

My Yard – August

The Machete Garden

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, plantnebraska.org

“The autumn garden is a machete garden.” Lauren Springer

It's not unusual for gardens to get a little out of hand by August. Even with diligent weeding, some of the plants that were only supposed to grow 3 feet high failed to read the nursery description and are looking us in the eye. If it seems like it's time for a machete, maybe it is.

It's great to leave seedheads as a winter food source for birds and other wildlife, but if plants have fallen or are likely to, cutting them back now may mean new growth that can withstand winter snow and ice. If weeds have gotten out of hand, pull them out or simply remove as many seedheads as possible. In large areas, they can be smothered with newspapers, paper bags or cardboard covered with grass clippings.

If there isn't a lot of interest in your own yard right now, a trip around town will give you some clues about what to plant next year. Public gardens like the Sunken Gardens, campus landscapes and the Backyard Farmer garden are great places to get ideas for future plantings.

For bird-watchers, August is the time to put out hummingbird feeders. Even if you haven't noticed them in your landscape, they have probably visited. Feeders make them more noticeable and provide nectar at a time when heat and dry weather have slowed nectar production for most flowering plants.

If you want to gather plants for dried arrangements, here are a few tips:

- It's best to collect plants on a cool morning and strip the lower leaves. Most plants should be gathered before fully dried.
- Spiky flowers are best picked when only half the spike is blooming (salvia, goldenrod, larkspur, gayfeather).
- Grasses can be harvested when the seedheads are ripe and stems are still green.
- Seedheads or pods should be collected soon after they mature so they don't shatter: sumac, *Baptisia*, poppie, prairie coneflower, etc. Cattails should be collected when they first turn brown.
- Flowers that remain the same after picking, like yarrow, can be picked fully open but before color begins to fade.
- Hydrangea blossoms are an exception. They should be dry before cutting and then hung upside down so the stems will dry straight.

