



Gardening with Acer

July - August - September 2026

Vol. 1, No. 3

Summer days, summer days! The still, quiet early mornings, the long hours of daylight stretching ahead as the day gets underway, the soft twilights that move into gentle evenings, even the faint promise of a thunder and lightning show ... they're finally here! And they are to be savored and stored up in our memories because gardeners know all too well how quickly the seasons change. Mother Nature is really in charge of these golden days and she has a way of making sure that we understand that. Don't put off your pleasure in summer. Chores will wait ... summer won't!

For some gardeners, this is a time to finally rest after the glories of spring and the beauty of June. Others are already looking ahead to late summer and fall and the subtle color shifts that come to many gardens. As the sun changes position in late summer, some flower beds may not get as much sun as they did earlier in the season. Tucking in some later fall-blooming, shade-tolerant plants will help you extend bloom time and may add a new dimension to your flower beds. Walking through the nursery and seeing what's currently in bloom on the 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.

Although gardening chores are always lined up, now is the best 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 could also surround the sitting area with ferns, grasses, heucheras, mints, hostas and sedums for a study in foliage combinations. Whatever you choose should reflect what makes your garden special to you.

Organizing Summer Gardening Chores

July:

Prune weigela bushes now before they set next year's bloom. Shape-up forsythia bushes.

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.

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.

Feed roses and containers on a regular schedule with liquid fertilizer.

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

Turn containers often to keep them growing evenly.

August:

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 stay fresh longer if they are not placed in front of an open or sunny window. Change the water often.

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 near mid-September ... be guided by night-time temperatures.

Established lawns need only 1" of water a week; don't water on a regular schedule. Control broad leaf weeds in the lawn and apply fertilizer in late August-early September. The lawn can be re-seeded from the last week of August into the 3rd week of September.

September

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, Siberian iris, bleeding heart, astilbe, rudbeckia and hosta all benefit from fall division.

If you are planting something, plant late in the day, not in the hot sun, and be sure to water it in deeply.

Cut down established hostas as the leaves die to remove winter shelter for slugs.

Weeding 101

A weed is basically just a plant in the wrong place! And it intends to stay there too! Some of them are actually quite attractive, which sometimes makes a gardener wonder if they should leave them alone! The answer is a resounding "NO"! That weed is robbing your chosen plants of space, nutrients, sunlight and moisture. (This is particularly true in the vegetable garden). Weeds can also camouflage pests and disease and delay dealing with the resulting damage. Left in the garden over the winter months, weeds can create a habitat for garden pests to live in comfort through the winter.

A little weeding a day can actually give a gardener some constructive time alone! (Nobody's going to rush outside to help you weed ... everyone in the house will vanish at the mere suggestion)! The weeding gardener can listen to music or podcasts, reflect on the order-out-of-chaos you are bringing to a flower bed or even just accept the fact that your plants will thrive without the competition of nearby weeds, all thanks to your hard work. You are doing your plants a big favor and your garden will be all the better for it. If there's a Best Weeder on the Block competition, try to win it ... your garden deserves it!

You can't outwit weeds but you can certainly slow them down and make their lives a misery. Here's how:

Limit the amount of bare soil available by planting densely.

Use light mulch wherever you can.

Weed a little every day if weather permits to keep weeds from going to seed.

Pull, don't yank, the weed to make sure to get all the roots.

Effective Watering

Establishing good watering practices will help your garden plants establish strong, healthy roots. In general, your garden requires 1" of water per week and a good rain gauge will help you track rainfall. The best gauge is still checking the soil ... stick your finger into the soil 1" down. If it feels dry, water. During hot, dry, windy 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; a layer of mulch will help retain the water.

Plants that Handle Dry Conditions Well

Do drought-tolerant plants share any characteristics?

There are exceptions to every rule and some established plants will adapt to drought conditions fairly easily ... others will give up almost at once! BUT, in general, plants that tend to be more drought tolerant than others do share some traits: small, narrow leaves with a gray or silver hue, deep taproots, fuzzy foliage and a slow growth rate. You'll still have to water though! The long-range forecast for this area is for drier summers. Growing reliable, heat-tolerant plants in your garden will help you cope with longer dry spells and cut back on your watering needs... but everything starts with good soil. Well-drained, loose soil allows roots to grow deep 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 adapted to the climate. In general, established perennial flowers require less water than annuals. Good choices include: achillea, agastache, artemisia, centranthus, columbine, corydalis lutea, echinacea, epimedium, gaillardia, lychnis, maiden fern, nepeta, oenothera, penstemon, perovskia, salvia, sedum, stachys and yarrow.

