

Gardening in the month of September

As summer winds down to fall, it is time to clean up the garden and plan for next spring. Water trees and shrubs less, allowing them to harden off before winter sets in. Remove spent annuals and **compost** them. Keep after the **weeds** and the **slugs**!

Here are a few gardening tasks and projects that you can do this month to help keep your garden looking it's best for the rest of this season, and prepare for the long cold winter and upcoming spring.

Fall Care of Annuals, Perennials, and Bulbs

It is time to plant perennial seeds and bulbs!

After soil temperature drops below 60° in the fall months, the **spring flowering bulbs** of Tulips, Daffodils, Hyacinths, Siberian Squill, Dwarf Irises, Anemone, and Crocus should be planted. Select healthy, disease free bulbs. Add Bone meal or Bulb fertilizer into the **planting hole** as you prepare the soil.

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As the weather cools, perennials that have overgrown their space or become crowded should be **dug and divided** or moved to a new area of the garden. New and replacement perennials should also be planted this month.

Tender bulbs like **Dahlias** should be dug up and stored in a cool, dark area after first frost.

Shrubs and Trees

Fall is an excellent time to **shop for plants, trees and shrubs**. Fall planting encourages good root development, allowing the plants to get established before spring. If weather is dry, provide water up until the ground freezes.

Stop fertilizing your trees and **flowering shrubs** to allow this years growth to harden off before winter.

Fruits and Vegetable Gardens

Harvesting **fruits and vegetables** is the best part of growing them. As is often the case, you may have produced much more of certain type than your family can consume. Share the abundance of **Squash** and **Tomatoes** with friends and neighbors, and don't forget about your local food bank or second harvest organization!

Although most fruits and vegetables are best when eaten fresh on the day they're picked, you can extend the season by freezing, drying, storing, or canning. Fruits and vegetables should be checked regularly for ripeness. A little practice and experience will tell you when your produce is at its peak of flavor, and that is when it should be harvested.

Plum trees should be pruned right after harvest, to insure a bountiful crop next year.

Once the tops of onions have withered, the bulbs should be lifted and dried in a warm, dry, sunny location for about 10 days. Then they should be stored in a cool, dark, dry place.

Some root crops, such as carrots, onions, and parsnips can be left in the ground in cold climates and dug up as needed. Apply enough mulch to keep the ground from freezing, and the crop will be kept fresh until it is needed. After you have finished harvesting your summer vegetables, plant a cover crop of clovers, cow peas, soybeans, or vetches for the purpose of plowing under next spring. These nitrogen producing plants will provide good organic matter and food for your garden crops next year, as well as helping to control weeds over the winter.

Lawn Care

When the fall rains arrive, fertilize your lawn with a slow-release **3-1-2 ratio fertilizer**. September is one of the best months of the entire year for **seeding or sodding new lawns**. If the lawn needs thatching, it can be done during the early fall. Over-seed old lawns with fresh seed to help fill in the bare spots and crowd out weeds and mosses.

Caring for your House Plants

Pot up some spring flowering bulbs for indoor color during the winter. Store the pots in a cool, dark place, until new growth emerges from the soil, and then move them to a bright window.

If you want them to bloom on schedule, begin conditioning your **Poinsettias**, **Christmas Cactus** and **Christmas Kalanchoe** to get them ready for the upcoming holiday season. These are all short day plants and will eventually bloom at their own pace, but if you want them in bloom in time for the holidays for at least 6 weeks beginning in mid to late September.

This can be accomplished by placing the potted plant in a closet or unlighted room, or by covering the plant with black cloth, black plastic over a frame or a cardboard box. The plant must then be returned to the light each day, and given a *minimum* of 4 hours of direct sun, or 10 hours of bright light

Poinsettias should be given an application of a **0-10-10 fertilizer** this month and again next month to help encourage the development of flower buds. Feed your Poinsettia every 2 weeks with a high nitrogen fertilizer once color has begun to show.

Christmas cactus needs the same general care, with the exception that they require cooler temperatures of about 50°-60°. Continue to watch for **insect** or **disease damage** and take the necessary steps to control the problem.

Odds and ends

Mark your perennials with permanent tags or stakes, or create a map showing their locations so you'll know where and what they are when they die back at the end of the season. This will help you to avoid accidentally digging up something you intended to keep when you work in the garden this fall and next spring.

One last effort at weeding will help to improve the appearance of your garden throughout the winter.

The birds will soon begin their winter migrations. Give them a helping hand by providing them with some food and water for their long journey. No one likes to travel on an empty stomach, and you may even persuade a few of them to stick around for the winter if they know they have a *reliable* food source!

Continue to watch for insect, **slug and snail**, or disease damage throughout the garden, and take the necessary steps to control the problem.