



# July, August, September 2017

Vol. 12, No. 3

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“The Perfect Summer” means so many things to so many people! To the sailor, it’s endless sunny days with steady, dependable winds and no storms. To the golfer, tennis player and bike rider, it’s sunny days with no wind and low humidity. But the gardener has an even more specific list! We require dependable rain (no storms please, just a steady patter), prolonged sun for the flowers and vegetables, a light breeze to help air circulation (and keep the gardener comfortable), a lack of bugs and wild-life (especially deer, rabbits and voles) and a complete absence of all fungal diseases and blights! But this is New England so what we get is anybody’s guess! So bring on the golden days ... we need to enjoy them now and remember them all winter long and we’ll cheerfully take whatever we get because it’s SUMMER!

Many gardens are filled with masses of green foliage after all the rain but Mother Nature is really in charge of this season and she has a way of making it all up to us. Flowering trees and bushes have outdone themselves; roses are everywhere! They like summer too! The rest of this long-anticipated time will bring abundant color and an on-going succession of bloom. Walking through the nursery and seeing what’s currently in bloom on the colorful benches will help you fill any “holes” you spot in your flower beds. Bring a photograph of the place with the “hole” and carry it around the benches with you ... it will help you visualize how a new plant will look and how it will blend in with what you are already growing.

Acer Gardens prides itself on its quality and diversity. Nursery specialties include Alpines, Daylilies (many re-blooming), Hostas, Ferns, Long-Blooming Perennials, Ornamental Grasses, Shrubs and Trees. Every year we extend our over-flowing benches to make room for even more plants. Our Shade Area alone is bursting at the seams! Well-trained and experienced staff are always ready to answer questions and help you make your garden a joyful place.

For some gardeners, this is a time to finally rest after the glories of spring and the beauty of June. Others are already looking ahead to late summer and fall and the subtle color shifts that come to many gardens. As the sun changes position in late summer, some flower beds may not get as much sun as they did earlier in the season. Tucking in some fall-blooming, shade-tolerant plants will help you extend bloom time and may add a new dimension to your flower beds.

Although gardening chores are never really done, now is the time to sit quietly and enjoy the garden you have created. A special sitting area with comfortable chairs or benches will give you the opportunity for rest and relaxation. Replant containers to try out different floral color schemes ... it’s an easy way to see how a larger flower bed might look! You can also surround the sitting area with Ferns, Grasses, Heucheras, Mints, Hostas and Sedums for a study in foliage combinations. A number of herbs and plants (such as Lavender, Lemon Balm, Geranium, Nepeta and Santolina) naturally repel many insects and are good choices to plant near your sitting area. Whatever you choose should reflect what makes your garden special to you.

You've worked very hard on your garden and you deserve the chance to take a break and let the garden refresh your spirit. Why not share the pleasure your garden gives you with your friends? Invite them to come and walk around with you .... exchange information on the different plants you grow, and why, and share what you have learned. Hopefully, your friends will invite you to tour their gardens and see what they are growing. This is a perfect opportunity to widen your perspective and to discover what has worked for other local gardeners.

## **Summer Gardens to Visit**

Every year The Garden Conservancy runs self-guided tours of hundreds of private gardens from coast to coast. Most of the gardens are only open to the public once a year... a wonderful opportunity to see how other gardeners have designed spaces and solved problems. This summer, Open Days in Connecticut will run through September 16 with admission at \$7 for an adult. No reservations are required; all Open Days are rain or shine events. Visit [www.opendaysprogram.org](http://www.opendaysprogram.org) to search by garden, city or state. Open Days are also listed for Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts.

## **The Plant of the Month**

The plant of the Month is available at the nursery checkout table from the first of each month on. These plants are carefully chosen to showcase current bloom and are featured from April through October.

July: **Asclepias tuberosa**

Zone: 3-9                      Height: 12-30'''                      Spread: 12-18'''

Butterfly weed is a native perennial needing full sun and well-drained soil. It is the primary plant used in attracting monarch butterfly larvae although its orange or yellow flower clusters produce a nectar very attractive to all butterflies. Slow to emerge in the spring, the deep tap roots of Ascelipas resent disturbance so it's best to plant them and leave them alone. Drought tolerant, they do well in poor soils and will naturalize easily. Seed pods are valued in dried flower arrangements.

August: **Stokesia** (Stokes Aster)

Zone: 5-9                      Height: 12-24''                      Spread: 12-18''

Stoke's Aster (the name honors an English botanist) will produce showy blue flowers for you in late summer, especially if you deadhead faithfully to encourage repeat blooms. The plant prefers full sun but will tolerate some shade. It fills out very quickly, usually in one season, and does not need dividing. Considered low maintenance, it has good drought and heat tolerance and is not attractive to rabbits.

