

What to Do in September 2022

By Kim Kleman, Master Gardener Volunteer with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester County.

Sept. 3

Perennials: If the garden is all green leaves and no flowers now, and you'd like more color, try late-blooming perennials like asters, purple coneflower, goldenrod, mums, rudbeckia and/or sedum. You can also use plants with variegated leaves to brighten up a shady spot.

Flowers: Many flowers that are annuals in our climate are perennials in more temperate areas, including begonia, coleus, and geranium. If you take insect and disease-free cuttings of these plants now and grow them indoors, you'll have color in winter, and good-sized plants ready to go outside in the spring.

Fruits and Vegetables: Continue to plant greens throughout the next few weeks. Sow arugula, bok choy and other Asian cabbages, lettuce, kale, spinach, and other fast growing greens. You can also plant radishes and turnips for a late fall harvest. A cold frame can extend the harvest into early winter or beyond with additional protection.

Trees and Shrubs: Trees and shrubs are beginning to slow growth in preparation for winter. Following any drought restrictions, providing an inch of water weekly (inclusive of rainfall) helps to reduce stress to woody plants. Trees and shrubs should not be fertilized at any time unless there is a demonstrated need. Fertilizing and pruning at this time may disrupt the hardening off process and increase vulnerability to winter injury. New growth that appears this fall could die when freezing temperatures arrive.

Lawns: As cool weather returns, September is a big month to establish or spruce up cool-season lawn grasses in the Northeast. If you plan to seed, overseed or sod the lawn, take the time to choose the proper seed for your conditions and properly prepare the soil for planting. Contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

Houseplants: If you have a bright sunny window or artificial lighting and want to try growing herbs indoors for winter use, choose those that tolerate indoor conditions and are easy to start from seed. You can plant successions of fast growing annuals and biennials to replace those that slow or stop growing. Try basil, chervil, cilantro and parsley. Chives are a perennial that tolerates indoor conditions. Other perennial herbs, such as oregano, rosemary, sage, and thyme can be difficult to sustain indoors.

General: Document good-looking views in the garden with lots of photos, so you can assess things. What worked? What didn't? (You think you'll remember this come spring, but you won't.) Early fall is the perfect planting time to fill in bare areas and remedy problems. While you're outside, keep an eye out for spotted lanternfly (SLF) adults. SLF is a major agricultural threat that can kill crops (grapes, fruit trees and others) and affect landscape plants. See <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/environment/invasive-species-exotic-pests/spotted-lanternfly/> Report sightings to spottedlanternfly@agriculture.ny.gov

Sept. 10

Perennials: Hardy spring bulbs may be planted now, even in dry soil. Consider planting them around daylilies, ferns, hostas and other plants that can hide bulb foliage that withers in late spring.

Flowers: Container gardening isn't only for summer. This is the perfect time to pot up cool-season plant arrangements including annual salvia, chrysanthemums, ornamental cabbage and kale. Use a container planting mix instead of garden soil. Hardy perennials such as bergenia, coral bells, and hellebore may winter over in a container if protected from saturated soil and ice cover. (You may plant hardy spring bulbs between them.)

Containers that are 14 inches in diameter or larger will insulate roots better than smaller pots, and poly resin pots can withstand the elements, where terracotta may crack outdoors in winter .

Fruits and Vegetables: Keep up with the vegetable harvest and pick herbs for freezing or drying. If pests attack crops that are almost finished, is it worth the effort to eliminate the pests or save the plants? There's still time to put in some fast maturing fall crops where main season types once grew. Or consider getting a jump on fall cleanup and growing a cover crop instead. Apples, peaches, plums, pears, blackberries, blueberries, grapes, and raspberries are ripening. Remove damaged and fallen fruit that could attract or harbor pests.

Trees and Shrubs: You can plant or transplant needle-leaved evergreens through mid-October, such as cedar, pine, spruce and yew; and spring-flowering shrubs and trees such as forsythia, lilac, crabapple and redbud. The plants should have at least 6 to 8 weeks of optimal growing conditions before the ground freezes. Broad-leaved evergreens (andromeda, boxwood, holly, rhododendron, etc.) and some slow to establish trees (bald cypress, ginkgo, maple, magnolia, and willow) are best planted in early spring. For information on how to plant, transplant, and aftercare, including proper watering and mulching, contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

Lawns: If you are seeding the lawn, the seed must have good contact with (well-prepared) soil and adequate moisture for best results. The soil surface must be kept evenly moist for germinating seed and newly emerged grass seedlings, but too much water can wash them away. Check daily and apply water as needed, if local drought restrictions allow. To encourage "deep" rooting, gradually reduce watering over a few weeks, and allow the soil surface to dry once the grass has filled in enough to obscure most of the ground. If needed, you can use a starter fertilizer at that time. Even if you're not seeding this year, fall is the best time to fertilize cool-season grasses (not spring!). Do so this month, following recommended quantities on the bag. Contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

Houseplants: Bring in houseplants about a month before you turn on the heat. This means you should be readying them for the move right about now by removing any pests, pruning, or repotting them if needed. Keep plants newly returned indoors separate from those that remained inside a for month or so, until you are sure they don't harbor pests.

