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Every New England gardener has the definition of “A Perfect Summer” firmly in mind ... it’s just that we so seldom get it! We dream all winter long about endless, sunny days, light winds, low humidity, dependable rain showers (nighttime only, please) and a total lack of bugs, creepy-crawly things and chew-crazy wildlife. But ... they are only dreams and the reality can often test the mettle of any gardener because this is New England so what we get is anybody’s guess! Bring on those golden days ... we need to enjoy them now and remember them all winter long and we’ll cheerfully take whatever we get because NOW IT’S FINALLY SUMMER! and it’s ours to treasure and share.

Although gardening chores are never really done, now is the time to sit quietly and enjoy the garden you have created. A special sitting area with comfortable chairs or benches will give you the opportunity for rest and relaxation. Replant containers to try out different floral color schemes ... it’s an easy way to see how a larger flower bed might look! You can also surround the sitting area with Ferns, Grasses, Heucheras, Mints, Hostas and Sedums for a study in foliage combinations. A number of herbs and plants (such as Lavender, Lemon Balm, Geranium, Nepeta and Santolina) naturally repel many insects and are good choices to plant near your sitting area. Whatever you choose should reflect what makes your garden special to you.

You’ve worked very hard on your garden and you deserve the chance to take a break and let the garden refresh your spirit. Why not share the pleasure your garden gives you with your friends? Invite them to come and walk around with you exchange information on the different plants you grow, and why, and share what you have learned. Hopefully, your friends will invite you to tour their gardens and see what they are growing. This is a perfect opportunity to widen your perspective and to discover what has worked for other local gardeners.

Flowering trees and bushes have outdone themselves; roses are everywhere! They like summer too! The rest of this long-anticipated time will bring abundant color and an on-going succession of bloom. Walking through the nursery and seeing what’s currently in bloom on the colorful benches will help you fill any “holes” you spot in your flower beds. Bring a photograph of the place with the “hole” and carry it around the benches with you ... it will help you visualize how a new plant will look and how it will blend in with what you are already growing. Remember ... there’s almost always more than one spot in your garden where a new plant will do well!

Acer Gardens prides itself on its quality and diversity. Nursery specialties include Alpines, Daylilies (many re-blooming), Hostas, Ferns, Long-Blooming Perennials, Ornamental Grasses, Shrubs and Trees. Every year we extend our over-flowing benches to make room for even more plants. Our Shade Area alone is bursting at the seams! Well-trained and experienced staff are always ready to answer questions and help you make your garden a joyful place.

Visit the Web Site

Our web site is a great resource for information including the current Newsletter and our Information Handouts which include sheets on Plants, Seasonal, How To's and Challenges. Take a few minutes to browse through them and print out some easy reading! You'll also find announcements on upcoming talks and workshops as well as videos. Please sign up for our Newsletter too. We're always interested in hearing what our customers would like to see on the web site and what would be most helpful to you. By all means let us know, by email, what you'd like to see covered! Just remember: we don't have full-time office coverage because we like to spend the season down in the Nursery with you. We'll get back to you as soon as we can!

Workshops and Talks

The Nursery will be offering several garden talks/demonstrations as summer starts to wind down, starting with Arranging Late-Season Containers. This will showcase the blending of plants in different presentations but using the same selection of plants! Learn how to accent the subtle changes in the season as fall draws near.

Bill Harris will be repeating his popular Lawn Care in September talk, guaranteed to help you sort through the "what do I really have to do and why?" lawn questions we all have. By special request, Bill will also give a talk on Groundcovers in the Landscape, helping you discover how many choices you have and how they are best utilized. Be sure to sign up when the announcements appear ... these talks fill up quickly!

Summer Gardens to Visit

Every year The Garden Conservancy runs self-guided tours of hundreds of private gardens from coast to coast. Most of the gardens are only open to the public once a year ... a wonderful opportunity to see how other gardeners have designed spaces and solved problems. In 2024, Open Days in Connecticut run from April 28 through October 12; non-refundable, pre-registration tickets are sold on-line on the Open Days website. Some capacity restrictions may apply. Pets are not allowed but children under 12 are free. Open Days are rain or shine events and are not re-scheduled due to inclement weather. Visit www.opendaysprogram.org to search by garden, city or state. Open Days are also listed for Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts.

The Plant of the Month

The plant of the Month is available at the nursery from the first of each month on. These plants are carefully chosen to showcase current bloom and are featured from April through October.

July: **Allium (Ornamental onion)**

Zone: 5-8

Height: 12-18"

Spread: 12-18"

This hybrid perennial/rhizome gives long-blooming, fragrant rosy-purple flowers from mid to late summer. Drought-tolerant and deer resistant, it attracts bees and butterflies and will give an architectural accent to your high summer garden. It prefers full sun, tolerates a wide range of soils and will cheerfully grow in containers. Deadhead or dry the flowers and cut back the foliage in late fall.

August: **Rudbeckia (Black-Eyed Susan)**

Zone: 3 - 9 Height: 2 – 2 ½’ Spread: 1 ½-2’

Late summer is brightened by planting bold drifts of these daisy-like flowers. In bloom from July to September, these bright yellow or orange flowers are best grown in full sun in rich, well-drained soil and naturalize well. Drought-tolerant when established, the plants stand up to heat and humidity, attracting birds and butterflies. Deadhead flowers to encourage more bloom.