September: **Aster**

Zone: 3-5'                      Height: 2-4'                      Spread: 18-24''

Asters come into their own as the summer wanes, blooming happily, in many cases, into October. Colors range from deep pink through every shade of blue-purple on the color wheel! The wide range of cultivars available makes it easy to choose plants for your garden. They are easily grown in well-drained soil, in full sun, but will tolerate some shade once they are well-established. Pinching back several times during the

summer months will help prevent “sprawl” and will increase the bushiness of the plant. The tallest of the Asters may appreciate staking. They naturalize easily and are very attractive to butterflies.

### **The Really-Must-Do-Now List**

Prune Weigela bushes now before they set next year’s bloom. Shape-up Forsythia bushes.

Delphiniums, Nepeta, Salvia, Coreopsis, Buddleia, Kalimeris, Daylilies and annuals all benefit from July fertilizing. August fertilizing is generally considered too late in the season for this area.

By mid-July, you should have cut back your Mums, Asters, Sedum and Montauk Daisies to keep them under control and to ensure good branching.

Dead-head perennials regularly to extend blossom time and encourage late-season re-bloom.

Re-apply slug bait.

Feed/ fertilize Roses and containers on a regular schedule.

Turn containers regularly to keep them growing evenly.

Control broad leaf weeds in the lawn and apply fertilizer in late August-early September.

### **Seasonal Reminders**

Attract pollinators by planting nectar and pollen-rich flowers. Many perennials are natural pollinators. Consider using Achillea, Agastache, Coreopsis, Echinacea, Lavender, Liatris, Monarda, Buddleia, Salvia and Rudbeckia.

If you are planting something, plant late in the day, not in the hot sun, and be sure to water it in deeply. Many perennials need a little more water than normal as they establish themselves.

Acer Gardens has introduced its **Alpine Soil Mix**, designed for Succulents and Alpines, and **Soil Moist**, which reduces the need for watering by absorbing and then slowly releasing water into the soil. Available at the nursery, the mixes are particularly useful for use in planters, containers and perennial beds.

Cut flowers for the house in the early morning or evening hours and try to choose flowers that are half open. To help your flowers last longer, add 1 Tb. sugar, ½ tsp. of white vinegar and ½ tsp. of bleach into 1 qt. of water and use to fill vases as needed. Your cut flowers will also stay fresh longer if they are not placed in front of an open or sunny window. Change the water as needed.

Some annuals slow down their blooming as the summer progresses. Cut them back by at least half, fertilize, water and wait a few weeks. They’ll come back quickly!

Houseplants spending time outdoors in the summer will probably need more water than they do during the winter months inside. Trim, fertilize and re-pot if necessary towards the end of August and bring them back inside on or near Labor Day.

Established lawns need only 1" of water a week; don't water on a regular schedule. The lawn can be re-seeded from the last week of August into the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of September. Dry conditions will not affect the re-seeding.

Unfortunately, those of us with gravel driveways know that in the blink of an eye we can be over-run with weeds! An old-fashioned but effective remedy is to spray a mixture of ½ white vinegar and 1/2 water on the weeds. Try to do this when you know you will have 2 sunny days after the application of the mixture. The weeds will be gone in a matter of days! This mixture will also help control weeds around patios and terraces.

September always gives you a chance to get a jump on next spring! The days are beginning to cool a little and working in the garden is a peaceful pleasure. In fact, it is the perfect time to move, divide and plant. The soil is still warm and watering will not be a big chore. Bearded Iris, Daylilies and Siberian Iris all benefit from fall division. Cut down established Hostas as the leaves die.

## **Garden Maintenance**

Most perennials need to be deadheaded often to encourage late August and early fall re-bloom. Deadheading is an effective way of shaping a plant and allows you to keep some plants from reseeding everywhere! It also prolongs bloom and encourages some perennials to send up another batch of flowers later in the season. (Annuals need to be constantly deadheaded to keep them looking neat and under control.)

A number of techniques will help the gardener coax perennials to give maximum blooms and will keep the plant healthy all summer long.

### **Deadheading:**

Deadheading: trimming off faded flowers will help the plant produce more buds and flowers instead of seeds. Some plants (Peonies) look terrible if not deadheaded after bloom; some (Columbine) will self-seed all over your flower bed if not trimmed back. Regular deadheading becomes a routine summer garden chore and keeps your flower beds looking neat as well as encouraging repeat bloom. Be sure not to cut off any developing flower buds.

