



July - August - September 2019

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A Connecticut summer asks a lot of a gardener! In fact, a Connecticut gardener spends a lot of time asking questions! Has my garden had enough water this week or do I need to drag the hose around? What did I do with that chart I set up to monitor what to fertilize when? Where did this new beetle come from and how much damage could it do? Do I have enough pollinators doing their thing? Why have my hanging baskets slowed down flower production? Why aren't the tomatoes ripening faster? How many zucchini can you realistically eat in one week anyway? Why, why, why!

Mother Nature would probably answer "Why not?" But Acer Gardens takes a different approach. If you have questions, come over and see us! Together, we'll deal with the questions and help you find the answers. Summer days don't last very long and you want to be free to enjoy as many hours as you can of this golden time without worrying.

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.

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.

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

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. Open Days in Connecticut run through September 18 with admission at \$10 for an adult. No reservations are required; Open Days are rain or shine events and are fully staffed by knowledgeable volunteers. Visit www.gardenconservancy.org to search by garden, city or state. Open Days are also listed for Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts and other nearby states.

Acer Gardens Late Summer/Fall Workshops

The nursery is planning a series of coordinated workshops and garden walk- throughs for the late summer-early fall time period. Topics will range from planning for late summer blooms and color to dealing with the vegetable garden, containers and bulb placements. Please feel free to let us know what topics are top-of-mind for you as we approach this exciting time in the garden ... we'd love to hear from you!

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 : **Astilbe**

Zone: 4-8 Height: 12-36" Spread: 18-30"

Feathery plumes in white, pink, lavender or red will give colorful bloom for much of the summer, depending on the variety. Easy to grow, and very hardy, Astilbes prefer a site which receives light to moderate shade with moist, well-draining soil. As the season advances, supplemental watering and a dense mulch will help them in drought conditions. Shallow-rooted, Astilbes can be grown in containers. Deer resistant, this plant attracts butterflies and will form well-rounded clumps. Divide overgrown clumps every 3-4 years.

August: **Ligularia dentata** (Leopard Plant)

Zone: 3-8 Height: 2-3' Spread: 1.5 – 2.5'

Wet shady spots can be a challenge in a garden but Ligularia comes to the rescue every time! Yellow or orange flowers last into fall, providing late season color against its glossy, deep green foliage. A slow spreader, Ligularia combines well with ferns and lives a long time. Leaf wilting may occur during a heat wave but plants will recover in the evening.

September: **Lavendula** (Lavender)

Zone: 5-8 Height: 1 – 1.5' Spread: 1 – 1.5'

Not just an herb, Lavender brings a stunning presence to borders and perennial gardens with its drifts of color in shades of purple and silver-green foliage. A woody perennial, Lavender loves hot sun and dry soil so don't overwater. Good air circulation is a must for this plant to thrive. Prune lightly each Spring and provide some winter protection. Clip flower sprigs to dry and add to sachets and potpourris.

The Really-Must-Do-Now List

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

Trim holly bushes but allow the bush to follow its natural, graceful shape.

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.

Feed Roses and containers on a regular schedule.

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 and abundant flowering.

Dead-head as needed to extend blossom time and encourage re-bloom later in the season.

Feed/fertilize Roses and containers on a regular schedule.

Turn containers often to keep them growing evenly.

Re-apply slug bait.

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

Weed, weed, weed! They won't go away on their own!

Seasonal Reminders

If you are planting something, plant late in the day, not in the hot sun, and be sure to water it in deeply.

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.

Acer Gardens has introduced its Alpine Soil Mix, designed for Succulents and Alpines. Available at the nursery, the bags can also be mixed into soil to promote drainage and are particularly useful for planters and containers.

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. Control broad leaf weeds in the lawn and apply fertilizer in late August-early September. The lawn can be re-seeded from the last week of August into the 3rd 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, Siberian Iris, Bleeding Heart, Astilbe, Rudbeckia and Hosta all benefit from fall division. Cut down established Hostas as the leaves die to remove winter shelter for slugs.