September: **Aralia cordata (Japanese spikenard)**

Zone: 3-8 Height: 4’ Spread: 4’

This shrub-like perennial actually dies back for the winter but all season long its tall, striking wide form is a perfect anchor and background for a woodland garden. The large, ornamental, bright chartreuse leaves thrive in part to full shade and moist woodland soil. 2 foot spikes of tiny white flowers bloom when little else is blooming in a woodland garden and are followed by bunches of purple berries which attract song birds. Deer and pest resistant.

The Really-Must-Do-Now List

Prune Weigela bushes now before they set next year’s bloom. Shape-up Forsythia bushes.

Delphiniums, Nepeta, Salvia, Coreopsis, Buddleia, Kalimeris, Daylilies and annuals all benefit from July fertilizing. August fertilizing is generally considered too late in the season for this area.

By mid-July, you should have cut back your Mums, Asters, Sedum and Montauk Daisies to keep them under control and to ensure good branching.

Dead-head perennials regularly to extend blossom time and encourage late-season re-bloom.

Re-apply slug bait.

Feed/ fertilize Roses and containers on a regular schedule.

Turn containers regularly to keep them growing evenly.

Control broad leaf weeds in the lawn and apply fertilizer in late August-early September.

Seasonal Reminders

Attract pollinators by planting nectar and pollen-rich flowers. Many perennials are natural pollinators. Consider using Achillea, Agastache, Coreopsis, Echinacea, Lavender, Liatris, Monarda, Buddleia, Salvia and Rudbeckia.

If you are planting something, plant late in the day, not in the hot sun, and be sure to water it in deeply. Many perennials need a little more water than normal as they establish themselves.

Acer Gardens has introduced its **Alpine Soil Mix**, designed for Succulents and Alpines, and **Soil Moist**, which reduces the need for watering by absorbing and then slowly releasing water into the soil. Available at the nursery, the mixes are particularly useful for use in planters, containers and perennial beds.

Cut flowers for the house in the early morning or evening hours and try to choose flowers that are half open. To help your flowers last longer, add 1 Tb. sugar, ½ tsp. of white vinegar and ½ tsp. of bleach into 1 qt. of water and use to fill vases as needed. Your cut flowers will also stay fresh longer if they are not placed in front of an open or sunny window. Change the water as needed.

Some annuals slow down their blooming as the summer progresses. Cut them back by at least half, fertilize, water and wait a few weeks. They'll come back quickly!

Houseplants spending time outdoors in the summer will probably need more water than they do during the winter months inside. Trim, fertilize and re-pot if necessary towards the end of August and bring them back inside on or near Labor Day.

Established lawns need only 1" of water a week; don't water on a regular schedule. The lawn can be re-seeded from the last week of August into the 3rd week of September. Dry conditions will not affect the re-seeding.

Unfortunately, those of us with gravel driveways know that in the blink of an eye we can be over-run with weeds! An old-fashioned but effective remedy is to spray a mixture of ½ white vinegar and 1/2 water on the weeds. Try to do this when you know you will have 2 sunny days after the application of the mixture. The weeds will be gone in a matter of days! This mixture will also help control weeds around patios and terraces.

September always gives you a chance to get a jump on next spring! The days are beginning to cool a little and working in the garden is a peaceful pleasure. In fact, it is the perfect time to move, divide and plant. The soil is still warm and watering will not be a big chore. Bearded Iris, Daylilies and Siberian Iris all benefit from fall division. Cut down established Hostas as the leaves die.

The Pollinator-Friendly Garden

Without pollinators we would be missing many of our favorite flowers and wildflowers. Our CT pollinators come in waves throughout the summer and there are many ways to attract them. Many gardeners keep a small area on the edge of their gardens a little on the wild side as pollinators are happiest in natural settings that resemble their favored habitats but a few simple additions to your existing garden can greatly increase the number of pollinator visitors.

Garden in the sun. Even late into the fall, you will find bees hanging onto flowers and sunning themselves.

Cultivate native plants. Natives are four times more attractive to native bees than anything else.

Plant in clumps. Clusters of one pollinator-friendly plant will draw more visitors.

Aim for extended bloom. Have at least 3 species blooming in each season.

Select flowers in bright colors. Vary the shapes of the flowers to accommodate different pollinators.

Choose common plants and heirloom varieties which are proven sources of nectar and pollen.

Provide ground cover and shade as well as shallow dishes of water.

Do not use pesticides.

Providing extended seasonal blooms for pollinators just takes a little planning. Bees and butterflies will be attracted to many different flowers over the course of the gardening season and will spend a great deal of time in the garden if you provide a selection of their favorites. For example:

Spring: Aubretia, Hyacinth, Pulmonaria, Crocus, Lilac, Primrose

Summer: Baptisia, Buddleia, Bee Balm, Cosmos, Echinacea, Honeysuckle, Hosta, Lavender, Nepeta

Fall: Asters, Chrysanthemum, Dahlias, Goldenrod, Hyssop, Sedum, Vernonia, Zinnias

For more in-depth information on building pollinator gardens, please read Acer Gardens' Information Sheet ... Creating a Pollinator Garden.

