

The Garden in September

By Rachel Anderson

Well, the firewood is stacked nice and cozy in the new wood shed, my pantry shelves are lined with all manner of jams and pickles and the garden is winding down after a long season. I can't help but look around at all of this abundance and beauty that surrounds me and feel full. I am thankful and not just a little humbled by my good fortune. Late summer turns toward autumn and the bounty is endless, whether you're growing vegetables or not. It seems to me that having the space, time, and knowledge to have a garden at all is a luxury. We are very lucky indeed!

In the ornamental garden:

- At long last, I think maybe it's okay to let your watering guard down. Ultimately, you know what's best in your garden so I'll leave it up to you. I know that I for one, will happily put down the hose for a while.
- Hold back on pruning and fertilizing, which promotes new growth. Instead, allow plants to slow down and begin to go dormant. Pruning in conjunction with fertilizing promotes soft tender new growth which is easily damaged if it hasn't had a chance to harden off before a first frost. That goes for roses too! Stop deadheading and let the flowers fade on the plant.
- September is a really good time of year to do any transplanting, whether you're planting an entirely new space or re-designing an old one. There's enough warm weather paired with rain to allow new roots to take hold before plants go completely dormant and the yucky weather sets in for the long haul.
- Speaking of new plantings, if you're hoping to add more fall color to your yard, now is a good time to visit the nursery and see what is looking good. I think the best way to buy for fall color is to actually see what the plant looks like in the fall as there can be so much variation. Never just go by a picture in a book or magazine.
- Bring in any houseplants that have been on vacation outside for the summer. Be sure to check them for any hitchhiking pests before they come in. This is especially true if you're growing citrus.
- Plant bulbs! There's a great selection at the nursery right now, including several options for allium, tulips, narcissus, and crocus. It seems like a lot of work to plant bulbs, especially after a long summer of tending your garden, but there is nothing more satisfying or exciting than to see those bright colors in late winter and early spring. I especially enjoy crocus and the tiny *Iris reticulata*, which are two of the earliest bulbs to show their faces in my garden. I would grow snowdrops, but for the life of me, I just can't get them to grow! Trust me, I've tried. I blame it on the squirrels!
- Clean out your containers of exhausted annuals. They've given you their all this summer and it's time for them to retire. Freshen things up with some new plants like pansies, ferns, heather, mums, or ornamental cabbages. Or fill them with things like Swiss chard, kale, and lettuces and enjoy salad from your pots well into fall! Vegetables are beautiful too!

In the edible garden:

- Speaking of vegetables, there's still a small window of time to freshen up your veggie garden for fall/winter. Since there's probably not enough time for seeds to germinate and grow to a decent size in order for them to survive the winter, plant starts. There are still a few things to be found like kale, Swiss chard, broccoli, and lettuce. Just remember that it's getting late and the selection may not be what it was in August.
- Pull out anything that is no longer productive and mulch with leaves or straw. If your beds aren't planted for a fall/winter crop, then give the soil a much needed rest. Mulch will help to keep out weeds and protect the soil from erosion and compaction from all the rain we'll soon be seeing. I can almost hear the garden sighing a contented sigh of relief at being allowed to take a nap.
- If your beds are planted up for fall, make sure that everything is thinned generously to allow good air circulation. Veggies that have at least 2 sets of true leaves should be well on their way for winter survival, depending on the veggie. Kale is usually bomb proof around here. Swiss Chard sometimes melts if it gets really cold, but often comes back when things warm up in the spring. Leeks hold their own nicely and cabbage and Brussels sprouts tend not to bat an eye at winters here. I'm trying a new cabbage variety (well, new to me) this winter called 'January King' that is supposed to be one of the most winter hardy-plus it looks like it will be beautiful too! I will let you know.

Enjoy the turning of the seasons!