### **Pinching:**

Pinching back fall-blooming garden mums to control height is a technique that also works for Asters, Montauk Daisies, Joe Pye Weed, Summer Phlox and Monarda. Pinching back half of the growth results in a bushy plant with more flowers and, in many cases, eliminates staking. Pinching should be finished by mid- July.

### **Cutting back:**

Most of the late-spring and early-summer perennials look pretty awful by July. A hard cutting back of plants like Cranesbill Geraniums and Silver Mound Artemisia will encourage new foliage and a more attractive plant. If cut back close to the ground, some plants will send up new flower stalks.

## Caring for Bearded Iris

One of the great pleasures of the late spring-early summer garden is Bearded Iris. Their colors range from subtle to bright and recent advances in hybridization have increased the size of the blooms and the range of colors available. They don't bloom long, but they add a presence to the garden un-matched by anything else; after bloom, their leaves still make an impressive addition to a flower bed! Planted or divided in late summer, their needs are actually quite simple:

Well-drained soil. A well-prepared bed and a low-nitrogen fertilizer.

6-8 hours of sun and good air circulation.

No mulch and watering only when it is extremely dry.

Division every 3-4 years, in the early fall.

To keep them flowering freely, every three years separate Bearded Iris clumps in late summer. Dig the clumps and divide the rhizomes by pulling them apart with your hands. Clip the leaves to 4-6" and replant the divisions, fanning out the roots in the holes. Space the plants 12-18" apart. Water well at planting but do not water again unless the weather turns very dry.

## Biennials and Self-seeders in the Garden

Some of the old garden favorites are **biennials**, growing leaves the first year and flowering the second. It takes a little patience to start them off, especially if you choose to grow them from seed, but most will self-sow very reliably and require almost no maintenance. Because biennials only flower in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year, you will need to sow more seeds at the start of the second year so that the 2-year cycle continues uninterrupted. If you intend to let your biennials self-sow, be careful not to uproot new plants as you weed. The biennial family stars are Hollyhock and Foxglove but also include Campanula (Canterbury Bells), Dianthus (Sweet William), Evening Primrose, Lunaria (Money Plant) and Queen Ann's Lace.

The tall spires of Foxglove will stand out in a shade border year after year as long as you give their soil abundant doses of compost or organic matter. They are easy naturalizers but do not let the plants dry out during a dry spell. Clipping spent flower shoots will encourage side shoots to develop and flower; leaving the last flowers on the plant to drop their seeds will encourage new seedlings for next year. Hummingbirds and bees are strongly attracted to these flowers.

Hollyhocks, constant favorites in all cottage gardens, can reach 6-8' (some newer cultivars are shorter.) Available in a wide range of colors, Hollyhocks require fertile, well-drained soil, full sun, good air circulation and room. The flower blooms will die down in the fall and drop seeds. If the bed becomes too thick over time, thin out the seedlings.

Plants that multiply by **self-seeding** will help you fill up a perennial garden and will give an informal look to the flower bed. Many native perennials will self seed if they are happy with their current growing conditions. Towards the end of bloom time, be sure to let a few seedheads develop and transplant "volunteers" (with 4 real leaves) the following spring as needed. Not all seedlings will come true to the cultivar you planted; some may revert to the color of the original parents.

## Grow Great Summer Phlox

Phlox paniculata is one of the most dependable summer-into-fall perennials available and can easily serve as the back-bone of your late garden. Blooming July through September, Summer Phlox bears flowers in shades of white, pink, coral, red, lavender and deep violet and reaches 4' with a spread of 1-3'. The flowers are showy and often fragrant and are highly attractive to hummingbirds and butterflies. Best grown in full sun, Phlox paniculata will tolerate some partial shade. It prefers well-drained, rich soil and will benefit from a light mulch to keep its roots cool. Intolerant of drought, the plants do need to be watered in a dry spell. Avoid overhead watering so as to keep powdery mildew at bay although recent new cultivars are increasingly mildew-resistant. Summer Phlox should be divided every 4-5 years in the spring or fall ; it may self-seed but those colors will not come true.

## Enjoying Succulents

At this time of the year, with the main garden flourishing and under control, a gardener may think about "something new." Planting succulents in rock gardens or containers is a perfect way to experiment with different leaves, colors and shapes. The combinations are endless! These plants have evolved in tough growing conditions and are happy with hot sun and well-drained soil. They are not cacti and do require gentle watering, storing it in their fleshy leaves. Their unique shapes, colors and textures add interest throughout the winter and are very low maintenance. Think about some of these plants and how you might use them together Acer Gardens staff will be happy to help you design your own "mix and match" grouping from the large nursery selection.