A complete list of Drought Tolerant Plants, including 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!

Zapping up the Shade Garden

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, but many other shade perennials bear white flowers. Consider using:

Heuchera	(coral bells)	Japanese Painted Fern	
Ajuga	(bugleweed)	Pulmonaria	(lungwort)
Liriope	(lilyturf)	Astrantia	(masterwort)
Rodgersia		Tiarella	(foamflower)
Asarum canadensis	(wild ginger)	Tricyrtis	(toad lily)

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

A is for Astilbe

Hot days take their toll on the garden and many perennials let you know they are not happy with it! But one plant stands out, offering hundreds of cultivars to choose from in a wide range of height, color and bloom time ... and is tough and low-maintenance too. A selection of astilbes can keep a semi-shade garden in bloom from May to late September. Many gardeners enjoy their dried feathery plumes and seedheads all winter long so don't bother to deadhead. All astilbes prefer cool, moisture rich soil but they handle summer heat well. They need to be well watered and benefit from mulching. Deer and rabbit resistant, they are rarely bothered by insects and pests and are easily divided in spring. Astilbes are outstanding in mass plantings, mixed borders and as cut flowers.

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 are quick to provide privacy. 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 late June - July

Stunning, huge white flowers in late 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.

Hibiscus moscheutos (Rose of Sharon)

8 – 12' Full sun Well-drained soil August

Leafs 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.

Recharging Decorative Containers

Caring for containers depends on common sense. You're really growing a garden but in a limited space. Fertilize, pinch and prune as you go along. Snipping off the tips will help keep your plants smaller and fuller. Sometimes plants go wild, often at the midsummer mark. Cutting them back by half will keep them in bounds and actually help them. Deadheading helps your plants keep blooming and also lets you enjoy the foliage. Check for pests every time you water ... and be sure to look under the leaves too. Don't over-fertilize but if you do, by mistake, add a lot of water to the container and let it run through. Be sure to keep turning your annual containers so that they grow evenly. The most important thing you can do: water ... every day if necessary during a heat wave! 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 diminish their light supply, minimize their growth and reduce their need for water while you are away.

A garden often changes its "look" as the summer moves along and you may find that at this midway point in the summer you are ready for a different plant selection in your containers. 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 begin the slide into early fall. There are many ways to achieve the garden designer's goal of "Thrill-Fill-Spill"... the choice is yours. Sometimes you just need a little "high summer punch"... using plants in new and stronger colors will help fill that goal. You can always re-position containers and put them in different garden locations. Large planters can be used to divide space visually and create privacy or lead the visitor from place to place. Sitting in a different place in the garden now? Rearrange some containers to reflect the move.

Keeping your Annuals Looking Fresh

Here we are in the lazy days of summer ... the smart gardener knows that this is when the annuals will do their best, thriving in the heat and the long hours of sunshine. After all ... they're quick, easy and colorful. What's not to like? Perennials are the backbone of the garden, re-growing every spring but blooming for short periods. Annuals live for only one growing season, blooming steadily until the first killing frost. Combining the two will ensure that you are always in bloom. A few simple steps will keep those annuals at their peak.

Keep the watering consistent and the soil evenly moist. Try not to let annuals in containers dry out between waterings. (Begonias are the exception to this rule ... they need to dry out between waterings.)

Deadhead annuals faithfully so they don't waste time developing seeds instead of blooms.

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 and then 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.

Replace annuals at any time in the summer if you're really sure the party is over. With our changing climate, September is still a good month for annuals and many will flower happily all month long and into early October.

The Tree You Wish You Had Planted: Cornus kousa (Korean dogwood)

Flowering trees mark a Connecticut spring but one late-bloomer seems to define it. Year after year, the Cornus kousa (Asian dogwood) throws out its white horizontal blooming tiers of branches and then follows the display with deep red fruit in August. The birds will enjoy every bite! (Cardinals are particularly partial to the cornus kousa and return, year after year, to build their nests in the same tree.) Happy in zones 5-8, the Asian dogwood will reach 15+ feet, requires sun to partial shade, needs little if any pruning, is very low maintenance and not disease prone. Mature trees are considered drought tolerant. The bark is attractive in the winter months and the over-all pyramidal shape of the tree adds to the general landscaping.

