

Gardening Notes for August

To me, August is the month that epitomizes summer. The days remain long, with the daytime chant of the Cicadas and the evening chorus of Crickets and Katydid. Rainfall in July varied by where you live but, on average was adequate although spotty. Coupled with the warm temperatures, most plants including vegetables flourished, although the heat did prove stressful for some. August typically has many humid days, but the temperatures are usually in the 80's, which benefits both the plants and the gardener! Remember to get outside during the cool of the morning or evening, use sunscreen, drink plenty of water and continue to take good notes of your endeavors.

Things to do:

Flowers

- Some annuals grown in containers may begin to look tired. For some annuals, a light pruning accompanied by a weekly fertilizing will breathe new life into the plants. For others, it is simply time for replacement. For autumn, consider *Salvia leucantha* (Mexican Bush Sage), pictured at right and *Leonotis leonurus* (Lion's Ear) as alternatives to the overused 'Mum'.
- Although frost is still 2+ months away, come months end you may wish to take cuttings of some annuals for rooting, potting up and over-wintering for next year's garden. If your rooting efforts fail, there is still ample time to get new cuttings.
- Gather and save seeds of various species annuals that are not named hybrids. In other words, those plants that were not the result of a controlled cross or propagated from cuttings but were open pollinated. These seeds can be used for seeding out new plants come next spring.
- August is the prime time to divide Iris, including German Bearded (*Iris x germanica*), Siberian (*Iris sibirica*) and Crested Iris (*Iris cristata*). It is also the month to divide Peonies that have become root bound. Often, Peonies will last 30 years or longer without the need for division, so division is typically not necessary unless they were planted too deep. Iris typically need division every 6-10 years. If you notice only the edges of a patch of Iris blooming, it is time to divide the patch! When lifting Bearded Iris, check the rhizomes to make certain they are solid. If they feel hollow or spongy, they may be infected with the Iris Borer, in which case the worm-like borer will need to be removed if still present. Divide the rhizomes into sections with each containing one fan of foliage and cut the foliage back to 4-6". Let the wounded or cut end of the rhizome callus over by letting it sit without any soil on a table for 2-4 days before replanting. When replanting, make certain the upper ½ of the Bearded Iris rhizome is above the soil



and exposed to the sun. Also, orient the fan or growing point of the rhizome in the direction you wish the plant to expand or grow in the years to come. For fibrous rooted Iris, like Siberian Iris discard the central and oldest portion of the crown and cut the remainder into 4 to 6 (10) pieces for replanting.

- For division of Peonies, lift the plant with a garden fork, which is less likely than a shovel to cut through or damage the tuberous roots. Tease the tuberous roots apart and replant such that the prominently displayed buds are very close to the surface. The peony foliage will wilt following division, but the plant will be perfectly fine come spring and will flower! Hence, this is the reason for late summer division of Peonies and Iris – to prevent loss of flowers come spring.
- Late August is an ideal time to plant new perennials, shrubs and evergreens in the garden, as the soil will remain warm and promote good root growth for weeks to come!
- Try to keep up with the weeding, especially as the summer bloomers are starting to set seed. Remember, the average life span of a seed is 7 years and that equates to another 7 years of stooping over to weed!
- Continue to deadhead those repeat blooming perennials, roses and annuals to promote new flowers. For some, such as *Echinacea*, *Silphium* and *Rudbeckia*, you may wish to leave the seed heads, since they are an excellent food source for Goldfinches and other birds that value seeds.

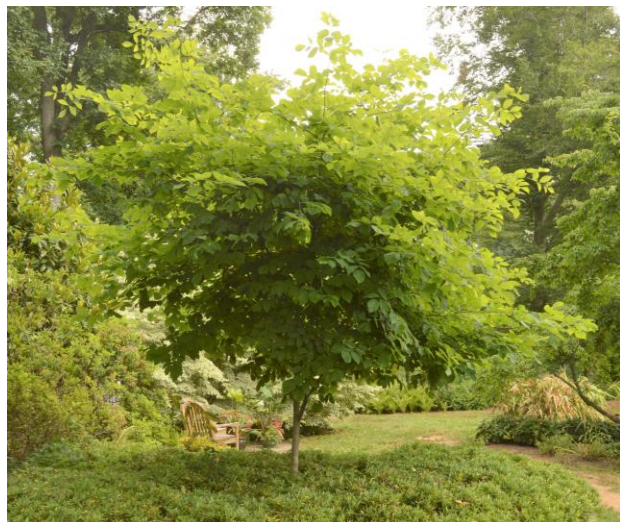
Vegetables

- The heavy rainfall of thunderstorms followed by the soil drying during sunny days has caused some tomatoes to exhibit Blossom End Rot, whereby the base of the fruit turns brown. It is due to a lack of calcium absorption caused by fluctuations in soil moisture. It can be prevented by mulching the plants and giving the soil a deep soaking. The mulch will help prevent fluctuations in soil moisture.
- Crops that have finished producing should be removed, the soil top-dressed with an inch or so of compost, and the area replanted with a crop from a different plant family that will mature within 70 days or by October 15, the average date for frost in NJ. Suggestions for a 2nd crop include:

<u>Root Crops</u>	<u>Leaf Crops</u>	<u>Other</u>
Beets	Lettuce	Broccoli Rabe
Carrots	Mache (like lettuce)	Broccoli
Fennel (bulbous)	Mesclun Mixes	Peas
Scallions	Pak Choi	
Kohlrabi	Arugula	
Leeks	Spinach	
Radishes	Chard	
	Kale	
	Cabbage	

- A friend and fellow gardener mentioned that the days to maturity on seed packets should be multiplied by 1.5 in the fall. This will account for the slower growth rate due to the shortening days of autumn as compared to the lengthening days of spring.