The Shady Side

We are so conditioned to thinking that growing grass (as in the perfect lawn) relies heavily on sun that we tend to forget that there are ornamental grasses which flourish in semi-shade and will brighten up shaded areas of your garden. Whether it's on the edge of a woodland or used as an accent near trees or to define a pathway, these grasses earn their keep many times over and serve as focal points. Some even do well in containers ... left standing through the fall they provide dramatic interest and many are deer resistant. Consider these two favorites;

Hakonechloa (Japanese Forest Grass)

These elegant, slow-growing, cascading plants require very little care once they are established and will reach about 18 - 24" when mature. Most varieties are variegated and all thrive in moist soil and low light conditions. This grass grows in a layered clump and is hardy in zones 5-9. They do very well on the edges of shaded woodlands as long as their moisture requirements are met.

Carex (Sedge)

Sedges are a grass-like plant which has been underused in recent years. Mostly evergreen, this shade plant blends texturally with many shade plants and is well-suited to woodland gardens. They are great companion plants to Hosta and perform best when grown in a moist location. Carex comes in a wide range of colors and forms arching mounds. Somewhat tolerant of neglect, sedge is deer resistant and attractive to butterflies. Easily divided in the fall, sedge will earn its keep.

As the summer moves forward, color combinations in the garden take center stage, and then recede ... often into a sea of green. A sea of green foliage is very restful but every shade garden needs a little "bling" to bring everything together. Mix the textures of your shade plant foliage; ferns alone will give you a huge choice. Adding variegated foliage with markings of white, red and gold will create the illusion of light, especially if planted in groups of threes. The pure white blooms found on many different Hosta cultivars always stand out, especially as twilight comes on and the light deepens.

Adding chartreuse as an accent can introduce a strong yellow-green, eye-catching punch that provides a focal point as well as a conversation piece. Used in a shaded area, chartreuse plants mimic sunlight and lighten a dark corner. Chartreuse goes with almost every other color and is a wonderful companion plant.

Our Favorite Ways to Carry the Garden from High Summer to Fall

Most New England gardeners find that there's a garden gap between high summer and the first hints of the coming fall. Here's how some of us at Acer Gardens fill that gap:

Bill

I look forward to the large cone-shaped flowers of **Hydrangea paniculata**. Some of the cultivars are the last hydrangeas to come into bloom with long lasting flowers that may even change color as they head into fall. They do well in the shoreline climate and can be used massed or as an accent plant. Happy with 5-6 hours of sun, they have no serious insect or disease problems and combine well with roses, grasses and perennials.

Sharon

The red, purple, orange or yellow foliage of **Heuchera** (Coral Bells) will add interest to a garden border from summer well into fall. Clustered along the front edges of a garden border, the unusual leaf shapes of Heuchera draw the eye and accent the garden. Plant in partial shade in a soil high in organic matter and dead head the flowers. Bees are attracted to this North American native and they combine well with ferns, astilbe, hosta, ginger and Japanese Forest Grass.

Rosemary

Lady's Mantle grows in sun or shade and maintains a presence in the garden all summer long! When the flowers stop, the foliage takes over ... cut foliage is terrific in bouquets. These plants can be grown in front of shrubs or at the front of a bed; some are even used as ground covers. Remove the flower stalks when the blooms are finished as Lady's Mantle will spread quickly if allowed to self-seed. When it rains, rain drops collect in the edges of the leaves and give the plant a shimmering effect! This plant combines well with ferns and astilbe and can be grown under trees.

Connecting Your Garden

As the season moves forward and flowers continue to come into bloom and then fade, some gardens can look a little disorganized. The easiest way to solve this problem is to connect all the pieces of your garden with one color which has the benefit of drawing your eye across the entire garden.

Oddly enough, one of the best colors to use to connect disparate beds isn't a color! It's white! White helps your eye travel from place to place and the slight variations in color only add to the general interest. It is also the last "color" to fade at twilight so you will always have something of interest to see as night comes on. Plants with silver-gray foliage are also helpful in giving a garden a connected look but a little goes a long way. As an added bonus, many white flowers are very fragrant and bloom well into the evening.

Summer-Flowering Bushes

Long-blooming summer shrubs can give a dependable backdrop to your summer garden. Many require almost no maintenance and thrive in high temperatures and humidity. Most are fragrant, long-bloomers followed by interesting fall foliage and, often, berries for the birds. Because they tend to be fast-growers they will also provide privacy ... another easy way to reduce maintenance!

Consider adding:

Viburnum (Summer Snowflake)

6 – 8’ Sun to part shade Well-drained soil May – Oct.

White flowers bloom from late spring to early October. Excellent for naturalizing. Fall orange-red berries attract birds. Tolerates a wide range of soils and is drought resistant. Shrub will develop a spreading shape. Extremely hardy.

Clethra alnifolia (Summersweet)

4 – 6’ Full sun to partial shade Moist soil June – Sept.

Heavily fragrant, bloom begins in late spring and continues into early fall. Pest and disease free, it will even tolerate shade. Avoid hot, dry sites. Looks well near ponds and streams. Colors range from white to pink with some compact (3’ – 4’) forms in white.

