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August Tips

PERENNIALS, ANNUALS AND BULBS

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- Late-blooming perennials, such as Helianthus, Helenium, Heliopsis, and Rudbeckia, make great color displays in the fall landscape.
- Looking for a refreshing color combination for late summer and early autumn? Try white garlic chives *Allium tuberosum* with pink turtlehead *Chelone lyonii*. Be sure to remove the seed heads of the garlic chives to prevent its invasiveness.
- With a little watering and mulching, most fibrous-rooted perennials can be moved during any season. Move them in some of their own of soil, and don't let them wilt. Fleshy-rooted and tap-rooted perennials, however, are best moved when dormant.
- White Baby's Breath, Gypsophila paniculata 'Bristol Fairy' (perennial), and lavender statice, Limonium tataricum angustifolium (annual), make great round fillers for the full-sun, perennial border.
- A superb fall perennial is the native Gentian *Gentiana septemfida lagodechiana*. Abundant, brilliant, dark-blue flowers are featured on 2 foot stems. Give it sun to part shade and moist, organic soil with pH 6.5 to 7.
- Start selecting your favorite bulb varieties now by searching out bulb catalogs. It is time to order so bulbs can be planted this fall.
- Stonecrop sedum *Sedum spectabile* is a succulent, pest-resistant perennial which grows about 18 inches high. Flat clusters of magenta-pink flowers open in late summer, attracting both honeybees and butterflies. Since its flower heads turn reddish-bronze and persist into winter, this easy-to-grow plant can be the backbone of the fall garden. The flower clusters are also attractive in dried arrangements. The cultivar 'Autumn Joy' is outstanding.
- For dried winter arrangements, flowers with petals in bright yellow, orange, pink and blue colors preserve best. Red and purple become darker and less attractive; white flowers usually become buff or tan in a short time.
- Gold and silver chrysanthemum *Chrysanthemum pacificum* has a compact habit, making it great for ground cover, edging, specimen, or container planting. Its clusters of golden, button-like flowers and gray-green leaves with a silver margin give the plant its name.
- During hot, dry, August days, avoid deep cultivation in your flower beds. Loosening the soil under these conditions reduces water uptake by increasing loss of soil water and damaging surface roots. Plants often look much worse after cultivation than before.

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- Some unusual flowers you may see thriving in the heat of August include acidanthera (also called *Abyssinian Gladiolus*) which bears fragrant, white flowers with dark-lilac centers and resembles gladioli; crocosmia, 24- to 30-inch tall yellow, orange, or scarlet flowers; and *Galtonia candicans* (summer hyacinth) with a loose, white, hyacinth-like inflorescence.
- The best time to buy chrysanthemums is in late summer as soon as they become available. For a longer blooming period, choose plants that are just coming into bud instead of those already in full bloom.
- If the cutting garden looks bedraggled, clear out the annuals that have finished blooming or are overgrown. Mulch empty areas to deter weeds.
- Oriental poppies can be safely planted, transplanted, or divided this month. Plant these hardy, long-lived perennials in well-drained soil in full sun.
- Take cuttings of favorite annuals or sow seeds in pots for winter flowering indoors. The following bedding plants root easily: coleus, geraniums, impatiens, wax begonias, and fuchsia. Plant calendula, ageratum, marigold, stock, impatiens, and snapdragon from seed.
- Petunias vary their growth habits according to temperature and day length. At temperatures of 62 degrees F and below, petunias will be branched, bushy, compact, and multi-flowered. From 63 to 75 degrees F, day length affects growth habit. If plants receive less than 12 hours of sunlight at these temperatures, petunias will be single-stemmed and have only a single flower; with more sunlight, petunias branch and increase flowering. At over 75 degrees F, day length has no effect, and plants will always be tall, leggy, and bear few flowers.
- Plant autumn-flowering crocus, sternbergia, colchicum, and other fall-flowering bulbs as soon as they become available at garden centers. Crocus and sternbergia need full sun; colchicum can be planted in areas receiving light shade.
- Colorful, plastic golf tees can be stuck in the ground to mark the location of dormant plants, such as spring bulbs or perennials.
- Bulbs that will do well in full sun with little water in summer include crocus, native violets, King Alfred daffodils, and bearded iris.
- Keep roots of lilies cool for best growth. Unless foliage of surrounding plants shades the roots, mulch the ground with grass clippings or similar weed-free material.
- Keep tall flowers staked, and remove dead stalks.
- Disbudding chrysanthemums produces larger blooms. Most mums, except spray types, respond well to disbudding.
- Select a good site for spring flower bulbs. For daffodils, dig the soil 12 inches deep in a sunny location. Work in a complete fertilizer and compost.