General: Continue to remove weeds, especially those that are setting seed. As you work, keep an eye out for the spotted lanternfly (SLF). See a checklist at <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/sites/nysipm.cornell.edu/files/shared/documents/SLF-checklist.pdf> Inspect objects before transporting them elsewhere. This invasive pest is spreading from Pennsylvania, where it was originally found, to other states in the Mid-Atlantic, New England, and recently as far as Indiana, Michigan and North Carolina. SLF is a major agricultural threat that can kill crops (grapes, fruit trees and others) and affect landscape plants. The spotted lanternfly has been confirmed in all boroughs of New York City, some areas in the Hudson Valley, Long Island, and the Southern Tier. To learn more about the impact of this invasive pest, including how to spot and report any lanternflies you may find, see <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/environment/invasive-species-exotic-pests/spotted-lanternfly/> and <https://agriculture.ny.gov/spottedlanternfly>

Sept. 17

Perennials: Divide and transplant spring blooming perennials such as hosta, iris, garden phlox and peony, and more. Peonies prefer a sunny location in fertile, well-drained soil. Remember not to plant them more than two inches deep for best blooms.

Flowers: Dig up and store tender bulbs and tubers such as caladium and tender begonias. Wait until frost kills the tops of cannas, dahlias and gladiolus. In warmer zones (USDA Zone 7 or higher) cannas, dahlias and

gladiolus may overwinter in the ground. In the cooler areas and microclimates of those zones, an insulating layer of mulch for protection may improve the plants' survival.

Fruits and Vegetables: Continue to harvest main season crops such as green beans, beets, carrots, cucumbers, greens, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, summer squash, and planting fast-maturing greens, radishes and turnips. You can use thinnings of young greens in salads. Tree fruit such as apples and pears continue to ripen. Pick pears when they are fully colored but still a bit hard and finish ripening them off the tree. Blemish-free, ripe apples and pears will last 2 to 6-7 months if stored at 32 degrees F.

Trees and Shrubs: Don't prune unless you find dead, damaged or diseased branches or stems. Removing branches of spring-flowering shrubs that have already set buds, such as azaleas and rhododendrons, forsythia, hydrangea, lilac and others will mean fewer blooms next year. Wait until oak trees are dormant (November through March) before removing branches that may still be alive to reduce the risk of oak wilt.

Lawns: Don't cut a newly seeded lawn until the grass is at least 4 inches tall. Make sure mower blades are sharp. Dull blades can rip seedlings from the soil and shred the tips of lawn grass blades, causing moisture loss and creating entry points for diseases. Dull blades also increase the amount of fuel consumed by mowing machines.

Houseplants: If plants are not going to fit in their usual indoor space and you don't have room to accommodate them at their current size, consider pruning or making smaller divisions that will work in your space. Many houseplants respond well to pruning by as much as half. If yours do, you can also plan for extra growth by cutting them back when you put them back outside next summer. You can give away extra divisions to or trade them with friends (using pots you don't want any more that are wasting space). Donate extra empty containers to a thrift store.

General: To increase the organic matter in the garden soil, add aged manure, compost or leaf mold this month or next. Adult spotted lanternflies (SLF) may be laying eggs on many surfaces and types of objects now, including compost bins, containers, and garden equipment. See a checklist at <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/sites/nysipm.cornell.edu/files/shared/documents/SLF-checklist.pdf> Inspect objects before transporting them elsewhere. SLF is a major agricultural threat that can kill crops (grapes, fruit trees and others) and affect landscape plants. To learn more about the impact of this invasive pest, including how to spot and report any lanternflies you may find, see <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/environment/invasive-species-exotic-pests/spotted-lanternfly/> and <https://agriculture.ny.gov/spottedlanternfly>

Sept. 24

Perennials: Consider leaving some plants standing this fall to help feed the birds and provide winter interest in the garden. Good candidates include purple coneflowers, rudbeckia, tall sedum, and switchgrass.

Flowers: Sow seeds of hardy annuals such as pansy, sweet alyssum and viola in gaps in flower borders for early blooms next year.

Fruits and Vegetables: Keep up with the harvest. Too much to manage? Share with a food pantry and others. Clean up and compost healthy vegetable plants as they finish production. Dispose of diseased plant parts. Bury deeply or bag and dispose of plants that are infested with insects and mites. If you are not using a space for more crops, consider planting a cover crop. Begin planting bunching onions, garlic and shallots now. Garlic lovers may enjoy the Hudson Valley Garlic Festival at Cantine Field in Saugerties NY next weekend, Saturday, October 1 and Sunday, October 2, 2022.

Trees and Shrubs: Don't worry if pines and other conifers are dropping some inner needles. It's normal this time of year. After a very dry summer, if there is scant rain throughout fall, evergreens would appreciate

occasional watering. This helps to keep them well hydrated when water is not available from frozen ground, and helps to prevent desiccation or winterburn of the foliage.

Lawns: You'll likely be mowing for another month or two. Don't bother bagging grass clippings and some leaves that can be mowed to disappear into the turf. These will return some nitrogen and add organic matter to the soil. If the leaves still clump after an extra pass with the mower, collect them to add to a compost pile.

Houseplants: Make sure you water well enough such that water drains out of the bottom of the pot. Giving plants just enough water for the soil to get wet but not drain can lead to salt buildup. A sign of potential problems is a white crust of minerals on the sides of the pot or in the soil. Carefully remove mineral buildup in soil with a tiny trowel or spoon, brush it off the pot, and flush the soil to remove excess minerals. Add fresh potting mix if needed. Going forward, water well enough that water drains out of the bottom of the pot, without keeping the soil soggy.

General: Adult spotted lanternflies (SLF) may be laying eggs on trees, many surfaces and types of objects now, See a checklist at <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/sites/nysipm.cornell.edu/files/shared/documents/SLF-checklist.pdf> Inspect objects before transporting them elsewhere. SLF is a major agricultural threat that can kill crops (grapes, fruit trees and others) and affect landscape plants. To learn more about the impact of this invasive pest, including how to spot and report any lanternflies you may find, see <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/environment/invasive-species-exotic-pests/spotted-lanternfly/> and <https://agriculture.ny.gov/spottedlanternfly>