

News Article

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September Lawn and Garden Activities

The following lawn, landscape and garden suggestions for the month of September are from “Autumn Garden Calendar,” Purdue Extension publication HO-93-W, authored by B. Rosie Lerner. Timing horticultural events and practices can vary from year to year, depending on weather conditions. The following information is intended as a general guide. Adjust activities according to local weather and site conditions, and be sure to read and follow label directions thoroughly on all products.

Indoor Plants and Activities

- Prepare storage areas for overwintering tender flower bulbs and garden produce.
- Thanksgiving (or Christmas) cactus can be forced into bloom in time for the holidays. Provide 15 hours of complete darkness each day, such as from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m., for approximately eight weeks. Keep temperature at about 60° to 65°F. Temperatures of 55°F will cause flower buds to set without the dark treatment.
- Dig and repot herbs or take cuttings for growing indoors over the winter.
- Store leftover garden seed in a cool, dry place. A sealable jar with a layer of silica gel or powdered milk in the bottom works well.
- Bring houseplants that were moved outside for the summer back indoors before night temperatures drop below 55°F. Gradually decrease the amount of light to acclimate the plants and help reduce leaf drop. Be sure to control insects and diseases before putting the plants near other houseplants.
- Reflower last year’s poinsettias for this year’s holiday by providing complete darkness for 15 hours daily beginning about October 1 until about December 10.

Woody Ornamental Landscape Plants and Tree Fruits

- Fall is a good time to plant many container-grown or balled-and-burlapped nursery stock. Prepare a good-sized hole, plant at the same depth it grew in the nursery, and water thoroughly. Mulching will help protect against large fluctuations in soil temperature and moisture. Be sure to stake or guy-wire tall plants to protect them from strong winds.
- Do not be alarmed if your evergreens, particularly white pine and arborvitae, drop some of their older needles. All evergreens shed needles at some time, but not all at once as deciduous plants do.
- Harvest apples when flavor is sweet but before fruits soften.
- Harvest pears when the dots on the skin begin to turn brown. Pears are best ripened to yellow off the tree.
- Clean up fallen fruits, twigs, and leaves around apple (including crabapple) and other fruit trees to reduce disease and insect carry-over.

Lawns

- To promote the lawn's recovery from summer stress, apply high-nitrogen fertilizer at the rate of 1 pound actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
- Mow lawn to maintain a 2 to 2 1/2-inch height, removing no more than 1/3 of the height of the grass at any one time.
- Leave clippings on the lawn or add them to the compost pile.
- Vertical thinning or power raking of the lawn will help control thatch build-up, if needed.
- Reseed bare spots or new lawns with a good quality seed mixture.
- Early fall is a good time to apply broadleaf weed killers. Be sure to follow all label directions, and choose a calm day to prevent spray drift.

Flowers, Vegetables, and Small fruits

- Dig onions and garlic after tops falls over naturally and necks begin to dry.
- Dig potatoes with a fork or shovel and allow to air dry for a week or two and then store in a cool (40-45°F), dark location.
- Plant radishes, sets for green onions, lettuce, and spinach for fall harvest.
- Thin fall crops, such as lettuce and carrots, that were planted earlier.
- Harvest crops such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, melons, and sweet potatoes before frost, or cover plants with blankets, newspaper, etc. (but not plastic) to protect them from light frost.
- Harvest mature, green tomatoes before frost and ripen indoors. Individually wrap fruits in newspaper, or leave them on the vine, pulling the entire plant out of the garden. Store in a cool location, about 55 to 60°F.
- Harvest winter squash before hard frost. Skin of the squash should be tough with deep, solid color. Some cultivars will show an orange blush when mature.
- Plant, transplant, or divide peonies, daylilies, iris, and phlox.
- Save plants such as coleus, wax begonias, impatiens, or fuchsia for indoor growing over winter. Dig plants, and cut them back about halfway, or take cuttings of shoot tips, and root them in moist vermiculite, soil mix, or perlite.
- Watch for garden chrysanthemums to bloom as days grow shorter. Some may already have bloomed earlier in summer, which will decrease the number of fall blooms.
- Plant spring-flowering bulbs beginning in late September. Planting too early can cause bulbs to sprout top growth before winter. However, allow at least four to six weeks before the ground freezes for good root formation.
- Cut flowers, such as strawflower, statice, baby's breath, and celosia for drying; hang upside down in a dry, well-ventilated area.
- Dig and store tender garden flowers for winter storage. Gladiolus corms should be dug when leaves begin turning yellow. Caladiums, geraniums, and tuberous begonias should be lifted before killing frost. Dig canna and dahlia roots after a heavy frost. Allow to air dry, then pack in dry peat moss or vermiculite, and store in a cool location.
- Harvest grapes, everbearing strawberries, and fall raspberries. For most fruits, flavor is the best indicator of ripeness, although color change can also be a good indicator. However, grapes change color long before they are fully flavored, so sample the fruit to be sure.
- Remove raspberry canes after they bear fruit.