



July - August - September 2023

Vol. 18, No. 3

447 Winthrop Road, Deep River, Ct. 06417

Phone – (860) 526-9056

Website – www.acergardens.com

Email – acer@acergardens.com

A Connecticut summer asks a lot of a gardener! In fact, a Connecticut gardener spends a lot of time asking questions! Has my garden had enough water this week or do I need to drag the hose around? Where are those lobelias I moved last fall? What's that strange looking bug and how much damage could it do? Do I have enough pollinators doing their thing? Why have my hanging baskets slowed down flower production? Why aren't the tomatoes ripening faster? How many zucchini can you realistically eat in one week anyway? Why, why, why!

Mother Nature would probably answer “Why not?” But Acer Gardens takes a different approach. If you have questions, come over and see us! Together, we'll deal with the questions and help you find the answers. Summer days don't last very long and you want to be free to enjoy as many hours as you can of this golden time without worrying.

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.

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 fall-blooming, shade-tolerant plants will help you extend bloom time and may add a new dimension to your flower beds.

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.

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. Be sure to take a minute to sign up for our Newsletter and all announcements. 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. Just remember: we don't have full-time office coverage because we like to spend the season down in the Nursery with you so you may have to leave us a message! We'll get back to you as soon as we can!

Summer Gardens to Visit

The Garden Conservancy runs self-guided tours of over 4,000 private gardens from coast to coast. Most of the gardens are only open to the public once a year. 2023 Open Days in Connecticut run from April 29 through October 14 with admission at \$10 for an adult (children under 12 are free but pets are not allowed). Knowledgeable and enthusiastic gardeners are present in all the gardens and very often the owners are available. No walk-ins will be allowed; online pre-registration will be required. Open Days are rain or shine events and a fun way to see how other gardeners create very personal spaces and solve their unique problems. Visit www.gardenconservancy.org to search by garden, city or state. Open Days are also listed for near-by Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts as well as other states across the country.

Early Fall Garden 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 annuals and perennials in different presentations but using the same selection of plants! Learn how to achieve different seasonal "looks!"

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!

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 : **Crocasmia** (Monbretia)

Zone: 5-9 Height: 2-4' Spread: 1-2'

This bright-flowered plant is a long-established star in the midsummer garden. It thrives in full sun to part shade, planted in soil with good drainage. A favorite of butterflies and hummingbirds, its bi-colored blooms are also deer and rabbit resistant. Once settled in, Crocasmia is drought-resistant.

August: **Eupatorium** (Joe-Pye Weed)

Zone: 3-8 Height: 4-5' Spread: 3-4'

Give this plant full sun and plenty of moisture and then step back out of its way! Hugely attractive to butterflies, Joe Pye Weed is very low maintenance and, after blooming, produces attractive seed heads that last well into winter. Add texture to the garden with its deep green large-leaved foliage; it's a great backdrop for smaller plants.

September: **Kalimeris** (Japanese Aster)

Zone: 4-8 Height: 2-3' Spread: 2-3'

One of the most dependable, long-blooming plants available for late summer into fall, Kalimeris is often mistaken for an Aster. Its white, daisy-like flowers provide contrast to perennial beds, wild gardens or meadows and shows best when planted in groups. Low maintenance, it is happiest in well-drained soil, sheltered from strong winds.

That Surprising Late Frost!

Last winter was fairly easy here in Connecticut but spring threw us a quick two-night curve with very cold temperatures just as the Buddleias and Hydrangeas were starting to bud out. Because Buddleias are usually cut back to 18-24" in early spring, some gardeners were slow to realize that they had been surprised by that quick late spring frost. Coming originally from Tibet, Buddleia is usually reliably hardy; most will re-establish themselves and grow from the bottom up but it may take a season or two for them to reach full strength and bloom. The same is true for most of the Hydrangeas although many will not bloom this summer. Cut off the dead branches and let the bush recover on its own schedule.

The Really-Must-Do-Now List

Trim holly bushes but allow the bush to follow its natural, graceful shape.

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 and abundant flowering.