Stone containers, large or small, troughs and hypertufa pots provide ideal growing conditions for succulents and your succulent garden can easily spend the winter indoors. Their trendy look can add a certain drama to indoor rooms.

Succulents have only a few requirements. Good drainage is a must as they need water to thrive ... water when the top inch of the soil feels dry. They will need 4-6 hours of sun a day, especially wintering indoors. Fertilize them on a regular schedule and remove dead or decaying leaves.

**Sedums**, also known as Stonecrop, cover a wide range but almost all have dependable foliage, sprays of star-like blooms in late summer, unusual shapes and leaves that change color in the fall. Many Sedums cascade; all are easy to divide. With its wide range of heights, Sedums do well in both rock gardens and pots. Although they spread rapidly, they are not considered invasive and are hardy to zone 5.

**Sempervivums**, known to many as Hens-and-Chicks, are hardy to zone 5 and are the perfect companion to Sedums. Sempervivum tectorum is large in size and very open-looking. Sempervivum arachnoideum is smaller, rounded and ball-like with a silver webbing over the leaves. These plants are widely grown in rock gardens, stone walls and containers.

**Echeverias** offer amazing color, interesting leaf textures and growth habits. Some resemble heads of lettuce with frilly leaves, others produce amazing rosettes. Some are very small and subtle in color. They are shallow-rooted plants and benefit from the addition of organic matter to the soil. The more sun they get the more they will display their colors and shapes. Hardy only to Zone 9, these plants cannot be left outside for the winter.

**Aloes** come in a wide range of sizes. They are primarily summer growers and “rest” in the winter although some of the new smaller species bloom from January to March or even longer. They do need a bright location during the winter and should not be located near a cold window. Many people keep an Aloe plant in the kitchen to use in case of burns.

## **Rooting Hydrangeas**

If you have a favorite Hydrangea that has been affected by the difficulties of the last few winters, now might be a good time to try rooting a new bush from the strong growth emerging from the base of the shrub.

Take a 5-6” slanted cutting from the new growth. Remove the lower leaves of the bottom 2 leaf nodes (bumps) and place in a filled water glass.

Prepare small pots (with saucers) by filling with a good potting mixture. Water them well and let them drain in the sink. Dip the bottom of the cuttings into rooting mixture, insert into the pot and firm the soil around the cutting. Cover the pot with a Ziploc bag and place in an east window where it will get strong light but not sun. Add small amounts of water only when the top of the soil feels dry. Add small amounts of water only when the top of the soil feels dry. After 5-6 weeks, a gently tug on the cuttings should produce resistance. You have roots!

Remove the Ziploc bag and move the pots outside to a place where they will get good light but be protected from drying winds. Let them acclimate for 3-4 weeks but continue to monitor the watering. When they are established, plant in the garden, ideally in a protected spot. It’s a good idea to use a marker stake and to make a circle of stones to mark the location.

Some gardeners have actually successfully rooted hydrangeas by leaving the cuttings in a glass of water for several weeks until they grew roots, planting them into pots and then transferring them to the garden after they have grown-on. Why not try both ways and see which way works best for you!

## **Changing Your Mind**

Mid-summer is a traditional time to take a serious look at your garden and decide if it really pleases you. Sometimes there are just a few holes to be filled and you may want to add a little punch. Don’t be afraid to move a plant to achieve the look you want!

Come to the nursery and walk around the benches to see how things look in full bloom and make your selections. Adding a container may give you a different look, especially if you pick new colors and place the container in a different spot. (Many of the new containers are lighter and more portable so you can easily move them around the garden to check their impact.)

Gardening is generally a forgiving occupation and mistakes are easily erased. Re-designing a bed is a more serious undertaking but we often outgrow a certain “look” and want more radical change. Gardening is all about change and adaptation. A gardener has to be able to give a plant what it needs to thrive... not just soil and location but the time to care for it. Be realistic about your expectations!

All gardens should be edited periodically to keep them looking fresh but time and physical strength lead many gardeners to consider downsizing their gardens and making them easier to care for and move around in. Lowering upkeep and maintenance is often as simple as creating cleaner lines and using shrubs to produce a full background look. Slopes can be covered with ground covers or spreading small evergreens, reducing the need for mowing.

The nursery can help you with the re-positioning. Bring photographs if you can and some idea of the dimensions of the proposed area. Who knows? You might like the new bed better than the old!

