

September Gardening

By Teresa Gaffner and Patty Neas, Master Gardeners

It's been a great summer for gardening in the Tri-Cities area. There was plenty of rain and the weather was hot but not as bad as some other parts of the country. Days are still warm here in September but they are getting shorter and that means cooler night and morning temperatures. Things are starting to slow down, annuals and perennials put out their last flowers and summer vegetable harvests are coming to a close. You will need to stay on top of watering now as this month typically has less rainfall.

There is still plenty of life left in the garden and you can have a beautiful autumn display with a little planning, housekeeping and fall color.

As summer's flowers fade, fall brings in bold and rich colors with displays of chrysanthemums, heuchera, marigolds, asters, nasturtiums, and celosia. Many of these flowering plants thrive in containers and will bring bright color to your front porch or doorway. It's also time to shop for spring flowering bulbs, corms and tubers, check your favorite catalogue or local nursery for bulbs and follow directions for proper storage until they are ready to plant.

Consider planting a fall herb garden. You can grow cilantro, chives, Greek oregano, lavender, marjoram, thyme, sage, parsley and mint. Many herbs are perennials and will come back in the spring.

If you have flowering shrubs that are still blooming, keep watering them while the weather is hot to ensure that their roots won't dry out and affect next seasons blooms. You could also add a top layer of compost or mulch to keep the roots cool. Be sure to check any root vegetable you may have started are not drying out.

Remove spent annuals from your flower beds but remember to let some dry out and collect the flower heads for next year's seeds. When your flower bed is cleared, you can add compost and gently aerate the soil to prepare for fall planting. Be sure to add mulch or compost to the cleaned out garden bed to discourage weeds from taking hold. This is also a good time to assess your perennials and see if they need thinning out. You can replant thinned out perennials in other areas of your garden that need filling in. Some perennials you can consider for fall beauty and for supporting pollinators are; goldenrod, Joe Pye weed, bee balm, perennial sunflowers and black-eyed susan.

The vegetable garden is a very busy place in September. You will want to clean out all of the summer vegetables that have stopped producing and prepare for fall and winter plantings. Pull up the healthy, spent plants and put them on the compost pile. Remove any vegetation that is diseased or insect ridden and dispose of away from the compost pile. Rake your vegetable beds clean and get ready to plant those fall and winter crops. Greens such as mustard, kale, swiss chard and spinach are good cooler weather crops. You can get some more ideas about what vegetables to grow in the cooler weather from the UT Extension guide to Fall Vegetable Gardens,

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP291-G.pdf>

You can also check the UT Extension monthly fruit and vegetable garden calendar for more information on growing greens and other crops in September.

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W436.pdf>

Be careful what you prune in September, you don't want to remove next years blooms. We have included a pruning guide for you that covers when and how to prune correctly.

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/PB1619.pdf>

As always, we recommend that you do prune all dead, diseased, damaged ,and dysfunctional shrub and tree limbs.

Enjoy the last of the warm weather and have fun planning your fall and winter gardens.

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.