Dead-head as needed to extend blossom time and encourage re-bloom later in the season.

Feed/fertilize Roses and containers on a regular schedule.

Turn containers often to keep them growing evenly.

Re-apply slug bait.

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

Weed, weed, weed! They won't go away on their own!

Seasonal Reminders

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

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.

Acer Gardens has introduced its Alpine Soil Mix, designed for Succulents and Alpines. Available at the nursery, the bags can also be mixed into soil to promote drainage and are particularly useful for planters and containers.

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. 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. 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. If you do need to weed around patio or terrace inset stones an old-fashioned grapefruit knife or steak knife does a wonderful job!

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

Caring for Bearded Iris

One of the great pleasures of the late spring-early summer garden is Bearded Iris. Their colors range from subtle to bright and recent advances in hybridization have increased the size of the blooms and the range of colors available. They don't bloom long, but they add a presence to the garden un-matched by anything else; after bloom, their leaves still make an impressive addition to a flower bed and a terrific background for other flowers! Best planted or divided in late summer, their needs are actually quite simple:

Well-drained soil. A well-prepared bed and a low-nitrogen fertilizer.

6-8 hours of sun a day and good air circulation.

No mulch and watering only when it is extremely dry.

Division every 3-4 years.

To keep them flowering freely, every three years separate Bearded Iris clumps in late summer. Dig the clumps and divide the rhizomes by pulling them apart with your hands. Clip the leaves to 4-6" and replant the divisions, fanning out the roots in the holes. They really need room to spread out so space the plants 12-18" apart. Water them in and then leave them alone.

Biennials and Self-seeders in the Garden

Some of the most treasured Tried-and-True 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 it also includes Campanula (Canterbury Bells), Dianthus (Sweet William), Evening Primrose, Lunaria (Money Plant) and Queen Ann's Lace.

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. (Some gardeners keep labeled photographs of the plants they want to self-seed so that they will easily recognize developing leaves in the spring.) Not all seedlings will produce blooms true to the color of the cultivar you originally planted; some may revert to the color of their original parents.

Our Favorite Summer Garden Choices

Everyone has a "Summer Favorite", a plant that brings the season to life for them, a flower that says "here's the season we wait so long for, this is special!" and so do we. Here are some staff choices from Acer Gardens:

Sharon:

Acanthus

Why:

It's unique and very dramatic.

Ways to use:

Blooms a long time; great as an anchor plant or used in mass planting.

Tips:

Grows best in part to full sun; happy in average garden soil.

Combines well with: Use with mixed perennials.

Bill

Stewartia

Why:

This small, showy, stand-alone tree flowers a long time during the summer. It has unbelievable fall color and amazing winter bark.

Ways to use:

A large, pyramid-shaped accent tree, it's great as an understory tree too.

Tips:

Prefers filtered sun.

Combines well with: Rhododendrons.

Rosemary

Why:

Ways to use:

Tips:

Combines well with:

Verbena bonariensis

This annual flowers a long time, well into the fall, with little care.

Has an airy appearance which shows well in a perennial garden or can be grown on the edge of a meadow or in mass as a border.

The straight species will self-sow.

Other annuals and full sun perennials. Also great used in floral arrangements.

Priscilla

Why:

Ways to use:

Tips:

Combines well with:

Hydrangea paniculata

Blooms mid to late summer and into the fall. Varieties range from short to very tall; all have strong, non-floppy stems. Flowers change color.

Excellent in vases; a stand-out in gardens as a specimen or focal point.

Never bothered by late spring frosts as blooms on new wood. Takes a strong early spring pruning in late March-early April.

Very versatile: smaller varieties can be used in landscape design as well as beds or borders.

The Shady Side

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 to give interest and depth; ferns alone will give you a huge choice. Use the naturally mounding shape of many shade plants to add the curves Mother Nature always uses when creating woodland areas. Add interest with feathery leaves and depend on the occasional vertical element to add excitement. Repeat plants like Astilbe and Hakonechloa throughout the shade area and vary the heights. 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 including Astilbe, Aстранtia, Cimicifuga, Dicentra, Epimedium, Liriope, and Tiarella ... and white is color!