### **Zapping up the Shade Garden**

As the summer moves forward, color combinations in the garden take center stage, and then recede ... often into a sea of green. A sea of green foliage is very restful but every shade garden needs a little “bling” to bring everything together. Mix the textures of your shade plant foliage; ferns alone will give you a huge choice. Adding variegated foliage with markings of white, red and gold will create the illusion of light, especially if planted in groups of threes. The pure white blooms found on many different Hosta cultivars always stand out, especially as twilight comes on and the light deepens, but many other shade perennials bear white flowers including Astilbe, Aстранtia, Cimicifuga, Dicentra, Epimedium, Lirope, and Tiarella.

Adding chartreuse as an accent can introduce a strong yellow-green, eye-catching punch that provides a focal point as well as a conversation piece. Used in a shaded area, chartreuse plants mimic sunlight and lighten a dark corner. Chartreuse goes with almost every other color and is a wonderful companion plant. Some favorites include:

Lysimachia	Creeping Jenny	Ground cover for sun or shade. A great “trailer” for pots. Very hardy.
Heuchera	Coralbells	Strongly veined leaves provide interest all season long. Cuttings root easily.
Hakemachloa	Japanese Forest Grass	Cascading leaves give movement. Develops best color in part shade. Very effective planted in drifts.
Hosta	Hosta	Available in a wide range of chartreuse combinations. Dappled shade will produce the best leaf color. Some new cultivars are deer-resistant.
Coleus	Coleus	Shade intensifies the brilliant colors of these ornamental annuals. Clip stem tops to encourage branching. Easily rooted in water for house plants.

### **Re-Charging Containers**

You may find that at this midway point in the summer you are ready for a different “look”. Bring your container, or a picture of it, to the nursery and let us help you re-design it. Adding cascading plants is always a simple way to create a look of abundance but you might want a complete color change as we slide into early fall. There are many ways to achieve the garden designer’s goal of “Thrill-Fill-Spill”... the choice is yours.

A number of perennials will grow very well in containers and, as the season winds down, can then be transplanted into the garden. And, you don't have to stay with the yellow-orange-maroon color palette so traditional to autumn. For a no-fail design, focus on one or two colors and then add an accent color. Use bold foliage with fine-textured foliage. Make your life easier by choosing plants for each container with the same sun, shade and water needs. As the season advances, the light in your garden changes too. Think about putting containers in different, unexpected places ... you can even pop them into flower beds!

By mid-summer, Petunias grown in containers may be looking sad and droopy. Petunias growing in too much shade will get leggy and produce fewer flowers. Be sure they are getting good drainage but having overly dry soil is the more common problem. Although you will lose a few weeks of bloom, the easiest fix is to cut every stem back by 1/3 to 1/2. Fertilize with a general liquid plant food. Your Petunias will branch and flower again in a few weeks and keep going until a killing frost.

If you are planning on a short trip or a long weekend, deep water your containers and move them away from direct sunlight, placing them in an area of low light. This will cut back on their light supply, minimize their growth and reduce their need for water.

### **Late- Season Color in the Garden**

Many dependable perennials wait until late in the season to bloom and a little advance planning can give you color right up to the first killing frost. (Dahlia tubers are not hardy in this climate and will have to be dug and stored after a killing frost but their colors are so outstanding that the trouble is well worth the effort.)

Fall-blooming anemones bring a graceful look to the early fall garden. The plants' willowy stems produce white or pink blossoms and, depending on the cultivar, can be in bloom from August to October. Preferring morning sun and partial shade, they can spread quickly in moist, humus-rich soil. They don't require dead-heading as they have attractive seed heads but cutting out spent flowers will keep the plant looking tidier.

Asters give a fall garden exuberance and are popular for their daisy-like flower heads which appear in late summer and early fall. Available in a wide range of sizes, colors (purple, pink, blue and white) and shapes, they thrive in moderately fertile garden soil, can handle full sun to partial shade, mingle well with other perennials and year after year get more vigorous. They benefit by being cut back early in the growing season but some cultivars have been bred to remain compact and belong in the front of the border.

Most Dahlias wait until mid-summer to burst into bloom and they keep going until the first frosts. Ranging in size from little pom poms and single flowered to the giant dinner plates, Dahlias are one of the most decorative flowers in the garden ... nothing else is available in so many colors. Give them space to grow; the taller ones need staking. Dahlias are heavy feeders. Start them with soil enriched with compost and apply a potassium-rich fertilizer at intervals throughout the growing season. After frost, harvest the tubers, dry in the sun, store them in sawdust, label the boxes (all those tubers look alike!) and over-winter in the cellar. Next spring, wait until the ground is really warm before planting and enjoy them all over again!