Pinching, Cutting Back and Deadheading

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

Pinching:

Pinching back fall-blooming garden mums to control height is a technique that also works for many late-season perennials such as Asters, Montauk Daisies, Joe Pye Weed, Summer Phlox, Lupine, Salvia, Veronica, Yarrow, Echinacea, Monarda, Perovskia, Helenium and Sedum. Pinching back half of the growth results in a bushy plant with more flowers and, in many cases, eliminates staking. Pinching of these perennials should be finished by mid-July.

Many annuals should be pinched back early in the season and again when they start to get leggy or bloom becomes sparse. Pinching encourages new growth and more bloom. Coleus, Petunias, Zinnias, Impatiens, Begonias, Lobelias and Salvias will all benefit from pinching.

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.

Deadheading:

Trimming off (deadheading) faded flowers keeps a plant producing more buds and flowers instead of seeds. Some perennials (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, encourages repeat bloom and helps shape the plant. Be sure not to cut off any developing flower buds. Deadheading annuals keeps them looking neat and under control and discourages bolting.

Helpful “Knee-Highs”

All too often, gardeners find that some of their favorite tall plants (roses are a chronic offender) produce beautiful blooms ... and show bare stems! Fortunately, there are a number of mid-height bloomers available to cover those “knobby knees” ... companion plants which form nice, spreading clumps to disguise those bare stems. Here are 3 perennials which bloom almost the entire summer and combine well with other plants:

Gypsophila (Baby’s Breath)

This hardy plant looks dainty and fragile but those lovely little white flowers are amazingly sturdy. Deer resistant and drought tolerant, Baby’s Breath prefers full sun, produces hundreds of flowers per plant, attracts bees and other beneficial insects, blooms until the frosts come and is also easy to dry.

Geranium ‘Rozanne’ (Cranesbill)

Easily grown in well-drained and evenly moist soil, this Geranium tolerates full sun to part shade and features violet-blue blooms all summer long. Rabbits and deer tend to ignore ‘Rozanne’ but butterflies and bees are strongly attracted to this plant. Once established, the Cranesbill has exceptional heat tolerance.

Coreopsis (Tickseed)

Cheerfully blooming from mid-summer to fall, Coreopsis will appreciate being deadheaded but is generally undemanding. Best bloom comes when planted in full sun but, once established, it is heat and humidity tolerant and can even handle a little shade. Bright yellow flowers combine well with many other plants.

Editing the Mature Garden

Mid-summer is a traditional time to take a serious look at your garden and decide if it really pleases you. 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.

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!

Aim for season-long interest, relying on foliage. Shades of green are restful to the eye and, repeated throughout the garden, produce “flow”. Carefully-chosen shrubs can give bloom from March to October. Using small trees will give accents and help create focal points. Make sure your soil is in top-notch condition. Use long-blooming perennials to give interest and spice to the front of the shrub borders but try to avoid plants that are not disease or insect resistant or which require a lot of care. Plant fewer varieties of flowers but in masses and sweeps and choose long-bloomers; add easy-care plants to fill in empty spaces. Group plants with similar moisture needs together. Instead of mulch, add a spreading ground-cover to fill in an area. Foliage plants can tie everything together and serve to unify the “look” of the garden while reducing

up-keep. Consider using raised beds to give the garden definite boundaries. Upgrade your tools to the new ergonomic products which take some of the bending out of garden work. Lastly, simplify watering by using drip or soaker hoses.

If you want to reduce maintenance on an existing garden, bring in a diagram/photos of what you have. Together we can choose the cultivars that would work for you and help you make your life easier! Who knows? You might like the new look better than the old!

Staff Favorites

Most gardeners will admit to being “plant happy” and, left on their own, would cheerfully end up growing one of almost everything! But, when backed into a corner, gardeners will admit to having a “favorite”, something they can’t resist, something they have to have ... and here are some staff choices from Acer Gardens:

Sharon

My favorite thing to grow is **Enkianthus campanulatus** (Redvein Enkianthus).

Why? For its beautiful structure, flower, fall color and bee/bird food supply. It has a unique, under-used naturalistic look.

Use as a specimen near a patio, deck or at the corner of a house or use as the anchor in a garden border.

Selective pruning of branches will open the view to the main branching; pruning the lowest branches allows for under-planting.

Enkianthus is deer resistant and can be grown in full to part sun. There are no disease or insect problems.

Enkianthus combines well with under-plantings of perennials or ground covers.