Hosta has been used heavily in shade gardens for a long time but it always earns its keep. Its naturally mounding shape and wide range of sizes make it a natural for edging a walkway or flower bed. Hosta can mark the transition between different parts of the garden or be the focal point on a shady terrace, patio or deck. Emerging later in the spring than many other plants, Hosta can easily cover fading bulb foliage. Those dainty flowers are an extra bonus!

Partial shade gives you the opportunity to add a little more color. Try these perennials on the edge of your shade garden:

Astilbe

Zone 4-8

Height: 6-36"

Spread: 18-30"

Eye-catching, feathery plumes in white, pink, lavender or red will give colorful bloom for much of the summer, depending on the variety. Easy to grow, and very hardy, Astilbes prefer a site which receives light to moderate shade with moist, well-draining soil. As the season advances, supplemental watering and a dense mulch may be necessary as they do not react well to drought conditions. Deer resistant, this plant attracts butterflies and will form well-rounded clumps. Divide overgrown clumps every 3-4 years in the spring.

Chelone

Zone: 4-7 Height: 2-3' Spread: 1-3'

Blooming steadily during the shorter days of late summer and early fall, Chelone produces weather-resistant spikes of flowers in dark pink or purple and will grow happily in partial shade with moist soil. A good choice for the mid-border, Chelone appreciates mulching and doesn't need division. The plants of this flower look best when planted in groups and allowed to colonize. Chelone will adapt to wet situations ... by a stream or in a rain garden ... and is attractive to butterflies. It combines well with Hosta and hardy Geranium but is also at home with many of the shorter grasses.

Summer Bloomers You Can Always Count On

Monarda

Zone: 4-7 Height: 2-3' Spread: 1-3'

The flowers of this plant will bloom from early to mid-summer in a range of colors from white, pink, red and purple. Easy care and very low maintenance, this plant asks only for sun and well-drained soil and will attract hummingbirds and butterflies. Light mulch will help to retain moisture. Divide plants in the spring every 3-4 years. Some gardeners dry Bee Balm, picking the flowers just before they open.

Salvia

Zone: 4-7 Height: 2-3' Spread: 1-3'

Salvia brings special gifts to the gardener. Carefree, the plants can be in place for years without having to be divided. Bees and hummingbirds will not leave them alone. Because they belong to the mint family, deer and rabbits are not interested in nibbling on them. They are happy with a half-day of good sun and prefer a soil rich in organic matter. A simple application of fertilizer early in the summer will keep them happy; drought tolerant, water salvias when needed. After the first flush of bloom, cut the plant back to about 1/3 of its original size. Wait 4-6 weeks and then enjoy new flush of flowers.

Shasta Daisy

Zone: 4-7 Height: 2-3' Spread: 1-3'

Blooming from early summer into fall, Shasta Daisies can carry a garden throughout the season. This cheerful flower brings many benefits: its naturally mounding habit works in the front of the garden as well as the middle, bees visit it all day long, its easy to grow, deer and rabbits tend to leave it alone and it doesn't guzzle water all day long. What's not to like? Some cultivars grow happily in containers! Give them all-day sun and moist, well-drained soil rich in organic matter. Deadhead as flowers fade to keep the blooms coming. The plant is naturally short-lived so divide every other year to keep it active.

Summer Phlox

Zone: 4-8 Height: 2-4' Spread: 2-3'

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. 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. The plants appreciate being watered in a dry spell. Avoid overhead watering so as to keep powdery mildew at bay although recent new cultivars are increasingly mildew-resistant. Summer Phlox should be divided every 4-5 years in the spring or fall; it may self-seed but those colors will not come true.

Deadheading 101

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

Pinching:

Pinching back fall-blooming garden mums to control height is a technique that also works for many late-season perennials such as Asters, Montauk Daisies, Joe Pye Weed, Summer Phlox, Lupine, Salvia, Veronica, Yarrow, Echinacea, Monarda, Perovskia, Helenium and Sedum. Pinching back half of the growth results in a bushy plant with more flowers and, in many cases, eliminates staking. Pinching of these perennials should be finished by mid-July.