Dendranthema (hardy garden mum) bloom in late summer through the fall. They prefer average, well-drained soil, take full sun to partial shade and ask only to be well-watered. Pinching back the earliest buds will give you the largest fall flowers. Deadheading extends the bloom time. Dendranthema combines well with Asters, Sedum, Perovskia and ornamental grasses and is drought tolerant.

Other late bloomers include Agastache, Chelone, Eupatorium, Gaura, Persicaria, Rudbeckia, Sedums, Helianthus, Heleniums and Trycyrtilis.

## **Dividing/Transplanting in the Fall**

September is the perfect time to start dividing perennials. Hopefully the heat is coming down, the dew stays late in the morning, the rains are a little more dependable and (because the ground will stay warm for a long time to come) there is plenty of time for newly dug and planted plants to adjust to their new homes. Plan on giving newly divided plants about 6 weeks to acclimate before the first hard freeze. In general, spring-blooming plants are best divided or transplanted in the fall.

Why divide a plant? Divide because flowering is diminishing and dividing will rejuvenate it, check its spread into new areas and keep it under control. Many gardeners simply like to propagate a plant they grow successfully and which suits their garden landscape.

Try to pick a cloudy day on which to divide. As you dig your perennials, place them on plastic and cover them lightly with newspaper. Renew the soil with generous amounts of compost.

If you are dividing, discard dead centers and replant only healthy pieces (usually the outside pieces.) Give your new plants a large hole so that you can spread out the roots of the new plant. Firm the soil around the new division and water well. Keep your eyes on the new plants for several weeks to make sure that they are settling in.

Perennials to divide in the fall include Astilbe, Asiatic Lilies, Oriental Lilies, Bleeding Heart, all Irises, Daylilies and Hosta.

Some plants should never be divided. They include Alyssums, Candytuft, Foxgloves, Lavenders, and Perovskia.

## **Often-Asked Questions**

### **What does the “spread” dimension really mean? Why is it important?**

Spread is the width of a mature plant ... east to west as well as north to south. Spacing a newly planted starter plant properly allows for proper top growth and also root development. It keeps them out of competition with nearby plants and allows for adequate air circulation. Some plants are natural clump formers (Hosta and Iris e.g.). Ignoring the “spread” dimension can lead to poor flowering and a plant that outgrows its allotted space too quickly, forcing you to move it to a new location. It may take a plant 3 years to reach full size but the wait is worth it.

### **I’m adding to my vegetable garden. Is there an advantage to raised beds?**

Raised beds allow you to garden anywhere and can be an attractive feature in your landscape. The soil in a raised bed warms up faster in the spring and water drains better. Close plant spacing allows efficient weed and pest control. Raised beds are often utilized for growing herbs and cut flowers and can give a very bountiful harvest. Many vegetable gardeners use a combination of in-ground and raised beds to assure multiple crops.

## **When it gets really hot, I don't want to fuss too much in the garden? What annuals can I count on to keep giving me blooms?**

A number of annuals flower happily in really hot weather and stand up to heat and humidity. Try Petunias, Marigolds, Lantana and Angelonia. New color introductions make it easy to plan beds and containers using these plants. They still need to be watered, but their small leaves help them retain moisture.

## **Dragging hoses around in last summer's drought wore me out! How can I be more efficient in my watering?**

Water in the morning when the air is still, or in the evening, but don't waste your time watering in the heat of the day as most of the moisture will be lost to evaporation. A single weekly deep soaking is much better for your plants than a daily sprinkling. Water deeply and get the water to the roots, not onto the leaves. Some gardeners divide their gardens into grids and water 1 grid a day. Plants which have become used to reaching down for water grow stronger roots and are better able to withstand periods of drought. Water stressed plants will look droopy in the morning or late evening and may have brown edges to their leaves. New plantings will need more attention; a layer of mulch will help retain the water.

A complete list of **Drought Tolerant Plants**, ranging from perennials, annuals, grasses, vines and shrubs, is available on the web site. And remember, when the heat wave hits, do only what is absolutely necessary in the garden ... don't push yourself. Many gardeners keep an eye on weather reports and water deeply just before the temperatures soar.

## **How do I divide my Hostas? Some of the clumps are out-of-control!**

Late summer is the best time to divide Hostas. Medium-sized Hostas can be split every 4-5 years ... anything too large will take at least 3-4 years to regain its size so choose carefully. Dig up the entire clump and gently break away the soil and wash the roots until you see the "eyes". Gently pull apart the roots to form new plants. You may actually have to cut them apart with a very sharp knife. Quickly plant them in their new location, spaced about 12-18" apart, and water well until thoroughly established and rooted in. Most Hostas prefer 3-4 hours of morning sunlight. Harsh afternoon sun will fade their leaves. All love at least 1" of water a week.

