bulbs are planted too shallow, they will produce too many offsets and will stop blooming in several years.
- Stem tubers like the Winter Aconite (*Eranthis*) pictured at right and above right should be soaked for several hours to rehydrate the tubers and do not have an obvious up versus down side.
- Most soils in NJ are rich enough to not require additional fertilizers when planting.



Trees

- Inspect and evaluate your ornamental small trees, shade trees and shrubs. It has been a drier summer on average for most and those plants that are stressed from age, disease or insects will let you know through early leaf wilt or drop. Oaks that have Bacterial Leaf Scorch will have leaves that suddenly turn brown in mid to late August, as the image of the Red Oak at right indicates. There are treatments for this disease, but once most of the foliage has turned brown the tree will ultimately need to be removed. It typically attacks older, less vigorous trees. Young oaks should still be planted, since the trees feed over 550 native insects!
- If you live with large deer populations, put wire cages around recently planted trees to avoid the bark from being rubbed and damaged by bucks. One of their favorite targets are Magnolias, so make certain that they are properly protected. Damage to bark is far more harmful than the nibbling of a few leaves and I have lost many a tree before protective cages could be installed.
- September is an ideal time to install additional woody and herbaceous plants to the garden. The soil is warm and although it is often a relatively dry month, the cooler days and moister weather ahead will allow the plants to establish an adequate root system before next summer’s heat and potential drought. Woody plants that are not fall transplant hazards can be dug and transplanted, and those that are fall hazards can be planted if they were dug this past spring or grown in containers. If rainfall is scarce, water new plantings every 3-4 days into November or later if rainfall remains low.



Vegetables

- For the vegetable garden, continue to remove plants that are no longer producing. The wet weather of June and dry weather of July and August have raised havoc with tomatoes as the fruit is subject to splitting when watered heavily and cucumbers faded from Powdery Mildew. As mentioned last month, Dr. Bob Mellert mentioned that the days to maturity on seed packets applies for springtime seeding. Come autumn, the number should be multiplied by 1.5 to account for the slower growth time due to the shortening days as compared to the lengthening days of spring. Plant leafy crops that appreciate the cooler nighttime temperatures, such as Arugula, Spinach, Bok Choi, Kale and Lettuce. The full list is below:

Root Crops

Beets (45-64 day)

Carrots (65-80 days)

Fennel, Bulbing (72)

Scallions (60 days)

Kohlrabi (45-60 days)

Radishes (21-48 days)

Leaf Crops

Lettuce (45-55 days)

Mache (like lettuce) (40+)

Mesclun Mixes (30-40 days)

Bok Choy (45 days)

Salad Greens (28-42 days)

Spinach (45 days)

Chard (28-42 days)

Other

Broccoli (55-80)

- If you are planting in containers, consider adding leafy crops like Spinach and Bok Choi. They can also be added to ornamental containers, if some of the existing annuals are in decline and in need of removal. These vegetables will provide a harvest well into the beginning of winter.
- Consider the installation of low tunnels, as seen at right, which are metal hoops covered with a fabric called Agribon. The fabric keeps heavy frosts off the rows of cool season vegetables. It enables the gardener to harvest well into December, and for certain crops like spinach into spring! This is a good month to pick-up the materials needed and to place the hoops, eliminating any last-minute dashes!
- September is the opportune time to plant garlic! 'Music' is an old-fashioned favorite and a good performer, but try some of the many other selections that are on the market too! Plant in a location that will be in full sun through next August, which is the harvest period.



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