



July Tips

PERENNIALS, ANNUALS AND BULBS

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- If you have been pinching back your mums this summer, mid-July is the time to stop so they will be able to develop flower buds for the fall.
- Hedera helix 'Buttercup' is an ivy with colorful foliage. It is an excellent ground cover, growing 6 to 8 inches tall, or can be trained to climb. New leaves are bright, yellow-green and later turn to a butter-yellow color. Older leaves are dark green with light veins. Buttercup tolerates a variety of soil conditions in full sun or heavy shade.
- Edible flowers taste best when picked and eaten the same day. Harvest flowers in the morning, after the dew has dried or right before sundown. Excess moisture can cause discoloration and loss of flavor. Leave stems intact when picking and storing; remove them just before serving. Loosely pack flowers in an airtight container with a moist, paper towel folded in the bottom. Add them to the dish as the last step in preparation.
- The dwarf sunflower variety, 'Sunspot,' grows only to two feet, but flower heads are full sized and have edible seeds. It is unusual in ornamental plantings and space saving in the garden.
- Snapdragons should be pinched back after blooming to promote a second flush of bloom.
- To produce the largest flowers, the main stems of dahlias should be kept free of side shoots, allowing only the terminal bud to develop. In larger varieties, a single stalk is the best. Adequate support must be provided to prevent wind damage. Water well.
- If sweet peas are heavily mulched, their roots will be kept cooler and their season prolonged. Use rough, plant litter or grass clippings for mulch. A little shade at mid-day will also help to maintain the quality of the flowers and prolong the blooming season.
- Cut back and fertilize delphinium and phlox to encourage a second show of bloom.
- Sometimes you run into a perennial about which little is known as to its hardiness and habit in your region. If you like the look of the plant, give it a try. Most perennials can be purchased at a reasonable cost, and experimenting with something new can be a lot of fun.
- Many plants are easily increased by layering. Verbenas, euonymus, pachysandra, ivy, daphne, and

climbing roses are some of plants that will root if stems are fastened down on soft earth with a wire and covered with some soil.

- Cutting flowers is best done with sharp shears or a knife to avoid injury to the growing plant. A special pair of cutting scissors may be bought that holds the cut-off stem, allowing the removal to be a one-handed operation. A slanting cut will expose a larger absorbing surface to water and will prevent the base of the stem from being sealed by resting upon the bottom of the vase. It is best to carry a bucket of water to the garden for collecting blooms, rather than the familiar cutting basket.
- Sow seeds of hollyhocks, English daisies, foxgloves, violas, Canterbury bells, and Sweet William now for next year's bloom.
- Geranium cuttings should be made in late July to start plants for winter and spring indoor bloom. To get flowers in the winter months, you may need to install some fluorescent tubes over the bench or shelves where you grow your plants. To make cuttings, use the tips of branches about 4 inches long. Cut off the bottom leaves and stick the cuttings about one third their length in a moist, sand-peat mixture. Roots will develop rapidly, and new plants should be ready for potting in about four weeks.
- Chrysanthemums should be lightly fertilized every two weeks with a water soluble fertilizer. To keep plants compact and full of blooms, pinch out new tip growth until eight weeks before they are to bloom, approximately mid-July. For large exhibition mums, allow only one or two shoots to develop. Stake these shoots, and remove side buds as they start to develop.
- Divide and transplant bearded iris using the vigorous ends of the rhizomes. Discard the old center portion. Cut the leaves back to about 8 inches.
- Propagate bleeding heart and Oriental poppy when growth has stopped and foliage has disappeared, indicating a dormant condition. Dig up a root and cut it into 1- to 2-inch pieces. Plant root pieces in a mixture of sand and rich loam. Keep the soil fairly moist, and soon tiny leaves will shoot up. The new plants will be ready for permanent quarters in the spring.
- Gerbera flowers (African daisy) can last up to two weeks in a vase if the water is kept clean. Since gerbera stems are hairy and easily dirty the water, do not immerse them more than a few inches. Change the water every two days.
- If your annuals are dead, pull them out and add them to the compost pile. You can replant beds with hardy annuals or perennials, such as pansies, calendulas, globe thistles, or sea pinks.
- Protect plants in containers from very high heat caused by light reflection from pavement. Move them to a cooler spot, or shade them during the hottest part of the day. Plants may be moved to a more sheltered location during severe rain or wind storms or as protection from the first fall frosts.
- Get a second bloom from faded annuals by cutting them back to approximately half their height, then fertilize them with 1/2 cup of 5-10-10 fertilizer per square yard of planted area and apply a generous layer of mulch.
- Tall flowers should be staked to prevent damage by wind. Use stakes that are large enough to support the plant, but not too conspicuous. Use soft twine or plastic twist-ties to secure.

- In planning a perennial bed, first assess the site of the garden. Is it shady? Sunny? Filtered shade? Is the soil acid or alkaline? Does the soil tend to be dry or moist? What climatic conditions are usual throughout the year? Is the soil well drained? Sandy? Full of clay? Once these things have been considered, you can develop a list of possible plants for such a location. Then the plan can be made. Time of bloom, height and size of mature plants, and flower and foliage colors and texture are important considerations in planning a perennial garden. Choices of specific plant varieties are very personal. Perennial gardens might include only a number of varieties of the same plant or they might, for instance, include only plants that have gray foliage and white flowers. Choices are countless; the important thing is to know what effect you are trying to achieve.
- Container-grown vegetables and flowers can dry out quickly, especially on a concrete patio in full sun. Daily watering may be necessary; however, the soil should not be soggy or have water standing on top of it. Apply water until it runs out the drainage holes. Clay pots permit additional evaporation from the sides, and watering must be done more often than when plastic pots are used. Small pots dry out faster than large planters. Feel the soil in containers at least once a day and twice on hot, dry days to be certain that plants are getting enough water.

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 Dorn, 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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