Hydrangea quercifolia (Oakleaf Hydrangea)

5 – 9’ Will take deep shade Well-drained soil early July

Stunning, huge white flowers in June surrounded by deep green, bold leaves. Some bloom as the summer continues. Fall foliage is burgundy-colored. Shrub forms a naturally graceful shape and is well-suited to the edge of woods. Survives difficult winters.

Sorbaria sorbifolia (False Spirea)

5 – 10’ Sun to partial shade Well-drained soil June - July

Forms large masses of arching branches with white sprays of very showy flowers in June and July. Not fussy about soil. Mature plants will spread and need to be controlled. Very hardy (to zone 2). Excellent in the shrub border and a good spreader for banks.

Hibiscus moscheutos (Rose of Sharon)

8 – 12’ Full sun Well-drained soil August

Leaves out very late in the season. A prolific bloomer with extremely large flowers (5-10” wide), in many colors, blooming in August. Thrives in heat. Attracts hummingbirds and bees. Mulch to help maintain soil moisture. Bush has a deep root system and resents being moved.

Callicarpa dichotama (Purple Beautyberry)

3’ – 4’ Sun to light shade Well-drained soil August

Covered in late summer with pink flowers, followed by purple berries lasting through the winter. Flowers and fruits on new growth so cut to 18” in spring. Attracts cardinals. Spectacular when used “en masse”; useful as a hedge or as woodland underplanting.

Caryopteris (Blue-Mist Shrub)

2 – 3' tall Full sun-part shade. Not fussy about soil August – Sept.

Aromatic, this shrub is perfect for the sunny edge of a woodland garden. Heat and drought tolerant, it blooms from summer through fall on new growth. Plant “en masse” for dramatic effect. Cut back to 12” in April. Deer-resistant and a magnet to butterflies and bees. Colors range from light to dark blue.

You will find a complete list of Summer Bushes on the Acer Gardens website.

Garden Helpers: Biennials and Self-seeders

Some of the old garden favorites are **biennials**, growing leaves the first year and flowering the second. It takes a little patience to start them off, especially if you choose to grow them from seed, but most will self-sow very reliably and require almost no maintenance. Because biennials only flower in their 2nd year, you will need to sow more seeds at the start of the second year so that the 2-year cycle continues uninterrupted. If you intend to let your biennials self-sow, be careful not to uproot new plants as you weed. The biennial family stars are Hollyhock and Foxglove but also include Ammi (False Queen Ann’s Lace) Campanula (Canterbury Bells), Columbine canadensis, Datura, Dianthus (Sweet William), Nicotiana sylvestris, Nigella, Evening Primrose, Lunaria (Money Plant, Queen Ann’s Lace and Verbena bonariensis).

The tall spires of Foxglove will stand out in a shade border year after year as long as you give their soil abundant doses of compost or organic matter. They are easy naturalizers but do not let the plants dry out during a dry spell. Clipping spent flower shoots will encourage side shoots to develop and flower; leaving the last flowers on the plant to drop their seeds will encourage new seedlings for next year. Hummingbirds and bees are strongly attracted to these flowers.

Hollyhocks, constant favorites in all cottage gardens, can reach 6-8’ (some newer cultivars are shorter). Available in a wide range of colors, Hollyhocks require fertile, well-drained soil, full sun, good air circulation and room. The flower blooms will die down in the fall and drop seeds. If the bed becomes too thick over time, thin out the seedlings.

Plants that multiply by **self-seeding** will help you fill up a perennial garden and will give an informal look to the flower bed. Many native perennials will self seed if they are happy with their current growing conditions. Towards the end of bloom time, be sure to let a few seedheads develop and transplant “volunteers” (with 4 real leaves) the following spring as needed. Not all seedlings will come true to the cultivar you planted; some may revert to the color of the original parents.

Deadheading 101

Most perennials need to be deadheaded often to encourage late August and early fall re-bloom. Deadheading is an effective way of shaping a plant and allows you to keep some plants from reseeding everywhere! It also prolongs bloom and encourages some perennials to send up another batch of flowers later in the season. (Annuals need to be constantly deadheaded to keep them looking neat and under control.)

A number of techniques will help the gardener coax perennials to give maximum blooms and will keep the plant healthy all summer long.

Deadheading:

Deadheading: trimming off faded flowers will help the plant produce more buds and flowers instead of seeds. Some plants (Peonies) look terrible if not deadheaded after bloom; some (Columbine) will self-seed all over your flower bed if not trimmed back. Regular deadheading becomes a routine summer garden chore and keeps your flower beds looking neat as well as encouraging repeat bloom. Be sure not to cut off any developing flower buds.

Pinching:

Pinching back fall-blooming garden mums to control height is a technique that also works for Asters, Montauk Daisies, Joe Pye Weed, Summer Phlox and Monarda. Pinching back half of the growth results in a bushy plant with more flowers and, in many cases, eliminates staking. Pinching should be finished by mid- July.

Cutting back:

Most of the late-spring and early-summer perennials look pretty awful by July. A hard cutting back of plants like Cranesbill Geraniums and Silver Mound Artemisia will encourage new foliage and a more attractive plant. If cut back close to the ground, some plants will send up new flower stalks.

