Gardening Calendar for September

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 September is not usually a major leaf drop month but this year will be an exception. Shade trees loaded themselves with leaves in response to the heavy rains last winter and spring, now they are dropping some of those extra leaves in response to the hot dry weather. Expect live oaks, cedar elms, Texas red oaks, bur oaks, mulberries and even small trees and shrubs to contribute to the drop.

An early leaf drop is a survival mechanism. The established well adapted shade trees should do fine. Provide some supplemental irrigation to trees and shrubs that are less than 2 years old, or are in a stressed situation such as at a recent construction site.

On the lawn keep up a once/week watering program unless you have Bermuda, zoysia, or buffalo grass and decided to let it go dormant until the rains return. If there are dry spots in the lawn due to uneven sprinkler coverage, shallow soil, or compacted areas--- address the special need in the short term with supplemental hand watering directed at the problem area. In the long term correct the sprinkler coverage, aerate and add soil or compost to the problem area.

Early in the month it is time to apply a pre-emergent herbicide such as Amaze or XL if you had trouble with weeds last winter and want to prevent germination of bedstraw, thistle, rescue grass, dandelions, beggar’s lice or other annual weeds. On or about September 30 it is time to apply a “winterizer” fertilizer. Look for the label “winterizer” on the bag. The lawn converts to a storage mode in the fall so the added nutrients will be stored and organized by the grass to provide cold tolerance and a fast green-up in the spring.

If you have sandburs, September is an especially tough time. The burs have matured for maximum puncture impact! If the area of infestation is not too large, pop out sand bur plants with the tip of your shovel and discard them, burs and all in the garbage can. For larger areas keep them mowed low or drag a carpet remnant through the area to collect as many burs as possible. Pull the carpet piece behind your riding mower or enlist the help of an able-bodied teen-ager to pull it around the yard.

The most important thing is to make a note on your calendar of landscape tasks to apply a pre-emergent herbicide to the area on March 1 so next year’s crop is eliminated or at least reduced.

In the vegetable garden keep the tomato plants well watered and fertilized. A quarter cup of slow release or “winterizer” lawn fertilizer per plant every 3 weeks meets the need for nutrients.

 It is time to plant carrots, radish, beets, lettuce, turnips, and rutabagas by seed. Later in the month plant broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, chard, mustard and other greens as transplants. Keep the greens fertilized and watch for cabbage loopers. Use a Bt product for control at first sign of the hungry caterpillars.

The roses are ready to begin their fall flush of growth and blooms. Give the hybrid teas a light pruning and restart the pesticide spray program. Use acephate for insects and triforine to prevent fungus. Organic gardeners can use sulfur products, spinosad and neem oil. Fertilize with a special rose food or use lawn fertilizer at the same rate and frequency as for tomatoes. Visit plantanswers.com for pruning diagrams and other information on rose culture.

It is time to plant wildflower seed. The special mixes for Texas/Oklahoma work very well. Find them at your favorite retail nursery or on the internet.

Spread the seed on a sunny site where there is minimal weed cover or sod so the seed can reach bare soil. Do not cover the seed with soil. It is great if you can apply the seed just before a rain but it is not necessary. Most years there is adequate moisture for at least some of the seed to germinate and bloom.

In the flower garden some of the cool weather annuals can be planted as transplants in September. Snapdragons, stocks and calendula will do fine. Wait on pansies, cyclamen, and primrose until October or November. There is often a conflict in early fall because the hot weather annuals such as zinnias will perform well until November. Finding space for cool weather annuals is not easy.