Many annuals should be pinched back early in the season and again when they start to get leggy or bloom becomes sparse. Pinching encourages new growth and more bloom. Coleus, Petunias, Zinnias, Impatiens, Begonias, Lobelias and Salvias will all benefit from

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.

Deadheading:

Trimming off (deadheading) faded flowers keeps a plant producing more buds and flowers instead of seeds. Some perennials (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, encourages repeat bloom and helps shape the plant. Be sure not to cut off any developing flower buds. Deadheading annuals keeps them looking neat and under control and discourages bolting.

Coping with Drought Periods

As improbable as it seems after our wet winter and early spring, the long-range weather forecast for this summer is “hot and dry”. 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!

Recharging Garden Containers

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.

Ready for a different "look"? Adding cascading plants is always a simple way to create a look of abundance but you might want a complete color change as we start to 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 pop them into flower beds, creating a whole new focal point or use a pair to direct traffic to another part of the garden!

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, minimizing their growth and reducing their need for water.

Dividing 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 or to 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 or in a flat cardboard box 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 and water them as needed.

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

Some plants should never be divided. They include Alyssum, Candytuft, Foxgloves, Lavenders, and Perovskia.

Autumn's Last Stars

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.) A large number of perennials will give reliable bloom in late summer/early fall ... and not in traditional "fall" colors!

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.

Officially known as *Nipponanthemum nipponicum*, Montauk Daisies are incredibly low maintenance and full of exuberance! Bright, white daisy-like flowers bloom through October and can withstand light frost. Cut down the plant in half by mid-July to make it bushy; it will easily reach 3' with a similar spread. Grow in full sun in well-drained soil. Deer-resistant, Montauks are always a favorite of the last butterflies. Although slow to leaf out in the spring, plants can be divided by digging up the woody base, cutting it apart and re-planting.

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, Heuchera, Perovskia and ornamental grasses and is drought tolerant.

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

Oftentimes-Asked Questions

I like the look of sunflowers but haven't enough room for those towering plants! Is there an alternative?

Heliopsis will give you the same look but without the height. This clump-forming, long-blooming (June-August) grows 3-4' tall and features daisy-like flowers in orange-yellow. A sturdy native, Heliopsis does best in full sun and tolerates drought although it will give its best bloom if regularly watered. Deadhead often to encourage re-bloom but do not over-fertilize. Related to the true sunflower, Heliopsis attracts butterflies, hummingbirds and bees.

I find I am relying more and more on flowering bushes to act as the backbone of my garden. Is there an easy way to calculate blooming time so I can always have something in bloom?

Here is a simple timetable to get you started ... simply choose your favorites. Many new cultivars are available in a wide range of sizes so you can choose which will adapt to your height requirements. Remember that some bushes take a little longer to get settled before they start flowering profusely so it might be a year or two before bloom time is fully established.

<u>Bush</u>	<u>Bloom Period</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Bloom Period</u>
Forsythia	March-April	Viburnum	May – Oct.
Azalea	May	Spirea	June
Rhododendron	May	Abelia	July – Sept.
Lilac	May - June	Clethra	July – August
Daphne	May - June	Buddleia	July – Sept.
Deutzia	May - June	Hydrangea	July – Sept.
Weigela	May	Callicarpa	August

My children love the idea of a small, separate butterfly garden. I don't want to overwhelm them, but what should it include?

Choose a location with lots of sun and put a few flat rocks around for the butterflies to rest on. Plant colorful blooms close together and be sure to include both annuals (Petunias, Verbena) and perennials (Monarda, Neoeta, Sedum). (There is an Information Sheet ... "Butterfly Magnets"... on the Acer Garden web site to help you with your choices.) If you have room for a Buddleia bush in the vicinity you'll be home free!

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!

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.(That's true for plantings around mailboxes too.) 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 welcoming garden is appreciated by visitors.

I've always wanted a Hibiscus but I thought it was a tropical plant. Can it grow here?