## **Growing Great Tomatoes and Cucumbers**

We wait a long time for home-grown tomatoes and cucumbers but it's worth every minute!  
A few simple steps will ensure an abundant and flavorful harvest.

### Tomatoes

Tomatoes need full sun, warm nights and warm soil to produce full-flavored fruit. They should be staked or caged to prevent broken stems ... and to make harvesting easier. Water slowly and deeply as needed and use a mulch. Pinching off suckers will help increase production. Always cut tomatoes off the stem when harvesting. Harvest tomatoes when they are completely colored and feel slightly soft to the touch. Cherry tomatoes are the ideal candidate to grow in containers as they have smaller root systems than their bigger cousins but they require very frequent watering.

## Cucumbers

Giving cucumbers full sun and evenly moist, fertile soil will help produce large crops. The bees will help pollinate the plants. Like many summer vine crops, cucumbers are heavy feeders and need a steady supply of water. Cucumbers will grow happily on vertical supports where they will benefit from better air circulation and more sunlight than those sprawling on the ground. Cut cucumbers off the vines with scissors and pick early in the day or late afternoon. The more you pick, the more you will get!

## Harvesting and Storing Vegetables

Most vegetables are at their peak of tenderness and flavor when they are on the small size. It may be fun to grow the world's biggest zucchini but eating it is another matter! Try to harvest almost every day as picking season comes ... picking every day encourages the plant to produce more. Being out in the vegetable garden daily lets you spot signs of trouble with the plant and deal with problems in a timely manner. It helps to keep cultivar information handy so that you have a rough idea of when your vegetables will be ready for harvesting. As a general guide, here are some easy harvest tips:

**Corn:** Sweet corn is ready to eat when you can feel round kernels beneath the husk and the silk at the top of the ear is drying out. Rush the corn to the pot!

**Cucumbers:** Cut off the vines when they reach size. Keep picking to increase production.

**Eggplant:** Pick when purple and shiny. Wait too long and the eggplant will taste bitter.

**Green Beans:** Pick when the leaves are young and tender for the best flavor and texture.

**Lettuce:** Pick when the leaves are young and tender for the best flavor and texture. Sow seeds at 2-week intervals for a fall crop.

**Melons and watermelons:** Pick when the blossom end is slightly soft. Watermelons will "thunk" when wrapped.

**Peppers:** Pick when they reach usable size and are firm to the touch. The longer on the plant, the more complex the flavor. The first few you pick will teach you how to gauge ripeness.

**Pumpkins:** Pick before heavy frost when they are full size and firm, leaving a 4" stem Never pick-up or hold by the stem. Stop watering one week before harvest and store in an airy place for 2 weeks.

**Squashes:** Ready in 2 months, pick squash daily to keep the plants producing. Re-sow in late July for a fall crop.

**Tomatoes:** There are so many varieties! A tomato is usually ripe when it releases easily from the stem. They will have the most flavor if ripened on the stem but, picked a day or two early, will still ripen indoors.

Root vegetables are more tender when eaten young The seed packet will tell you when the vegetable should be ready to eat ... when it's time, loosen the soil gently and pull one to check readiness. These cool season crops will taste best if harvested in the cool early morning hours ... they will stay crisp and store longer. This is really important for lettuces, parsley, and radishes. If you can't harvest in the morning, wait

until early evening when the sun has moved off your vegetable garden. Harvest guidelines for cool season crops:

**Beets:** Harvest when the “shoulders” are showing 1-3” above ground. Dig the roots carefully.

**Broccoli:** Ready 3 months after seeding, harvest before the plant flowers.

**Cabbage:** Ready 2-3 months after sowing. Harvest before the heads split.

**Carrots:** Check the expected size of your variety. Pull when shoulders are 1” above ground.

**Chard/Kale:** Cut the outer leaves to let the plant keep growing.

**Onions:** Harvest in late summer when the tops have yellowed and fallen over. Dig the onions and let them dry on a rack. Do not store with apples or potatoes. Shallots and garlic can be harvested, tied together and hung to dry.

**Potatoes:** Pull new potatoes 2 months after setting out or when the vines start to flower. Large potatoes mature in 3-4 months. Cut away the vines, wait 5-7 days and then dig up.

