

Gardening Notes for August



Pycnanthemum muticum

Hydrangea 'Ruby Slippers'

Lycoris squamigera

To me, August epitomizes summer. The days remain long, with the daytime chant of the Cicadas and the evening chorus of Crickets and Katydid. Rainfall this summer remains ample and coupled with the warm temperatures, most plants have flourished. The flowers of Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*), Ruby Slippers Oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia* 'Ruby Slippers') and Naked Ladies (*Lycoris squamigera*) are certainly at their best this month. August typically has many humid days, but the temperatures are usually in the 80's, which benefits both the plants and the gardener! As always, try to garden in the cool of the morning or evening, use sunscreen, drink plenty of water and continue to take good notes of your endeavors and the weather!

Things to do:

Flowers

- Some annuals grown in containers may begin to look tired. For some annuals, a light pruning accompanied by a weekly fertilizing will breathe new life into the plant. For others, it is simply time for replacement. For autumn, consider *Salvia leucantha* (Mexican Bush Sage), pictured at right at Longwood Gardens or *Leonotis leonurus* (Lion's Ear) as alternatives to the overused 'Mum'.



- Although frost is still over 2 months away, near month's end you may wish to take cuttings of some annuals for rooting, potting up and over-wintering for next year's garden. It is far easier than trying to lift the original plant. If your rooting efforts fail, there is still ample time to get new cuttings.
- Gather and save seeds of various annuals that are not named hybrids or selections. In other words, those plants that were not the result of a controlled cross and will look just like the parent when the seed is germinated. These seeds can be used for seeding out new plants come next spring.
- August is the prime time to divide Iris, including German Bearded (*Iris x germanica*), Siberian (*Iris sibirica*) and Crested Iris (*Iris cristata*). Iris typically

need division every 6-10 years. If you noticed only the edges of a patch of Iris showing growth or blooming in May, it is time to separate the Iris!

A patch of *Iris laevigata* in need of division can be seen at right.

When lifting Bearded Iris, check the rhizomes to make certain they are solid. If they feel hollow or spongy, they may be infected with the Iris Borer, in which case the worm-like borer will need to be removed if still present. Divide



the rhizomes into sections with each containing one fan of foliage and cut the foliage back to 4-6", as seen at right. Let the wounded or cut end of the rhizome callus over by letting it sit without any soil on a table for 2-4 days before replanting. When replanting, make certain the upper ½ of the 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 (10) pieces for replanting.



- It is also the month to divide Peonies that have become root bound or if divisions are desired! Peonies will last 30 years or longer without the need for division, so division is typically not necessary unless they were planted too deep or plants are very old. 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 and will flower! Hence, the reason for late summer division of Peonies and Iris – to prevent loss of flowers which will happen with spring division.
- 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 (ouch) 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 for their autumn and winter diet.

Vegetables

- The heavy rainfall of thunderstorms followed by the soil drying during sunny days has caused some tomatoes to exhibit Blossom End Rot, whereby the base of the fruit turns brown. It is due to a lack of calcium absorption 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 from a different plant family that will mature within 70 days or by October 15, the average date for frost in NJ. Suggestions for a 2nd crop include:

Root Crops

Beets
Carrots
Fennel (bulbous)
Scallions
Kohlrabi
Leeks
Radishes

Leaf Crops

Lettuce
Mache (like lettuce)
Mesclun Mixes
Pak Choi
Arugula
Spinach
Chard
Kale
Cabbage

Other

Broccoli Rabe (Rapini)
Broccoli
Peas

- A friend and fellow gardener mentioned that the days to maturity on seed packets should be multiplied by 1.5 for the fall. This will account for the slower growth rate due to the shortening days of autumn as compared to the lengthening days of 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 above) to mitigate any issues from early frosts. Low tunnels consist of hoops often fashioned out of 1" PVC pipe and placed about 5' apart. Cover with a fabric such as Agribon that allows air to pass yet protects the plants from early frosts. You may wish to look into making or buying the hoops and cover fabric now, so you will be prepared come October. Sturdier hoops can also be made from bending metal piping or buying the metal pipe already fashioned into a hoop.