Grow Great Summer Phlox

Phlox paniculata is one of the most dependable summer-into-fall perennials available and can easily serve as the back-bone of your late garden. Blooming July through September, Summer Phlox bears flowers in shades of white, pink, coral, red, lavender and deep violet and reaches 4' with a spread of 1-3'. The flowers are showy and often fragrant and are highly attractive to hummingbirds and butterflies. Best grown in full sun, Phlox paniculata will tolerate some partial shade. It prefers well-drained, rich soil and will benefit from a light mulch to keep its roots cool. Intolerant of drought, the plants do need to be watered in a dry spell. Avoid overhead watering so as to keep powdery mildew at bay although recent new cultivars are increasingly mildew-resistant.

Coping with Uneven Rainfall

As improbable as it seems after our wet winter and early spring, the long-range weather forecast for this summer is "hot and dry". Call it what you will, that spells drought! Growing reliably heat-tolerant plants in your garden will help you cope with longer dry spells and cut back on your watering needs and dependence on the hose ... but everything needs to start with good soil. Well-drained, loose soil allows roots to grow deep down to where the moisture is held. It's not a good idea to put plants that prefer wet conditions in the middle of a mixed bed! Use native plants where you can; they've already cheerfully adapted to the climate. In general, established perennial flowers require less water than annuals. Good choices include: Achillea, Agastache, Artemisia, Columbine, Corydalis lutea, Echinacea, Gaillardia, Lychnis, Nepeta, Oenothera, Penstemon, Perovskia, Salvia, Sedum and Stachys.

Drought-tolerant doesn't mean you never have to water... in fact, you must water until your plants are settled-in. Establishing good watering practices will help your garden plants grow strong, healthy roots. In general, annuals, perennials and most vegetables require 1-2" of water per week (heat and wind are factors here) and a good rain gauge is your great asset. The best gauge is still your finger. Stick your finger into the soil 1" down; if it feels dry, water. During hot, dry spells you may need to water more often.

Water in the morning when the air is still, or in the evening, but don't waste your time watering in the heat of the day as most of the moisture will be lost to evaporation. A single weekly deep soaking is much better for your plants than a daily sprinkling. Water deeply and get the water to the roots, not onto the leaves. Some gardeners divide their gardens into grids and water 1 grid a day. Plants which have become used to reaching down for water grow stronger roots and are better able to withstand periods of drought. Water stressed plants will look droopy in the morning or late evening and may have brown edges to their leaves. New plantings will need more attention until established; a layer of mulch will help retain the water.

A complete list of **Drought Tolerant Plants**, ranging from perennials, annuals, grasses, vines and shrubs, is available on the web site. And remember, when the heat wave hits, do only what is absolutely necessary in the garden ... don't push yourself. Many gardeners keep an eye on weather reports and water deeply just before the temperatures soar. Then they pour iced tea and read a book until the heat breaks!

Maintaining a Seaside Garden

The mild, moist seaside climate can be very favorable to many plants. Salt spray has been credited with keeping insects off Roses and powdery mildew off Monarda! But, almost constant wind brings challenges and carries salt and sand. Wind can be very drying and sandy soil won't hold water and nutrients well. The best seaside plants are drought native plants that have developed their own defenses: silver-gray foliage and small leaves (often waxy) to shed water and fog.

Watering seaside plants with overhead irrigation will help remove coatings of salt and sand. In fact, after a big storm, it's a good idea to hose off your plants as the storm will have deposited salt on the leaves! Check your soil and add organic matter to the top 6 inches. This will help the soil hold water. Adding a layer of mulch will also help to conserve soil moisture and regulate the soil temperature. Consider adding windbreaks by using ornamental grasses or junipers. Use a slow release organic fertilizer to feed your plants steadily throughout the season.

For listings of seaside-friendly plants, trees and bushes, please check out the Information sheet ... [Seaside Planting](#) ... on Acer Gardens website.

Fall Natives

As we move into the warmer days of high summer and look ahead to the coming of fall, consider the advantages of adding some native plants to your existing garden. First of all, they are attractive, with long-blooming flowers and interesting foliage and combine well with the colors of early fall. They adapted to living in CT long ago and, in general, have very few care requirements. They are generally insect and disease resistant and support birds, butterflies, pollinators, and wildlife. Many of the natives offer multiple choices, sizes and colors ... it's hard to know where to start! Asters begin to bloom in August ... many are still going strong in October! Echinacea, Rudbeckia, Solidago and Vernonia. will all give you spectacular displays as we move into cooler weather. The list includes:

Boltonia asteroides (False Aster)

Blooming from late summer to the first frosts, Boltonia features hundreds of white aster-like bloom. Boltonia prefers wet to medium soil conditions and grows best in full sun to partial shade. Native to marshes and stream banks, this plant is very attractive to butterflies and bees and combines well with Asters, Joe Pye Weed and grasses.

Cimicifuga (Bugbane)

A spectacular choice for the back of a border, some cultivars flower into early November! Tall wands of white flowers are held high against fernlike foliage and can reach over 5' when established. The plant prefers moist, rich soil and should be protected from strong afternoon sun. Non-invasive and deer resistant, Cimicifuga will develop into a dividable clump in about 3 years and can be cut for arrangements.