- Arugula, Spinach, and Lettuce are best seeded out near the end of August when the evening temperatures consistently drop into the 60's and upper 50's. These crops will endure the early frosts and the spinach actually becomes sweeter as the temperatures become cooler!
- The length of harvest time for the crops listed above can be extended by erecting low tunnels in October, as pictured at right, to mitigate any issues from early frosts. Low tunnels consist of hoops placed about 5' apart and covered with a fabric like Agribon, allowing air to pass yet protecting the plants from early frosts. You may wish to look into making or buying the hoops and the cover fabric now, so you will be prepared come October. The hoops can be easily be made from ½" poly pipe or more elaborate from bending metal piping.
- Squash plants may be wilting from squash borer. If so, discard the plant (best to find the borer and kill it as well) and plant one of the crops mentioned above.
- August is the time to get your orders in for the fall planting of Garlic!



Trees

- Make certain plantings from this spring as well as trees planted last year continue to receive weekly irrigation during periods without rainfall. Remember, for a newly installed tree, every inch of caliper size (the diameter of the trunk 6" above the soil) will equate to 1 year of additional care and watering. Hence, a tree with a 3" caliper will require 3 years of added care.
- Many tree limbs will gradually hang down lower following the flush of new growth in June/July. If you did not

complete this pruning in July, early August is still okay for pruning. Removing the lowest tier of branches on a shade or small tree (as seen at above right) makes the Garden look more open and able to ‘breath’ again. It also allows more light to reach the plants beneath the tree.



- Resist the urge to vigorously prune shrubs and trees. Heavy pruning during August and September will result in the robust growth of new shoots that will not become ‘hardened off’ by the first frost, resulting in not only their death, but potentially the death of the plant! Removal of broken branches or light pruning or shaping is still appropriate.



- If planting a containerized tree in August or this fall, make certain to break up the root mass before planting. Often, the roots will encircle the soil, most likely leading to girdling roots. Girdling roots literally choke the trunk of the tree over time, leading to premature death (as pictured above). As brutal as it sounds, simply chop up the root mass of the containerized plant with an ax or soil knife (as seen top right) and plant the tree at or just above the soil level. Water the tree weekly and cover the root mass with 2-3” of mulch. It is typically not necessary to stake the tree and they typically respond better by developing a sturdier stem without staking.

Bulbs

- It is time to start to think about ordering bulbs! Bulb orders should be placed for a September or October delivery. If you are interested in any of the autumn blooming *Cyclamen*, *Crocus* or *Colchicum* (as pictured in the closing image at Wave Hill below), early August is the time to place your order for a September delivery and planting, since many bulbs will quickly sell out!
- One bulb that has been overlooked by many gardeners for an August bloom is *Prospero*



autumnale, previously known as *Scilla autumnalis* as seen at right. Although the light pink flower spikes only reach 8-10" tall, the clumps readily grow in size and slowly produce seedlings that appear nearby.

- Another great overlooked plant is *Lycoris squamigera*, commonly called Naked Lady, as seen below right. Order now from various bulb distributors and plant 6-7" deep, the plants will produce Daffodil like foliage in spring, but no flowers! Just like Daffodils, the foliage gradually flops and turns brown come June. As late July and August



approach, a stalk suddenly appears from the ground without any foliage and yields numerous pink trumpet shaped flowers. The common name originated from the simple fact that they bloom naked or without foliage! In addition, just like the *Colchicum* pictured in the closing image, the plants are deer resistant and unfortunately, too little used! The image above was taken at Chanticleer Gardens. Once established, plants can be dug and moved about the garden once the foliage goes dormant. Transplants take several years to reestablish and bloom.

Turf

- Continue to cut the lawn as growth and rainfall permit. Maintain a higher cutting height of 3" to reduce the stress from the heat and lighter rainfalls.
- The third and fourth weeks of August are the ideal time for reseeding or seeding new turf areas. The evening dew becomes heavier and helps to ensure proper growth and the warm soils allow proper root development throughout the fall before winter's chill. Supplemental irrigation will be necessary if rainfall is light.
- Wait to fertilize turf until cooler weather once again



returns in September through November.

General

- August is a great time to evaluate your garden and see what plants might be growing too tall, or are outcompeting neighbors or are simply old and need to be updated with something new! Perhaps the color palette is a bit too pale and needs a bit of enhancement with something bold like the orange flowered, Hummingbird attracting *Iris domestica*

(previously *Belamcanda chinensis*) pictured above. Although I have read it is invasive, my experience has been they do develop of seedlings, but they do not travel far from the original plant. Or, perhaps the garden needs a different summer flower shape, such as a globe. Our native *Allium cernuum* (Nodding



Onion) as seen above would be a good solution there! OR, perhaps you are a fan of Azaleas and regret the blooms of May are far too fleeting! In that case, consider the Plum Leaf Azalea (*Rhododendron prunifolium*). Pictured above blooming on July 21, I have seen them still in bloom in August with pink, red, salmon and orange flowers! Regardless, August is a great time to evaluate your garden and decide what is needed, since late August is a great time to plant!



Bruce Crawford – Manager of Horticulture, Morris County Parks Commission