

Gardening in the month of August

While the list of gardening tasks for August is shorter than in many months, there are still ongoing tasks to perform in the garden. The hot temperatures of mid-summer make it tough to spend much time working in your garden, so take advantage of any cooler days to take care of grooming and weeding. Right now, your *primary* concern will be assuring an ample supply of water for your plants. Weed control is also very important, because with the warmer weather and increased watering, weed seeds will germinate and grow faster, and mature to the point of producing more seeds. Take advantage of your spare time to keep the weeds cultivated out of all parts of the garden.

Here are a few August gardening tasks and projects that you can do to help keep your garden looking it's best for the rest of this season.

Watering the garden

Watering can be the biggest task this month particularly if the weather gets hot. Vegetable gardens, most flowering plants, and the lawn all need about one inch of water every week to keep them green and looking nice.

Be sure to water *thoroughly, and deeply* each time you water. When possible, do your watering in the morning or early afternoon so the soil has a chance to warm up before the cooler evening hours set in. Deep watering will induce the plant's roots to grow deeper, where they are less likely to dry out, as well as the added benefit of anchoring the plant into the ground better. Light, surface watering actually wastes water, because the water never actually reaches the root zone of the plant, and the moisture rapidly evaporates from the top inch of soil. The best way to tell if your plants are receiving enough water is to take a trowel or shovel and dig down a few inches. The soil should be moist at least 3 or 4 inches deep to insure that the water is reaching the root zone of the plants. Of course, if you planted drought resistant plants in your garden, you won't have to water as often, but the principal of deep watering still applies.

Be sure to check the **hanging baskets and container grown plants** every day during hot weather and about every second day on moderate summer days. Don't just check the surface... Push your finger an inch or two into the soil to be sure there is adequate moisture below throughout the root area. Water them thoroughly each time you water, but be careful not to overwater them.

Perennials, annuals, and bulbs

Take out a few minutes to pick off the old dead flowers on your annuals, as well as the spent flowers on perennial plants. A little time spent on grooming the plants will make a big difference in the overall appearance of the garden. By removing the spent flowers, the plants will not go into the seed producing stage and should continue to flower longer into the season.

Perennial and biennial plants can be started from seed sown directly into the garden this month *or next*.

Container grown perennials, shrubs and trees can be planted this month. Always take time to properly **prepare the soil** by mixing generous quantities of peat moss, **compost** and processed manure with your existing soil.

Fall blooming Crocus should be planted this month, to give you an extra week or two of flowers after the main garden plants have finished for the year.

Spring flowering perennials can be divided and transplanted this month *or next*. Be sure to do this during the coolest part of the day and water the plants *thoroughly* after transplanting.

Prune your hybrid roses in late August to promote the most fall blossoms. Remove about a third of the vigorous growth. Any stems that cross each other should be removed, as well as those that are in the center of the plant. Weak, spindly canes and any damaged by black spot fungus should be removed. Except in colder regions, roses should be fertilized through the end of September. Maintain a spraying schedule to control insects and disease.

Shrubs and Trees

Summer blooming shrubs should be pruned for shape after they have finished flowering. Remove any dead or diseased branches.

Fruits and Vegetables

Now is the time to start your fall and winter vegetables. Plant starters or seeds of green onions, **carrots**, **beets**, **Lettuce**, spinach, **radishes**, and winter cauliflower directly into the garden early this month.

Enjoy the harvest of your homegrown fruits, vegetables and herbs!

Lawn Care

Contrary to popular belief, a brown lawn isn't necessarily a dead lawn. Grasses go dormant in times of drought, but will quickly return to life with the fall rains. If a lush green lawn is important to you, and you don't mind mowing, water it regularly, and deeply. If a water shortage is expected, or you hate tending to grass, you may choose to just let your lawn go dormant, and water it as seldom as once a month. Raise the cutting height of the mower. Taller grass cools the roots and helps to keep the moisture in the soil longer.

House Plants

Late this month **Poinsettias** and Christmas cactus should be brought back indoors and you should begin preparing them for Christmas flowering.

Poinsettias are short day plants. Although they will eventually bloom, if you want the plants in bloom for the holidays they must be kept at about 65 to 70 degrees, and subjected to at least six weeks of 14 hours of total darkness per day (mid to late September). This may 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. The application of a 0-10-10 fertilizer this month and again next should help encourage the development of flower buds, then feed your plant 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 to 60 degrees.

Continue to watch for **insect** or **disease damage** and take the necessary steps to control the problem. Warmer and drier weather means it will be necessary to water and mist your house plants more often.

Odds and ends

Keep the weeds pulled, before they have a chance to flower and go to seed again. Otherwise, you will be fighting newly germinated weed seed for the next several years. Weeds in the garden are harmful because they rob your plants of water and nutrients, harbor insects and diseases, and, on occasion grow tall enough to shade your flowers and plants. Change the water in your bird bath regularly, and keep it filled. Standing water is less healthy for the birds, and may become a breeding ground for mosquito larvae.

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