Helenium

Blooming cheerfully from August to October, Helenium is easily grown in moist, well-drained soil in full sun. A wide size range and blooms in shades of yellow, orange and red make this plant a good "mixer". Deadhead as needed, cut back the plants by ½ after flowering and divide the clumps every 3-4 years to maintain vigor. Birds are very attracted to Helenium.

Vernonia (Ironweed)

This tall (4'+) perennial thrives as a background plant, standing straight and showcasing its purple flowers from late summer to the killing frosts. Vernonia is fond of damp locations and is often seen growing wild along the banks of marshes. Sun-loving, it is attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds. Heat and humidity tolerant, Vernonia is at its best planted in drifts to display its remarkable purple flowers.

Re-Charging Garden Containers

You may find that at this midway point in the summer you are ready for a different "look". Bring your container, or a picture of it, to the nursery and let us help you re-design it. Adding cascading plants is always a simple way to create a look of abundance but you might want a complete color change as we slide into early fall. There are many ways to achieve the garden designer's goal of "Thrill-Fill-Spill"... the choice is yours.

A number of perennials will grow very well in containers and, as the season winds down, can then be transplanted into the garden. And, you don't have to stay with the yellow-orange-maroon color palette so traditional to autumn. For a no-fail design, focus on one or two colors and then add an accent color. Use bold foliage with fine-textured foliage. Make your life easier by choosing plants for each container with the same sun, shade and water needs. As the season advances, the light in your garden changes too. Think about putting containers in different, unexpected places ... you can even pop them into flower beds! Moving and grouping containers together can bring a whole new "look" to a neglected part of the garden. Experiment!

By mid-summer, Petunias grown in containers may be looking sad and droopy. Petunias growing in too much shade will get leggy and produce fewer flowers. Be sure they are getting good drainage but having overly dry soil is the more common problem. Although you will lose a few weeks of bloom, the easiest fix is to cut every stem back by 1/3 to 1/2. Fertilize with a general liquid plant food. Your Petunias will branch and flower again in a few weeks and keep going until a killing frost.

If you are planning on a short trip or a long weekend, deep water your containers and move them away from direct sunlight, placing them in an area of low light. This will cut back on their light supply, minimize their growth and reduce their need for water.

What Would Fall Be Without These Beauties?

Many dependable perennials wait until late in the season to bloom and a little advance planning can give you color right up to the first killing frost. (Dahlia tubers are not hardy in this climate and will have to be dug and stored after a killing frost but their colors are so outstanding that the trouble is well worth the effort.)

Fall-blooming anemones bring a graceful look to the early fall garden. The plants' willowy stems produce white or pink blossoms and, depending on the cultivar, can be in bloom from August to October. Preferring morning sun and partial shade, they can spread quickly in moist, humus-rich soil. They don't require dead-heading as they have attractive seed heads but cutting out spent flowers will keep the plant looking tidier.

Asters give a fall garden exuberance and are popular for their daisy-like flower heads which appear in late summer and early fall. Available in a wide range of sizes, colors (purple, pink, blue and white) and shapes, they thrive in moderately fertile garden soil, can handle full sun to partial shade, mingle well with other perennials and year after year get more vigorous. They benefit by being cut back early in the growing season but some cultivars have been bred to remain compact and belong in the front of the border.

Most Dahlias wait until mid-summer to burst into bloom and they keep going until the first frosts. Ranging in size from little pom poms and single flowered to the giant dinner plates, Dahlias are one of the most decorative flowers in the garden ... nothing else is available in so many colors. Give them space to grow; the taller ones need staking. Dahlias are heavy feeders. Start them with soil enriched with compost and apply a potassium-rich fertilizer at intervals throughout the growing season. After frost, harvest the tubers, dry in the sun, store them in sawdust, label the boxes (all those tubers look alike!) and over-winter in the cellar. Next spring, wait until the ground is really warm before planting and enjoy them all over again!

Dendranthema (hardy garden mum) bloom in late summer through the fall. They prefer average, well-drained soil, take full sun to partial shade and ask only to be well-watered. Pinching back the earliest buds will give you the largest fall flowers. Deadheading extends the bloom time. Dendranthema combines well with Asters, Sedum, Perovskia and ornamental grasses and is drought tolerant.

Other late bloomers include Agastache, Chelone, Eupatorium, Gaura, Persicaria, Rudbeckia, Sedums, Helianthus, Heleniums and Trycirtis.

Often-Asked Questions

What does the "spread" dimension really mean? Why is it important?

Spread is the width of a mature plant ... east to west as well as north to south. Spacing a newly planted starter plant properly allows for proper top growth and also root development. It keeps them out of competition with nearby plants and allows for adequate air circulation. Some plants are natural clump formers (Hosta and Iris e.g.). Ignoring the "spread" dimension can lead to poor flowering and a plant that outgrows its allotted space too quickly, forcing you to move it to a new location. It may take a plant 3 years to reach full size but the wait is worth it.

My annuals seem to be slowing down and are not blooming well. What can I do?

Cut them back by at least half, fertilize, water and wait a few weeks. They'll come back quickly! A number of annuals flower happily in really hot weather and stand up to heat and humidity. Try Petunias, Marigolds and Angelonia. New color introductions make it easy to plan beds and containers using these plants. They still need to be watered, but their small leaves help them retain moisture.