Hibiscus syriacus, known as Rose of Sharon, is perfectly hardy here in Connecticut. It leafs out very late in the season but grows to its height very quickly. A prolific bloomer with extremely large flowers (5" wide) it produces showy flowers in August and tolerates heat, humidity and drought. Hummingbirds and bees find it irresistible. This Hibiscus has a deep root system and resents being moved. It will sometimes self-seed.

Are there really any bushes deer won't eat? I seem to be engaged in a losing battle!

Deer-resistant doesn't mean that the deer, if hungry enough, won't ever have a nibble or two ... it just means it's not the first or even second choice! But, there are some bushes deer are not really interested in: Caryopteris, Boxwood, Buddleia, Flowering Quince and Mahonia. One of the best deterrents is still the smell of dog. Some gardeners have their neighbors save the hair from dog brushings for them and then tuck it into the bushes they want to protect. Of course, if it rains, you have to start all over again!

I love the look of little "tuck-in" bulbs. What's the best way to use them?

Tuck-in bulbs are the first welcome Spring gives us and the first welcome nectar and pollen for our returning bees. (Bees are definitely partial to blue, purple, white and yellow flowers). Site them near the front door, mailbox or garage doors, tuck them into rock gardens or scatter them at the edge of the lawn ... you want to be able to see them from the house! Plant in abundance for the best effect and keep the look informal. Crocus, Snowdrops, Scilla siberica, Anemone blanda, Chionodoxa, Muscari, Camassia, Hyacinthoides and Leucojum aestivum are all good choices.

2nd Crop Vegetables

The Information Handouts on the Acer Gardens web site include our guide to Harvesting and Storing Vegetables, an easy guide to getting the best from what you have grown. Many gardeners print it out and keep it handy as the season moves along.

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 which in this part of New England is generally around October 10. Plant beans, cucumbers and squash. Cabbage, beets, scallions 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. Raised beds pay large dividends in 2nd crops as the soil in them can be 8-12 degrees warmer than the soil in-ground! (They warm up faster in the spring too!)

Acer Gardens will have a good supply of herbs ... especially cilantro, basil, arugula, mint and thyme ... as well as lettuces ... right into the fall.

The best time of day to harvest herbs is early in the morning before the sun has reduced the strength and taste of the oils in their leaves. 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.

Getting a Good Harvest from Patio Vegetables

Not everyone wants a big vegetable garden. Some of us have space or sun/shade limitations or have downsized both house and appetite. Being able to grow a few vegetables in well-sited pots is a giant plus. (Lettuce grown in pots is also highly decorative!) Container gardening gives us great control over what we grow where.

Try to give your veggie pots 6 to 8 hours of sun per day in a place easy to water. Protection from wind is a definite plus. The more pot space you can offer the vegetables you plant, the better ... in the long run it will mean less watering. Fabric pots have become very popular and they do a good job. Plastic pots are lightweight and hold moisture well. Terra-cotta pots look terrific but definitely require more watering. Assess your available time realistically as you choose your pots because you may be watering once a day, especially in a heat wave. Most container-grown vegetables are happy with a slow-release fertilizer added to the soil as you pot up. After that, use a liquid fertilizer twice a month. Frequent waterings change soil content more than we realize! Some of your vegetables will probably need strong supports. More and more vegetables are being labeled “dwarf” or “container” which makes them easy choices for your patio garden.

As you arrange your pots/containers, group plants together with similar needs for sun and water. Leafy greens will handle the most shade, including spinach. Tomatoes and squash need lots of sun. Plan accordingly so you don't have to drag heavy pots around! In a large pot, you can easily combine lettuce, herbs and radishes or tomatoes and basil. Harvest early and often and use scissors to cut off what you need. Some herbs (chives, lemon balm, mint and parsley) will grow happily in partial shade. Harvest frequently to keep the plant tidy.

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, or their aftermath, 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 and put them in a safe place.

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, Chionodoxa, 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.

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.

Acer Gardens
Linda Z. Lynch
Editor & Writer