**Radishes:** Ready in 3 weeks, the younger the radish, the sweeter to eat. Easy to grow in containers.

## **Second Crop Vegetables**

Now is a good time to put down straw in the vegetable garden (never hay) . (Be sure to weed thoroughly first!) Continue to check your garden for insects and disease. Clean off harvested rows immediately to prevent any insect/disease build-up. The nursery has several organic insecticides and fungicides available to help you protect your vegetables.

Second plantings will mature before frost. Plant beans, cucumbers and squash. Cabbage, beets and broccoli are also good candidates for the “second season”. Many gardeners wait until early August to sow spinach as it will continue to produce leaves until a freeze. Swiss chard, kale, and leaf lettuces can be planted in two-week intervals from mid-July into September. Try putting a series of lettuces in small, individual containers and use them on the patio as accent plants.

Acer Gardens will have a good supply of herbs ... especially cilantro, basil, arugula, mint and thyme ... as well as lettuces ... right into the fall. Everyone uses basil with tomatoes but they also pair well with tarragon, dill, chives, oregano, fennel and thyme. Zucchini is enhanced by garlic, basil, parsley and oregano. If you're lucky enough to be growing leeks, try pairing them with mustard, bay leaves, thyme, paprika or dill.

If you don't use all your herbs, you can dry them easily in the microwave. Arrange sprigs of thyme, oregano or rosemary in a single layer on a paper towel. Microwave on High for 2 minutes or until dry and brittle. Remove the leaves from the stems and crumble into small, labeled Ziploc bags. They can be stored for 1 year. Do not freeze.

## **Preparing for a Storm**

As unpleasant as it is to contemplate, we do get storms from time to time: thunderstorms sweep in with heat waves and hurricanes come up the coast. The prudent gardener pays attention to weather reports and takes notice of the state of the garden before a storm arrives.

Prune out dead branches on trees or shrubs.

Make sure that pergolas, arches and trellises are firm on their foundations.

If a storm is due to hit and you have a staked sapling, untie the tree from the stake so that it can move with the wind. Re-tie it when the storm has passed.

Gather gardening tools and equipment, hanging plants and small containers and park them in the garage.

Remove small, decorative garden objects, including wind chimes, which could become air-borne.

Finally, move light furniture and tables into the garage until the storm has passed.

## **Bulbs**

Sliding into late summer means it's time to plan for bulbs! Adding small, unusual bulbs to your established gardens is a quick way to enhance your spring plantings and a fun way to experiment with "new looks". You can plant bulbs almost anywhere in the garden as long as the soil drains well. Planting bulbs in clumps will give you an abundant look ... inter-planting them among established perennials allows your perennials to disguise the dying foliage of the bulbs after bloom.

Location counts ... bulbs need sun even after they have bloomed in order to develop next year's flowers. After you plant, fertilize and then water the bulbs. It's a good idea to mark the location with a plant stake.

Some of the easy naturalizers are considered to be both deer and rodent proof. They include:

Allium sphaerocephalon	(Drumstick Allium)	Blooms in June-July
Anemone blanda	(Grecian Windflower)	Blooms in April-May
Camassia	(Wild Hyacinth)	Blooms in May-June
Chionodoxa gigantea	(Glory of the Snow)	Blooms in April
Galanthus elwesii	(Giant Snowdrop)	Blooms in March-April
Leucojum aestivum	(Summer Snowflake)	Blooms in May-June
Muscari armeniacum	(Grape Hyacinth)	Blooms in April-May
Scilla hispanica	(Spanish Bluebells)	Blooms in May
Scilla siberica	(Siberian Squill)	Blooms in April
Daffodils	(Daffodils)	Blooms in April-May

Acer Gardens will also be carrying tulips again as well as several varieties of garlic.

Many bulbs will be available at the nursery from Labor Day on including Alliums, Anemones, Chionodoxa, Leucojum, Scilla hispanica and Snowdrops. Daffodils, Paper Whites for forcing and large-sized Amaryllis bulbs, some pre-potted, will also be available. In this climate, bulb planting should be an on-going process as the nights begin to cool down in late September. Start with the smallest bulbs (and remember...some of those don't really have a sharp-end-up so just lay them on their sides in the ground. They'll actually right themselves and grow properly towards the light when the time comes!) As fall continues, start planting the larger bulbs and finish with the tulips in early to mid November. Some gardeners put a thin layer of fine gravel in with the bulbs to deter the voles.

**Tuesdays** at Acer Gardens are 60+ Discount Days ... 10% off all purchases.

**Wednesday** offers a 10% Nursery **Discount** to all customers.

Acer Gardens  
Linda Z. Lynch  
Editor

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