Often-Asked Questions

My Peonies were gorgeous this year! What do I do now?

Peonies bring wonderful color to the June garden and require very little after-bloom care. Remove the faded flowers and the stem, leaving as much foliage as possible. In the fall, after a heavy frost, cut the stems to within 3" of the soil surface. Extremely long-lived, peonies can grow 10 years or more without needing division; they dislike being moved. Early fall is the best time to plant new peonies. Winter's sustained cold actually helps peonies flower well.

I enjoy sitting on my terrace in the evening but don't want to spray. What can I do?

A number of herbs and plants naturally repel many insects and are good choices to plant near your sitting area. Consider using nepeta, lavender, lantana, lemon balm, lemon thyme and santolina.

I'm planning a small garden near my front door. Any tips?

The easiest way to design an entry garden is to make of list of what you don't want. It's a good idea to avoid plants with thorns or plants that attract bees and yellow jackets. Branches at face height could present a problem for arriving visitors as could any plant that sprawls across the walkway and could become a tripping hazard. Try not to choose shrubs that need yearly pruning. Smaller, slow-growing evergreens will add structure and provide winter interest. A focused light source feature will ensure that your garden is noticed by visitors.

My garden will need a little oomph after all the June flowers go by. Any quick fixes?

After the initial burst of June bloom declines, many gardeners think about adding a little punch of color to their flower beds. Red flowers can be demanding but their rich color, especially when partnered with silver or white and used sparingly, can bring new life to the entire garden. (Red flowers also signal hummingbirds that nectar is available). Reds can add a sense of mystery and create the illusion of depth. If you are unsure about where to use a red flower, pot up a container and move it around your garden to see where it fits best. Fortunately, there are many shades of red available with a wide range of texture and shape. You might choose from different varieties of: astilbe, begonia, cardinal flower, coleus, crocosmia, daylily, monarda, persicaria and petunia.

It's fun to watch the CT butterflies zooming around but my garden is now very naturalistic! Are there any native grasses and sedges which will also attract them?

There are many native grasses and sedges which will also serve as host plants, not just nectar sources. Big bluestem, little bluestem, indian grass, wool grass and switch grass all host skipper butterflies. Native sedges host 36 different kinds of caterpillars! Both grasses and sedges also provide seeds for birds as well as shelter.

Planning Fall Gardens and Late Season Color

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. They combine well with many native plants and grasses.

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. Divide the plants in the spring when you see the centers begin to thin out ... about every three years. 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.

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 combine well with asters, sedum, perovskia and ornamental grasses and, once established, are drought tolerant.

Sedums thrive in full sun to partial shade. Drought tolerant, they are happiest in well-drained soil and give continuous bloom from mid-summer to fall. Deer and rabbit resistant, they are a wild-life magnet for bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. Sedum features a wide range of pink and purple flowers; the plants range from low-growing rock garden specimens to the taller perennial garden plants. All have fleshy, succulent leaves; some feature variegated foliage.

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! Here are a few dependable choices:

Echinacea (Coneflower)

These hardy prairie plants are long-blooming and drought tolerant and feature a wide range of colors including white, pink and purple. Planted in full sun, they will bloom from mid-summer to fall and

appreciate dead-heading. They will self-seed; large clumps should be divided every three years. Deer-resistant, they attract birds and butterflies and combine well with ornamental grasses. Some gardeners leave the plants standing through the winter and then shear them back in the spring to make bushier plants

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.

2nd 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.

Water tomatoes deeply and regularly, at least once a week. Once the fruits start to ripen, water only if the plants start to wilt; this will encourage better-flavored fruit. Harvest tomatoes when they are completely

colored and feel slightly soft to the touch. Gently twist and pull from the plant. Too many tomatoes to eat? Put cherry, grape and small plum tomatoes in Ziploc bags, lay flat, squeeze out the air, close the bag and pop them in the freezer!

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 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.

Most vegetables are at their peak of tenderness and flavor when they are on the small size. It may be fun to grow the world’s biggest zucchini but eating it is another matter! Try to harvest almost every day as picking season comes ... picking every day encourages the plant to produce more. Acer Gardens has a handout on Harvesting & Storing Vegetables 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 and bird feeders, which could become airborne.

Finally, if you can, move light furniture and tables into the garage until the storm has passed. If you have one, be sure the table umbrella is lowered before the storm hits.

Acer Gardens
Linda Z. Lynch
Editor & Writer