

September Gardening Calendar

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September is when we normally launch winter gardening efforts. Drought restrictions and numerous 100 degree days in August may have reduced your enthusiasm but hopefully by mid-month we will receive some more rain and the temperatures will moderate.

Temperatures at night are especially important for plant growth. We can expect night time temps to drop this month. The result is that even if the high daytime temps continue we can successfully begin the winter gardening season.

Start the month with a limited pruning of roses. Remove dead wood, open up the middle, and remove any stems growing in an inconvenient location. Apply a half cup of slow-release or "winterizer" lawn fertilizer around each plant to support the fall flush of growth. Products with acephate as the active work well to control insect pests on roses. Use a fungicide with triforine as the active ingredient to prevent fungal diseases.

In the flower garden zinnias, vinca, cosmos, moss roses, and purslane should continue to bloom well until Thanksgiving. You can however, plant the winter annuals in late September. Snapdragon, calendula, stocks, and ornamental kale transplants will be available. Wait to plant pansies and cyclamen until November.

One reason to leave the zinnias in place is that they are an unmatched wildlife food source. Butterflies and hummingbirds seek the nectar and seed-eaters such as lesser goldfinch and cardinals eat the seed. Let the zinnias reseed themselves to continue the production as late into fall as possible.

In addition to the zinnias the migrating Monarch butterflies will seek out mistflower, porter weed, Mexican flame vine, duranta, fall aster, and mint marigold flowers in September and later in the fall. Some of the plants can still be obtained from nurseries and be planted in full bloom this month.

September is a good time to divide iris, daylilies, paperwhites and other bulbs and rhizomes. Cut off the rotting parts (if there is any) and replant the "new" individuals 18 to 24 inches apart. The bulbs can be stored in paper sacks until you are ready to plant them. Another option is to pot the new plants in 1 gallon containers until you are ready to place them in the garden. In my experience iris will last well for a year in a paper sack in air-conditioned conditions. They last one half year in a shed that is not weather controlled. Daylilies have about half the storage capability.

In the vegetable garden carrots, beets, turnips, rutabagas, radishes, and green beans can be planted by seed. Use transplants for broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, chard, and kale.

Prepare the soil by working in 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow release or "winterizer" lawn fertilizer per 100 sq. ft. of bed.

Your fall tomatoes will start setting fruit in September. Side dress with the same lawn fertilizer used for the winter plantings. One quarter cup of the nutrients per plant work well. Don't get it too close to the main stem (10-12 inches works well). Watch for hornworms, pin worms and other caterpillars. Use a Bt product such as Thuricide or Dipel to control them if individuals are discovered.

On the lawn, first thing in the month apply a pre-emergent herbicide such as Amaze or Dimension to prevent germination of the winter weeds. Among the weeds that the herbicides address are rescue grass, annual bluegrass, dandelions, bedstraw, and beggars lice.

Late in the month fertilize the lawn with a "winterizer" product with a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium. Eighteen- six-twelve (18-6-12) is one version. The winter application is taken up by the grass plant to be used in cold weather resistance mechanisms and stored for use in the spring for a fast green-up. Because of shorter days the lawn grass has changed its chemistry away from top growth.

September is usually an excellent time to plant new trees and shrubs in the landscape because the plants have the opportunity to develop a root system before the heat of the next summer challenges there survival. Because of the drought restrictions and if the rains still have not started, you could consider postponing some planting but you can hand water if you decide to plant in September.