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- Sow annuals for winter flowering indoors if you have a greenhouse or bright southern window. Calendulas bloom well and last a long time. Browallia, mignonette, ageratum, marigolds, snapdragons, and many others also are good indoor subjects.
- Since container-grown plants have a limited area from which to absorb water, plants in a sunny location may require watering several times a day. Check plants often to avoid water stress. This additional watering may leach nutrients from the media. Biweekly fertilization may be necessary to maintain vigor.
- Many plants in the flower border will make excellent house plants this winter. Among the easy-to-maintain indoors are begonia, coleus, geranium, and ivy. If they are already being grown in containers, it is a simple matter to bring them indoors. Start moving them in at night when the temperature drops below 60 degrees F to maintain their vigor and flower production. Locate plants where they receive sunlight equivalent to what they received outdoors for optimum bloom. If you are planning to take some garden plants indoors to provide for early full bloom, use a sharp knife to root prune them now to a size a little smaller than the pot. Remove all buds and flowers, and cut back the top growth severely. Water well until ready to lift.
- Remove bedding plants that have finished blooming for the season. Replace them with hardy annuals or mums.
- Do not mulch dormant oriental poppies. They prefer hot, sun-baked ground while resting.
- Cut strawflowers intended for dried flower arrangements when the blooms are only half open. Tie small bundles of the flowers together, and hang them upside down in a well-ventilated place to dry.
- Plant bulbs of the hardy amaryllis or magic lily in August as soon as received. They will produce foliage in the spring that dies down by late summer. Clusters of six to nine lily-like, pink flowers borne on 3-foot stalks appear in August. The bulbs will live almost indefinitely and grow better if not disturbed.
- Check on water needs of hanging baskets daily in the summer. Wind and sun dry them much more quickly than other containers.
- Do not allow phlox to go to seed. Seedlings do not come true to parent color and may overtake your planting, giving the impression that the parent plants have reverted.
- Order your spring-flowering bulbs now. A good guideline to use is 'biggest is best' in regard to bulb size. Be careful about so-called "bargain" bulbs as they may be small or of inferior quality.
- If your container annuals pass their prime, remove them and plant new ones. Add more soil mix, thoroughly blending it with the leftover soil. Add a slow-release fertilizer according to the manufacturer's directions to feed the new flowers throughout the months ahead.

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- Take 6- to 9-inch-long cuttings of roses for rooting using a sharp knife. Remove all but the top two or three leaves. Insert the cutting 4 to 6 inches deep in well-prepared soil in bright light. Firm, water well, and cover with an inverted glass jar to conserve moisture. Be sure the cutting does not receive direct sun, or it might overheat.
- Plan changes in your perennial plantings now. Autumn is usually the best time for moving and dividing perennials since the gardening pace has slowed considerably. Add new bulb to your design at the same time. Peonies, bleeding heart, and oriental poppies grow better if left undisturbed, so plan to work around them.
- Many self-sown seedlings of hollyhock, larkspur, columbine, Sweet William, etc. are appearing now. If the parent plant is not a hybrid, the seedling should come true to type.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dom, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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