

Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

September—the Pivotal Month

September is a pivotal or turning point month to gardeners because now we swing into full production for the fall. This is the month when you can fertilize all the potted plants; in fact, some people contend that the fall fertilizing is more important than spring fertilizing. I know it makes a difference on your lawn...but don't fertilize the lawn yet, gotta wait until mid-October/early November for that. You can plant trees and shrubs and sod new lawns or plant grass seeds now. You can put down pre-emergent herbicides for winter weeds. You don't have to worry much about moisture in the soil—especially after that 5-inch rain last week and the 2-inch one this week. About the only other thing you really NEED for your gardens and beds is mulch. (I didn't get to the mulch site this week like I said I might...maybe later.) Mulch for the shrubs and trees, of course, would be native mulch while mulch for the veggie beds would be leaves or compost. A guy at church last week asked if he should kill the weeds before or after putting mulch down. The answer is before. Use whichever type of weed killer you prefer and then go ahead and put the mulch right on top—same day and everything. Weeds don't need sunshine to die (a little humor there).

In Neil Sperry's newsletter last week, he pointed out that, "If you're going to grow stone fruits (peaches, plums, apricots, cherries), you must protect your trees from peach tree borers, and you must do so NOW. Every stone fruit crop must be sprayed at this time every year, from the first year they are planted until they die from some other cause. It's absolutely non-negotiable." Sounds pretty serious to me. Personally, I don't have any stone fruit trees yet, but if I did, I'd be using Neem oil or at least light horticultural oil that is recommended for tree spraying. Once you get peach tree borers, they really do a number on your trees and can greatly affect the quality as well as the quantity of fruit next spring. One bottle of Neem oil will last a long time. Please follow the directions—more is not better.

This is also the month when you can plant many veggies. A little later on (about September 20-25) you can plant transplants of the cole crops; i.e., broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and cabbage; but if you're gonna try to grow cole crops from seed, now is the time to get them started. Now is also a good time to plant your cucumbers, bush beans, kohlrabi, potatoes and summer squash (it's a little too late for winter squash). You might even be able to get a crop from sweet corn—it's a little late but maybe not too late. I haven't seen any seed potatoes. Have you?

Be sure to work in about 3-4 inches of good compost in each bed and whatever fertilizer you use before planting. Fertilizer to be used would be: organic - 9-2-2 or 7-1-1 soil food or bat guano (both available from Gardenville); chemical - 19-5-9 slow-release lawn fertilizer. If you're using chemical fertilizer, use about 1-2 cups per 100 square feet of bed; if organic, use about 2-4 cups per 100 square feet of bed.

Have you noticed all the hummingbirds lately? Know why? It's because lots of summer and fall flowers are in bloom right now. I counted five of them the other day in the bed on the west side of the house. The flowers out there include roses, firebush, red salvia, Russian sage, and dwarf Mexican petunia. If you have feeders out, be sure to change the sugar-water every week. Mix 4 parts sugar to 1 part water and it doesn't have to be colored red; if you've got it, they'll find it.

One of the prettiest flowers you're gonna see now or real soon is the fall aster. It has almost-iridescent blue/purple flowers on a 2-3 feet, mounded bush. It's nothing much to look at all year, but during the fall, it's a show-stopper. I used to have people stop and ask about it when I lived in town. Hope you have some or can see some close by. I'm afraid the deer will eat them here, so I haven't planted any—yet.

Send your comments and/or questions to gardener@gvtc.com.