

The Garden in September

By Rachel Anderson, Certified Professional Horticulturalist

We have been blessed this year with one of the very best summers that I can remember. At my house, you know it's a good summer when:

- The house hasn't been cleaned in months. Seriously, if we have guests, we just reroute them through the garden gate and onto the patio out back. Trust me, it's much nicer out there. Who wants to be inside cleaning when there's sunshine to enjoy?
- We've been eating home-grown tomatoes since July - and that's without a greenhouse. Yup, best year ever. Try 'Golden Nugget' for sweet, juicy, golden cherry tomatoes as early as July 15. And it's still going!
- My hands have calluses from holding the hose. I'm not kidding here. Nice weather means dry gardens, and I don't have an irrigation system. Not to mention all the hours of hand-watering at the Nursery. Talk about a full time job!
- Best of all, you know it's been a good, long, dry, beautiful summer like we haven't seen in a long while when, as it finally begins to rain a good solid rain, you'll find me sitting on the front porch (the house still hasn't been cleaned) smiling and soaking up the coolness and the fresh rain scents, and listening to the hiss and patter of raindrops with a smile on my face and gladness in my heart, because hey, after all, I am a Pacific Northwesterner and believe it or not, I missed the rain!

In the ornamental garden:

- Stop pruning and fertilizing. Allow trees and shrubs to slow down and go dormant. Pruning and fertilizing encourages plants to put on new growth, and now is not the best time for that. New growth that hasn't had a chance to harden off is easily damaged by frost, stunting and, in some cases, killing the plant.
- Don't deadhead roses. When you let the flowers fade on the plant, it tells the plant that it's time to slow down and get ready for winter.
- Plant bearded iris. There is a great selection to choose from at the Nursery right now. It's better to plant bearded iris sooner than later to give them a chance to put down roots before winter. Speaking of which, if you haven't already divided the bearded iris you already have, now is the time (assuming it needs it). It's best if this is done in August or September to give the newly divided rhizomes time to put down new roots before cold wet weather set in.
- Go shopping at the Nursery for the best selection of bulbs for spring. Plant in September and October. You'll be so glad you did when the first snowdrops and crocus pop up in the dreary months of February and March.
- Bring in any houseplants that vacationed outdoors for the summer. Be sure to check for any hitch-hiking pests.
- If your summer containers are looking a little tired, consider tossing the old plants and revamping your pots with fall and winter color in mind. We've got lots of great perennials and annuals in stock that will provide fresh, colorful foliage and flowers for the season to come. Look for grasses, heucheras, mums, asters, ornamental cabbage and kale, pansies, heather, Japanese anemones, and loads more!

- Begin to think about changes you'd like to see in your garden. Fall is an excellent time to get new plants in the ground to give them a head start for the next growing season. Also, September is a great time to begin thinking about adding fall color to the garden, be it flowers, colorful foliage, or berries.
- If you have herbaceous perennials in your garden that are looking spent and tired after our dry summer (early blooming perennials especially are guilty of this) and you're tired of looking at them, go ahead and cut them back.

In the veggie garden:

- Continue harvesting long-season crops like green beans, summer squash, cucumbers, and tomatoes.
- There's still time to get some veggies going for fall and winter, as long as you begin with starts. There are still some great things to choose from at the nursery. If you sowed seeds in August, make sure your seedlings are thinned and spaced generously, especially if you plan on overwintering them. The more space they have the better the air circulation, which is important during our wet cool winters.
- Remove anything that is no longer productive or that has gone to seed (unless you're saving seed). Mulch bare soil with straw (NOT hay - you'll have weeds forever!) or sow a cover crop (like fava beans, crimson clover, or buckwheat) to protect your soil during the winter. Cover crops are a great way to return nutrients to the soil and they'll help to prevent erosion and compaction from our rainy winter.

I hope that as the season turns, and the days grow shorter, cooler, and more gray, we'll all be able to remember the feel of hot summer sun on our faces, the taste of sweet homegrown tomatoes eaten right off the vine, and the feel of cool grass tickling our bare feet. But just in case I have a hard time conjuring up those memories when the days are dreary, I've canned a few jars of tomatoes to help me remember. I sure hope I've cleaned the house by then, because it's awfully chilly on the patio in winter!



About the author:

Rachel has been gardening since childhood, thanks to her mom, and has been part of the team at Christianson's since 2002. She's a Certified Professional Horticulturist with a passion for roses and vegetable gardening. Rachel and her family enjoy gardening together and now share their urban garden with a menagerie of ducks, chickens, two cats, and a dog.

*This article was first published in the September 2013 issue of **Garden Notes**, our monthly online newsletter. You can sign up for Garden Notes on the Newsletter page of our website (www.christiansonsnursery.com) or sign up in person the next time you're in the Garden Store at the Nursery.*