How can I keep powdery mildew off my Phlox and Monarda?

Many new cultivars of Phlox and Monarda have been bred to be naturally mildew-resistant. Spray older versions with Horticultural Oil once a week, for 3 weeks in a row.

At this point in the summer, my garden could use a little “zing”! Any ideas for a quick fix?

Both Rodgersia and Ligularia will give you the “zing” you’re looking for, forming large clumps with outstanding foliage and giving you a focal point. They can accent existing perennials and also tie a plant grouping together especially on the edge of a semi-shade garden.

You might also think about adding a few red flowers to your garden. A few well-placed red accents can energize borders or add drama to small spaces. (They also signal hummingbirds that nectar is available.) Deep reds create the illusion of depth. Can’t decide where to put that red accent? Pot up the plant in a container and move it around the garden to see where it will fit best and give the greatest impact.

I have many areas of both dry and moist shade. Is there a ground cover which would do well under both conditions?

Epimedium (Barrenwort) is the answer to your problem! Easily grown in both dry and moist shade, this tough and sturdy plant will even tolerate drought once it is established. Growing 6-12” tall, new spring leaves emerge with a red tinge, mature to green and then turn bronze in the fall. Epimedium flowers come in many shades and are not attractive to deer or rabbits.

How do I divide my Hostas? Some of the clumps are out-of-control!

Late summer is the best time to divide Hostas. Medium-sized Hostas can be split every 4-5 years ... anything too large will take at least 3-4 years to regain its size so choose carefully. Dig up the entire clump and gently break away the soil and wash the roots until you see the “eyes”. Gently pull apart the roots to form new plants. You may actually have to cut them apart with a very sharp knife. Quickly plant them in their new location, spaced about 12-18” apart, and water well until thoroughly established and rooted in. Most Hostas prefer 3-4 hours of morning sunlight. Harsh afternoon sun will fade their leaves. All love at least 1” of water a week.

When can I ease up on watering my plants?

Many gardeners stop watering their plants as temperatures begin to cool down but, in general, it’s not a good idea. Plants need water as they begin to prepare for the long winter months ... so do the bulbs you plant. As long as a plant has leaves it’s making and storing food. Moist soil helps to protect root systems from killing frosts and lets your plants slide into winter on their own schedules. Take advantage of natural rainfall but don’t put the hoses away too soon.

I’m looking forward to harvesting second-crop lettuce when things cool down a little. What’s the best way?

What kind/type of lettuce you are growing will impact harvesting. Leaf lettuce can be harvested, leaf by leaf, as needed. The method is actually called cut-and-come-again because the plant will keep growing. Crisp lettuce is harvested by the complete head and you cut that off at the base. Either way, whether you are harvesting a single leaf or an entire head, do so early in the morning when the leaves are crisp and fresh. Temperatures above 80°F can cause lettuce to bolt so plan accordingly.

When can I stop deadheading my perennials?

Many gardeners begin to ease up on deadheading as we get into still warm September weather as it can encourage new growth and leave the plant vulnerable to a sudden frost. Some seedheads are pretty to look at when they are dried and can be left on all winter. If the perennial is a busy re-seeder, cut the stalks down and save yourself some spring work!

I hate to think of the butterflies leaving as fall gets closer! How can I keep them longer?

Fall gardens are actually very important to butterflies ... they provide food for those who migrate and shelter for the caterpillars who stay. That late-season nectar is really important! If you can, plant their favorites in groups and make their feeding easier. Try these perennials: Joe Pye Weed, Goldenrod, Verbena, Dendranthema, Asters and tall Sedums.

Are there any spring bulbs which are squirrel and rabbit proof? I seem to be running an annual buffet party with a pretty inclusive menu!

Squirrels, voles, chipmunks and rabbits are active diggers but some early-blooming bulbs have proven to be somewhat resistant to them. These three bulbs take full sun to part shade and are easy to plant: Chionodoxa (Glory-of-the-snow), Scilla siberica (Siberian squill) and Fritillaria (Checkered lily). All bloom in early to mid spring in colors ranging across white, pink, blue and purple.

Dividing/Transplanting in the Fall

September is the perfect time to start dividing perennials. Hopefully the heat is coming down, the dew stays late in the morning, the rains are a little more dependable and (because the ground will stay warm for a long time to come) there is plenty of time for newly dug and planted plants to adjust to their new homes. Plan on giving newly divided plants about 6 weeks to acclimate before the first hard freeze. In general, spring-blooming plants are best divided or transplanted in the fall.

Why divide a plant? Divide because flowering is diminishing and dividing will rejuvenate it, check its spread into new areas and keep it under control. Many gardeners simply like to propagate a plant they grow successfully and which suits their garden landscape.

Try to pick a cloudy day on which to divide. As you dig your perennials, place them on plastic and cover them lightly with newspaper. Renew the soil with generous amounts of compost.

If you are dividing, discard dead centers and replant only healthy pieces (usually the outside pieces.) Give your new plants a large hole so that you can spread out the roots of the new plant. Firm the soil around the new division and water well. Keep your eyes on the new plants for several weeks to make sure that they are settling in.