Bill

My favorite thing to grow is **Wikstroemia trichotoma** (Triki Wiki Plant)

Why? It’s an under-used woody flowering shrub that grows in partial shade. Small, at 3 x 4’, it adds a delicate touch to any type of garden.

The ovate foliage is light green in color and openly spaced along the stem. This characteristic adds an airy and refined note against the generally coarse foliage of other bushes.

This bush thrives in partial shade with average organic, well-drained soil.

Hardy to zone 5, the shrub produces small, delicate yellow flowers from late August to early September ... worth waiting for!

Wikstroemia combines well with all shade-loving perennials; its foliage is a beautiful contrast against *Pieris japonica*, *Andromeda* and all varieties of *Hydrangea*.

Rosemary

My favorite thing to grow is **Astilbe chinensis ‘Pumila’**.

Why? It’s an unbelievable shade groundcover perfect for a garden border. It flowers later than typical Astilbes, in August, with blooms in lavender and pink and is only 9-12” tall.

Don’t deadhead the spent flowers. They dry well, look pretty and will last into the fall.

Unlike other Astilbes, ‘Pumila’ spreads and can be dug up, divided and transplanted to other garden areas.

This Astilbe looks well with Hosta, Dicentra, Ferns, Lamium and Heuchera.

Priscilla

My favorite thing to grow is Allium ‘Millenium’.

Why? It was Plant of the Year in 2018 and is a great, stylish flower. The shape holds up to rain and wind and the color is a rosy-purple.

Plant near the front of the border in groups of 3 or more or you can plant singly.

You will be amazed at how many flowers this plant produces!

‘Millenium’ is a great vertical accent with amazing blooms on strong stems.

Combines well with anything and is even lovely in containers or used as a centerpiece!

The Shady Side

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, Astrantia, Cimicifuga, Dicentra, Epimedium, Liriope, and Tiarella ... and white is color!

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.

Hakonechloa	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.
Corydalis	Corydalis	Produces bright yellow flowers from May to September forming a nice ground cover. Prefers Rich, moist soil and will naturalize over time.

Discover the “Vs”!

Three remarkable perennials will give your garden blue-purple flowers from June to the first killing frost! They combine well with many other plants but can also establish a strong presence on their own. As the light begins to change towards the end of summer, the blue-purple blossoms highlight Dahlias, Asters and Dendranthema. Try the V's!

Veronica (Speedwell)

This carefree and easy-to-grow perennial (12-24”) will give you long spikes of flowers from June to August. Colors are available in a wide variety including pinks, purples, blues and whites. Happiest in full sun, Veronica benefits from at least 1” of water weekly. Deadhead to extend the bloom time. The plants can be divided every 3 years in autumn or spring. Veronica attracts butterflies and hummingbirds and is deer and rabbit resistant.

Veronicastrum (Culver’s Root)

The soft bloom spikes of this plant range from white to pale pink to blue-purple and resemble candelabra. The flowers can reach 4’ and will add a vertical accent to the back of the border. Blooming from mid-summer to early autumn, Veronicastrum’s leaves remain attractive throughout the season. Plant in full sun to partial shade and provide medium moisture. Attractive to butterflies, this plant is one of the showiest “natives”. The added bonus is that deer detest this plant so many gardeners put them on “guard duty”!

Vernonia (Ironweed)

This tall (4’+) perennial thrives as a background plant, standing straight and showcasing its purple flowers from late summer to the killing frosts. Vernonia is fond of damp locations and is often seen growing wild along the banks of marshes. Sun-loving, it is attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds. Heat and humidity tolerant, Vernonia is at its best planted in drifts to display its remarkable purple flowers.

Re-Doing 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. Sometimes you just need a little “high summer punch”... using plants in new and stronger colors will help fill that goal. You can always re-position containers and put them in different garden locations. Large planters can be used to divide space visually and create privacy; a line of smaller containers can segment a garden into different areas and direct the traffic flow.

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.

Be sure to keep turning your annual containers so that they grow evenly. Containers benefit from the use of liquid plant food once a week. Cut back as necessary; the plants will fill back in. 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

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 Trycyrdis.

Good Watering Practices

Establishing good watering practices will help your garden plants establish strong, healthy roots. In general, your garden requires 1" of water per week and a good rain gauge will help you track rainfall. The best gauge is still checking the soil ... stick your finger into the soil 1" down. If it feels dry, water. During hot, dry spells you may need to water more often.

