August Gardening Tasks

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If your newly planted fall tomatoes appear to be just hanging on without any growth be reassured that they are growing roots and will take advantage of the extensive root system for a growth spurt when the nights cool this month or next.

If you still have spring tomatoes in the ground they are probably producing more spider mites and fungus spores than tomatoes. Consider pulling them out to make room for new fall transplants. Look for the fastest producing varieties such as Roma Surprise, Surefire, Lavaca, and BHN 968. Lavaca is small like Surefire but is supposed to taste better. BHN 968 is a heat setting cherry tomato that is my favorite tomato for taste.

Along with the small fast-producing selections include one or more large varieties that may beat the freeze if the weather stays mild or you are willing to protect them from the first cold-spell. I will use Tycoon, Red Deuce, and Solar Fire or Valley Cat. Red Deuce is unproven as a fall producer but was outstanding this spring.

Keep the okra, eggplant, and peppers harvested so that production of tender new pods and fruit does not stop.

If you have zoysia grass, Bermuda, buffalo grass or even St Augustine (in the shade) you can reduce your water bills by being stingy with the water. Bermuda, zoysia, and buffalo will go dormant without rain or irrigation. St Augustine won’t be very green but can survive with an irrigation of about 1 inch every 2 weeks. To keep the lawn grasses green apply about .5 inches every week. If your lawn is on sand divide the application in half and irrigate twice per week.

Bermuda grass becomes a weed when it leaves the lawn and enters the flower garden or shrub border. Control it by applying a contact herbicide specific for grass. Ornamec, Over- the- Top, Poast, and Grass- be- Gone all can be applied to Bermuda grasses in gardens without hurting the shrubs or flowers. Follow label instructions.

The tough modern roses such as Belinda’s Dream, Katy Road, and Knockout, and the old-fashioned roses will survive without supplemental irrigation but they will maintain better foliage and blooms if they receive irrigation every 2-3 weeks. Water hybrid tea roses every week to get them through the summer and ready for a fall flush of blooms.

The birds will be very appreciative if you offer one or more bird bath that you refill every day. Bird baths in our climate are not a source of mosquito production because between the bird splashing and evaporation, the bath dries out every day. To make the water source especially popular, attach a drip or recycling mechanism. Place the bird bath about 6 feet from shrubs and other cover. Close enough for the birds to flee to when hawks fly over but not so close that cats can launch themselves at wet birds from cover.

Consider planting some sunflowers in a sunny corner of the landscape. The plants prosper in our summer weather and they are a favorite butterfly and bird food source. Butterflies extract the nectar from the flowers and caterpillars eat the foliage. Cardinals, Inca doves and lesser goldfinches relish the seeds. If you have both water and sunflowers you may even attract indigo and painted buntings.

Expect your live oaks, cedar elms and other trees to drop some leaves this month. In the winter and spring rains they loaded up with more foliage than they can support when it is hot and dry. It is not a long term problem.