Perennials to divide in the fall include Astilbe, Asiatic Lilies, Oriental Lilies, Bleeding Heart (Old Fashioned), all Irises, Daylilies, Hosta and Peonies.

Second Crop Vegetables

Now is a good time to put down straw in the vegetable garden (never hay) . (Be sure to weed thoroughly first!) Continue to check your garden for insects and disease. Clean off harvested rows immediately to prevent any insect/disease build-up. The nursery has several organic insecticides and fungicides available to help you protect your vegetables.

Second plantings will mature before frost. Plant beans, cucumbers and squash. Cabbage, beets and broccoli are also good candidates for the “second season”. Many gardeners wait until early August to sow spinach as it will continue to produce leaves until a freeze. Swiss chard, kale, and leaf lettuces can be planted in two-week intervals from mid-July into September. Try putting a series of lettuces in small, individual containers and use them on the patio as accent plants.

Acer Gardens will have a good supply of herbs ... especially cilantro, basil, arugula, mint and thyme ... as well as lettuces ... right into the fall. Everyone uses basil with tomatoes but they also pair well with tarragon, dill, chives, oregano, fennel and thyme. Zucchini is enhanced by garlic, basil, parsley and oregano.

If you're lucky enough to be growing leeks, try pairing them with mustard, bay leaves, thyme, paprika or dill. If you don't use all your herbs, you can dry them easily in the microwave. Arrange sprigs of thyme, oregano or rosemary in a single layer on a paper towel. Microwave on High for 2 minutes or until dry and brittle. Remove the leaves from the stems and crumble into small, labeled Ziploc bags. They can be stored for 1 year. Do not freeze.

pick, the more you will get!

Acer Gardens' Harvesting Vegetables handout is available on the web site.

Preparing for a Storm

As unpleasant as it is to contemplate, we do get storms from time to time: thunderstorms sweep in with heat waves and hurricanes come up the coast. The prudent gardener pays attention to weather reports and takes notice of the state of the garden before a storm arrives.

Prune out dead branches on trees or shrubs.

Make sure that pergolas, arches and trellises are firm on their foundations.

If a storm is due to hit and you have a staked sapling, untie the tree from the stake so that it can move with the wind. Re-tie it when the storm has passed.

Gather gardening tools and equipment, hanging plants and small containers and park them in the garage.

Remove small, decorative garden objects, including wind chimes, which could become air-borne.

Finally, move light furniture and tables into the garage until the storm has passed.

Bulbs

Sliding into late summer means it's time to plan for bulbs! Adding small, unusual bulbs to your established garden beds is a quick way to enhance your spring plantings and a fun way to experiment with “new looks”. You can plant bulbs almost anywhere in the garden as long as the soil drains well. Bulbs like sun even after they have bloomed ... most need it to develop next year's flowers. Don't just scatter your bulbs around the garden ... plant bulbs thickly to give an abundant look. The following chart will help you determine the number of bulbs needed per square foot in order to give a dense display:

<u>Bulb</u>		<u># per sq. foot</u>
Allium sphaerocephalon	(Drumstick Allium)	3-4
Anemone blanda	(Grecian Windflower)	18-20
Chionodoxa gigantea	(Glory of the Snow)	18-20
Crocus	(Crocus)	8-9
Daffodils	(Daffodils)	4-5
Galanthus elwesii	(Giant Snowdrop)	12
Hyacinthoides	(Spanish Hyacinth))	5-6
Leucojum aestivum	(Summer Snowflake)	9-10
Muscari armeniacum	(Grape Hyacinth)	12
Scilla hispanica	(Spanish Bluebells)	8

Many bulbs will be available at the nursery from Labor Day on including Alliums, Anemones, Chionodaxa, Fritillaria, Leucojum, Scilla hispanica and Snowdrops. Daffodils, Tulips, Paper Whites for forcing and large-sized Amaryllis bulbs, some pre-potted, will be available a little later in September. Acer Gardens will also be carrying several varieties of garlic, which is surprisingly easy to grow.

Some of the easy naturalizers are considered to be both deer and rodent proof and a little planning will give you a long period of bloom. Consider:

Galanthus elwesii	(Giant Snowdrop)	Blooms in March-April
Chionodoxa gigantea	(Glory of the Snow)	Blooms in April
Anemone blanda	(Grecian Windflower)	Blooms in April-May
Daffodils	(Daffodils)	Blooms in April-May
Muscari armeniacum	(Grape Hyacinth)	Blooms in April-May
Scilla siberica	(Siberian Squill)	Blooms in April
Scilla hispanica	(Spanish Bluebells)	Blooms in May

In this climate, bulb planting should be an on-going process as the nights begin to cool down in late September. Start with the smallest bulbs (and remember...some of those don't really have a sharp-end-up so just lay them on their sides in the ground. They'll actually right themselves and grow properly towards the light when the time comes!) As fall continues, start planting the larger bulbs and finish with the Tulips in early to mid-November. Some gardeners put a thin layer of fine gravel in with the bulbs to deter the voles. It's not a bad idea to mark your bulb-planting spots with labeled stakes so that fall clean-ups don't impact your planting areas.

Acer Gardens
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