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.

Often-Asked Questions

I'd like to get my young grandchildren (3 and 5) interested in gardening. Is there an easy way to start?

Consider planting a special container garden for each of them, with their help. You might plant radishes, basil, parsley and lettuce or nasturtiums, marigolds and bright petunias. Ask them to help water and weed and harvest. During the winter, sit down with your grandchildren and have them design next year's garden to make it more personal to them.

I have many areas of both dry and moist shade. Is there a ground cover which would do well under both conditions?

Epimedium (Barrenwort) is the answer to your problem! Easily grown in both dry and moist shade, this tough and sturdy plant will even tolerate drought once it is established. Growing 6-12" tall, new spring leaves emerge with a red tinge, mature to green and then turn bronze in the fall. Epimedium flowers come in many shades and are not attractive to deer or rabbits.

My new terrace has more shade at one end than I had planned on. How can I brighten it up?

Begonias will bring color and beauty from early summer until the fall frosts. They can be planted in containers, planters, and window boxes. Morning sun is acceptable but afternoon sun is too strong. Give them rich soil, adequate moisture, good drainage, air circulation and protection from wind and they will reward you with continuous bloom all summer.

I find I am relying more and more on flowering bushes to act as the backbone of my garden. Is there an easy way to calculate blooming time so I can always have something in bloom?

Here is a simple timetable to get you started ... simply choose your favorites. Many new cultivars are available in a wide range of sizes so you can choose which will adapt to your height requirements. Remember that some bushes take a little longer to get settled before they start flowering profusely so it might be a year or two before bloom time is fully established.

<u>Bush</u>	<u>Bloom Period</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Bloom Period</u>
Forsythia	March-April	Viburnum	May – Oct.
Azalea	May	Spirea	June
Rhododendron	May	Abelia	July – Sept.
Lilac	May - June	Clethra	July – August
Daphne	May - June	Buddleia	July – Sept.
Deutzia	May - June	Hydrangea	July – Sept.
Weigela	May	Callicarpa	August

I'm always reading about Re-blooming flowers. Are there some plants which always re-bloom and how do I encourage them to keep up the good work?

Plant breeders have worked very hard to give us re-blooming varieties within a species (Daylilies, for instance, add re-bloomers every year!) but you have to choose carefully. Some plants are natural rebloomers: Echinacea, Rudbeckia, Gaillardia, Gaura, Salvia, Monarda and some of the oriental Lilies). To encourage re-blooming, deadhead faithfully and in mid-summer use a fertilizer with a low nitrogen content like 5-10-5.

Some of my perennials have out-grown their allotted space! When can I start dividing?

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.

Perennials to divide in the fall include Astilbe, Aconitum, Lily-of-the-Valley, Bleeding Heart, Daylilies, all Irises, and Hosta.

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 in the early a.m. when the pods are 4-7" long and a little fatter than pencils.,

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 you rap them with your knuckles.

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 continue to 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.

2nd 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, scallions 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.

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, or their aftermath, 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 and put them in a safe place.

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 garden beds 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. Bulbs like sun even after they have bloomed ... most need it to develop next year's flowers. Don't just scatter your bulbs around the garden ... plant bulbs thickly to give an abundant look. The following chart will help you determine the number of bulbs needed per square foot in order to give a dense display:

<u>Bulb</u>		<u># per sq. foot</u>
Allium sphaerocephalon	(Drumstick Allium)	3- 4
Anemone blanda	(Grecian Windflower)	18- 20
Chionodoxa gigantea	(Glory of the Snow)	18- 20
Crocus	(Crocus)	8- 9
Daffodils	(Daffodils)	4- 5
Galanthus elwesii	(Giant Snowdrop)	12
Hyacinthoides	(Spanish Hyacinth))	5- 6
Leucojum aestivum	(Summer Snowflake)	9-10
Muscari armeniacum	(Grape Hyacinth)	12
Scilla hispanica	(Spanish Bluebells)	8

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 a little later in September. Acer Gardens will also be carrying Tulips as well as several varieties of garlic.

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.

General Reminder

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

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

Acer Gardens
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Editor