

## Gardening Notes for September



*Boltonia* 'Snowbank'



*Gomphocarpus physocarpus*



*Heptacodium miconioides*

September marks the start of getting the garden – and the gardener – ready for a long winters rest. Yes, it seems much too early to think of winter, but it is time to start planning for winter! However, we still have a good month until frost, so there is plenty of time to enjoy September bloomers such as False Aster (*Boltonia asteroides* ‘Snowbank’), the round capsules of Balloon Plant (*Gomphocarpus physocarpus*) or the fragrant blooms of Seven Son Flower (*Heptacodium miconioides*). Continue to take good notes and pictures on how you weaved together your annuals this year, plus thoughts on how you would like to improve the garden for next year. After the first frost these pictures and notes will be all that remains of this year’s favorite combinations!

### Things to do:

#### Flowering Plants

- 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. It is safest to place them in the refrigerator (not the freezer) until next spring. If the seeds have not dried thoroughly, they could burst in the freezer! Don’t forget to label the plants well and add the date of harvest.
- Remove those annuals that look excessively tired or leggy. Some annuals look excellent right up to the first frost while others, such as the *Cleome* pictured above right, are ready for the compost. A note



of caution too on composting annuals like *Cleome*, *Rudbeckia* and *Talinum* – the seeds will survive for years and continue to sprout once the compost is spread in your garden!

- 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. Getting the weeds out today will save you years of additional work and sore backs, since the seeds last on average for 7 years!

### Bulbs

- Send in your bulb orders now for an October delivery! October is a great month for planting spring bulbs. For autumn blooming bulbs like *Crocus speciosus* (Autumn Crocus) pictured above, they may be sold out 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 the sunny or woodland garden. I tried the white flowered form (*Crocus speciosus* 'Alba') last year and was greatly impressed.
- As a reminder, don't purchase 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. Minor bulbs include Snowdrop (*Galanthus*), Squill (*Scilla*), Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari*) and Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa sardensis*, pictured at right). These and other minor bulbs are typically found near the end of bulb catalogues. For major bulbs, measuring 1-3" in dia. such as Daffodil (*Narcissus*), Hybrid Tulip (*Tulipa*) and Flowering Onions (*Allium*), quantities of 25 to 50 bulbs will begin to make a nice impact.
- 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 5-20 work well. Pictured at right are tubers of *Eranthis* (Winter Aconite) that will yield a floral display as seen below 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!
- Stem tubers like Windflower (*Anemone blanda*) and the afore mentioned Winter Aconite (*Eranthis*) pictured above should be soaked for several hours to rehydrate the tubers. In the image of the tubers above, they had been



soaked and were rehydrated. Stem tubers do not have an obvious 'up' side and grow just fine when placed in the hole any side up!

- When planting bulbs, place them to a depth equal to three times their diameter. In other words, a  $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter 'Minor Bulb' should be planted 1½-2" deep with the 'pointed end' oriented upward. For larger 'Major Bulbs' measuring 2-3" in diameter, they will require holes 6-9" deep, so only layout what you can comfortably plant in one day, as they can be work intensive (read that as tiring!) to plant. There is always tomorrow to plant more! If major bulbs are planted too shallow, they will produce small bulbils or offsets that are too small to produce flowers.
- Always experiment! Several years ago, I tried *Muscari paradoxum*, also known as *Bellevia paradoxa* (Grape Hyacinth) for the first time. An image is seen at the end. Photographed on April 15<sup>th</sup>, it stands 8" tall and adds a great deep purple color to the garden. Also at the end is *Narcissus romieuxii*. A small species of Daffodil that is perfect for small spaces! The slender grassy foliage of the Daffodil reappears in the fall and persists until the following spring. The foliage should be considered in the garden design so it does not prove to be distracting!
- Most soils in NJ are rich enough to not require additional fertilizers for bulbs when planting.



### Trees

- Inspect and evaluate your ornamental small trees, shade trees and shrubs. 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 above 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 less vigorous trees. However, still continue to plant Oaks, since they feed over 550 native insects!

- Constantly monitor tree structure. The Cherry tree at above had 3 stems all originating at one point, which created a weak branch attachment. The weight of the branches caused the 3-way split in June that fortunately was noticed before the tree collapsed!
- Beech Leaf Disease is a new problem that is sadly appearing throughout NJ. The leaf will have a water-soaked appearance and the plant will slowly to rapidly decline. Fortunately, there are treatments so consult your arborist to save important trees in your garden.
- 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.
- 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 drier 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 3-5 days until November or later if autumn rains remain scarce.

### Vegetables

- For the vegetable garden, continue to remove plants that are no longer producing. The heavier rains of July and August have created havoc with tomatoes as the fruit is subject to splitting when watered heavily and cucumber vines fade from Powdery Mildew. Mulching the tomatoes with straw and providing good air circulation helps these issues. As mentioned last month, a Master Gardener friend pointed out that the days to maturity on seed packets applies for springtime seeding and the number should be multiplied by 1.5 to account for the slower growth time from the shortening days. Plant leafy crops that appreciate the cooler nighttime temperatures.



Suggestions include:

#### 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 lettuce (as seen

above), Spinach and Bok Choi. They work well in autumn ornamental containers when some of the existing annuals are in decline and in need of removal. These vegetables will provide fresh harvests throughout the fall.

- Consider the installation of low tunnels, as seen below right. They consist of metal or plastic 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, even into spring! This is a good month to pick-up the materials needed and to place the hoops, eliminating any last-minute dashes in October!
- 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 July and August, which is the time for harvest.
- If you are considering fruit trees for your garden, but are opposed to spraying to keep insects and disease at bay, consider growing Paw Paw (*Asimina triloba*). The fruit is seen at right! It is a great small tree, growing to 30' tall and is very tolerant of light shade. In the wild, they are very plentiful in moister locations by streams. Make sure to plant two different varieties (not just several of one cultivar), which will produce a much greater yield. Fruits often drop to the ground when ripe and should be eaten as soon as possible. Interestingly, the deer are not prone to nibbling on the foliage of this native!
- Another easily grown vine that does not require spraying is Hardy Kiwi (*Actinidia arguta*) as pictured at right. The fruits maybe small, measuring about 1" long, but they are delectable and can be eaten skin and all! Just make sure you keep your pruners at hand since they are vigorous growers and benefit from light pruning in summer and more significant winter pruning. The plants are dioicous and it is important to purchase male and female plants in order to have an autumn harvest!



### Turf

- Continue to keep your lawn mower blades set high for cutting your lawn to minimize the stress from summer. Even though the temperatures were growing cooler by the end of August, turf will still appreciate the higher setting.
- Mid to late September is a great time for reseeding bare spots, or for the installation of sod. The upcoming cooler temperatures, heavy dews and typically consistent rainfalls combined with warm soil temperatures promotes good root growth and turf establishment.
- Late September is a good time to fertilize your lawn. It aids in developing a good root system throughout the fall and winter for next summer's heat and stress.
- If you have portions of the lawn receiving excessive foot traffic or have otherwise developed compacted soils, consider coring and aerating your turf this month. The special equipment needed can be rented at local rental facilities and the effort does improve the quality and health of the turf.



*Narcissus romieuxii*



*Bellevia paradoxa*

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