- Squash plants may be wilting

from squash borer (as seen above right in mid-July). If so, discard the plant (best to find the borer and kill it as well) and plant one of the crops mentioned above.

- August is the time to get your orders in for the fall planting of Garlic!

Trees and Shrubs

- Many tree limbs have gradually drooped lower following the flush of new growth in May into July. If you did not complete this pruning in July, early August is still okay for pruning. Removing the lowest tier of branches on a shade or small tree (as seen at right for a Yellowwood Tree) makes the Garden look more open and able to 'breathe' again. It also allows more light to reach the plants beneath the tree.
- 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 added care.
- Resist the urge to vigorously prune shrubs and trees. Heavy pruning during late 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 a light shaping is still appropriate.
- If planting a containerized tree in August or this coming fall, make certain to break up the root mass before planting. Often, the roots will encircle the soil, most likely leading to girdling roots. Girdling roots (as pictured below right) literally choke the trunk of the tree over time, leading to premature death. As brutal as it sounds, simply chop up the root mass of the containerized plant with an ax or soil knife (as seen above) 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 nor thin the crown – movement in the wind creates a stronger trunk and the sugars produced by the foliage of the crown hastens new root development. The only reason to do any pruning of the crown is to remove rubbing branches or early signs of codominant leaders.



Bulbs

- It is time to start thinking about ordering bulbs if you have not already done so! A true bulb nerd, I had my bulb order in during May! Bulb orders should be placed now for a September or October delivery.
- If you are interested in any of the autumn blooming *Cyclamen* (*Cyclamen* are pictured in the closing image), *Crocus* or *Colchicum*, early August is your last chance to place your order for a September delivery and planting.
- One bulb that has been overlooked by many gardeners for August color is *Prospero autumnale*, previously known as *Scilla autumnalis* as seen at right. Although the light pink flower spikes only reach 8-10" tall, the clumps readily grow in size and slowly produce seedlings nearby that enhance the clumps.
- Another great overlooked plant is *Lycoris squamigera*, commonly called Naked Lady (as seen at right). Best ordered in spring for June shipping and planting. It should be noted that transplants take several years to reestablish before blooming. The plants will produce Daffodil like foliage in spring, but no flowers! Just like Daffodils, the foliage gradually flops and turns brown come June. During late July and August, a stalk suddenly appears without any foliage and yields numerous pink trumpet shaped



flowers. In addition, just like the Colchicum, the plants are deer resistant! The image above was taken at Chanticleer Gardens in August. Once established, plants can be dug and moved about the garden in late spring once the foliage has turned brown.

- Consider adding autumn blooming Crocus that should be ordered by early August for fall shipment. For years I have enjoyed the October blooms of the blue flowered *Crocus speciosus*, but recently I added the selection 'alba' (pictured at right on Oct 19th). The touch of white was very welcome and flowering persisted into early November! Plant where the grassy foliage of spring will not be a distraction.
- Another Autumn blooming Crocus I have had great success with is *Crocus pulchellus* 'Zephyr' (as seen at right). It too bloomed into early November with grassy foliage in spring. Interestingly, the seed pods emerge from the ground as the foliage withers in spring!



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. The months of September through November are ideal.

General

- Late August is an ideal time to add new perennials, shrubs and evergreens to the garden, as the soil remains warm and promote good root growth for weeks to come! As a result, evaluate your garden and see what plants might be growing too tall, or are outcompeting their neighbors or are simply old and in need of updating! Perhaps the summer color palette is a bit too pale and needs a bit of bold color. In that case, consider the Plum Leaf Azalea (*Rhododendron prunifolium*) as seen below on July 21. Offering blooms of pink, red and salmon,

they will continue to bloom into August! Or, perhaps the garden needs a different summer flower shape, such as a globe. Our native *Allium cernuum* (Nodding Onion) as seen below right would be a good solution there! It provides blooms from the middle of July through August. It is also deer resistant and seeds lightly! Or perhaps your garden is in need of a more refined touch such as Hardy Cyclamen (*Cyclamen hederifolium*) pictured below in late September. Planted in light shade in August/September, they provide white or pink flowers into November, with evergreen foliage through May. Regardless of your choice, August is a great time to plant, allowing plants to become established long before winter's chill!



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