

My Yard – September

The garden slows down

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, plantnebraska.org

“By late September the plants are concentrating all their energies on this process—on writing down their secrets on tiny seed tablets and then encouraging someone, anyone, to take them out into the world. Recipes, instruction manuals, last testaments: by making seeds the plan condenses itself, or at least everything it knows, into a form compact and durable enough to survive winter, a tightly sealed bottle of generic memory dropped onto the ocean of the future.” Michael Pollan



For many gardeners, fall is their favorite season. The weather is cooler, the activity level is slower and there's a sense of completion, of winding down. The garden is still growing and intact so it's a good time to take a critical look and make decisions for the future. There are still plenty of things to do and, since frost can occur as early as mid-September, there's no assurance of a leisurely fall. Here's a few things for the to-do list:

- Think about what you want to plant for future years, and where. Goals might include: creating outdoor living spaces; adding fall and winter color or structure; attracting birds and other pollinators.
- Fall is a great time for planting shrubs and trees; it gives them time to establish root systems during cooler weather and the soil is not likely to freeze until much later in the season.
- Make sure existing woody plants are well-watered going into winter and water them as needed until the ground freezes hard. Evergreens lose moisture through their needles all winter long; adequate water in their root zones helps prevent winter burn and desiccated needles.
- Divide and add perennials to boost the landscape in coming years.
- Pull or deadhead the most problematic weeds. If you have a lot of spotted spurge, the seeds need light to germinate so a heavy layer of mulch should help reduce it. Bindweed is hard to get rid of, but regularly stripping the foliage will help prevent seeds from setting and should eventually weaken the vine.
- Improve garden soil by adding manure, kitchen waste, grass clippings and leaves.
- Lawns can be reseeded early this month, if necessary, to get them established before cold. If soil is compacted, you may want to aerate it.
- If you apply fertilizer or weed-killers, fall is a far more effective time for applications and less likely to harm trees and other plants.

Bringing the Garden Indoors

- Pot up plants to bring indoors for the winter, whether they're temperate plants to overwinter, herbs for cooking or annuals for winter bloom. It's best to slowly acclimate plants to the indoors and get rid of nuisance insects before frost warnings require a quick move.
- If annuals like begonias, coleus, geraniums and impatiens are leggy, it may be better to start new plants by taking root cuttings. (photo above)
- Collect okra seed pods, gourds, sumac seed heads, rose hips and other plant materials for dried arrangements.