



## September Tips PERENNIALS, ANNUALS AND BULBS

Contact: Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

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- Wintergreen *Gaultheria procumbens* makes a great ground cover (2 to 4 inches tall) for sites with sun or light, mid-day shade. This evergreen plant is tolerant of wet soils; loves acid soil (pH 4 to 6.5) with abundant organic matter; and features white, summer flowers and red, fall berries in addition to pleasing, leathery, green foliage. *Gaultheria* is a source of wintergreen oil and is a folk toothache cure due to the presence of a compound similar to aspirin.
- As you select your flowering bulbs to plant this fall, keep in mind that larger caliber bulbs give big, showy displays, but cost more. Smaller caliber bulbs usually are less expensive, with a smaller show, but are great for brightening nooks and crannies in your yard.
- Start taking cuttings of your annual plants to bring indoors and carry through the winter. Geranium, coleus, fuchsia, and other plants do best when stem cuttings are rooted and kept in pots indoors through the winter. Be sure to place pots where they receive plenty of light.
- Fall is a good time to invest in crocus; scilla; narcissus; glory-of-the-snow; and other easy-to-naturalize, hardy bulbs. A mild winter produces an exceptionally fine growing season in the Netherlands and results in a record-breaking crop of flower bulbs that are reported to be of superb quality.
- Bring hanging baskets or pots of begonias indoors for the fall and winter. Return outdoors in the spring.
- Have on hand some heavy paper or cardboard boxes to cover tender garden plants on the first nights of frost. Often if tender plants can be protected from early frosts, they will bloom for several more weeks.
- Bright-colored flowers from spring-blooming bulbs can bring interest to a neutral setting in early spring. Set some in the rock garden or alongside a brick wall this fall. Many of the dwarf species available are ideal.
- If you are not sure which end of the bulb is the top, plant it on its side. The stem will always grow upright.
- When planting ornamentals around the perimeter of a building, leave room behind the foundation plants to paint, put up screens, etc. A tree too close to the house may clog gutters with leaves. Roots can invade drain fields, crack walks, and pierce foundation walls. Leave plenty of space between buildings, houses, and tree plantings.
- Plant lilies this fall for many years of beautiful flowering. Modern hybrids are available in many colors and grow from 2 to 6 feet tall. American-grown hybrid varieties have less trouble with virus disease than the old species types.
- Place rooted cuttings in the cold frame. Unless frost threatens, ventilate frames freely to harden young plants in preparation for overwintering.
- Now is the time to move perennial plants started from seed in midsummer to the nursery row or to their permanent spot in the garden. Mulch after the first hard frost.
- Soak bulbs of winter aconite in water for a few hours before planting.
- Every three to four years, separate crowded lily-of-the-valley crowns. Replant 3 inches apart.



- When planning next year's fall garden, consider the versatile and carefree daylily as a source of fall color to complement chrysanthemums and fall asters. There are several varieties of daylily that will bloom in August and September.
- Mark the spot in your garden where asclepias are so you will not dig them up next spring. Plants are late to break dormancy in spring, but once established, they should not be disturbed.
- To prevent damage to bulbs from moles tunneling in your flower beds, treat the soil with an insecticide to kill the grubs. To avoid damage from mice or other vegetarian rodents, plant the bulbs in cans. Cut both ends from large fruit-drink cans. Bury the cans to their rims. Fill about one-third full of soil, place one bulb in each, and cover to the surface with soil.
- Perennial flowers that will bloom in September include Biglow sneezeweed *Helenium Biglovii*, hardy asters, hardy chrysanthemums, showy stonecrop *Sedum spectabile*, false dragonhead *Physostegia virginiana*, bigleaf sea lavender *Limonium latifolium*, and great azure sage *Salvia Pitcheri*.
- If you enjoy growing wild flowers, collect seed for your garden from many of the summer-flowering types now.
- Plant peonies now, but make sure the crowns are buried only 1 1/2 to 2 inches below ground level. Deeper planting keeps the plants from blooming.
- Root cuttings of such annual bedding plants as begonias, coleus, geraniums, and impatiens. These can overwinter in a bright window and provide plants for next year's garden.
- As the nights become cool, caladiums will begin to lose leaves. Dig them up, allow them to dry, and store them in a warm, dry place. This space can be replanted with Christmas peppers or Jerusalem cherry plants that are easy to grow from seed in pots or with mum transplants that have been grown to flower size.
- Freesia corms can be planted early this month for December flowering. Plant them 2 inches deep in pots, then place outdoors in a shady place. Move pots indoors to a cool location when night temperatures begin to dip below 45 degrees F. Freesias bloom in 10 to 12 weeks from planting.
- Perennial phlox should be divided about every third or fourth year. Early fall and early spring are the best times to plant and transplant them. Divide big clumps into thirds.
- In the coldest parts of the state, it is time to dig gladiolus corms as the leaves yellow. The tops should be cut off 1/2 inch above the top of the corm immediately after digging. After digging, dry the corms (about 10 to 20 days), separate the large corms from the smaller ones, and store them in damp peat moss at 40 to 45 degrees F where there is good air circulation.
- Establish new perennial flower beds; dig, divide, and replant overcrowded beds of cannas, daylilies, violets, and shasta daisies. Spread a liberal amount of organic matter and bulb fertilizer evenly over the area. Mix this into the soil at least 6 to 8 inches deep. Space divisions at least 1 foot apart in all directions so that root competition will not be a problem for several years.
- To plant bulbs, loosen the soil and make a hole with a trowel or bulb planter. Don't mash the bulb into the soil or you may damage the basal plate (bottom of the bulb), causing it to rot.
- Outdoor ferns should be planted in early fall for best results. To have a healthy fern garden, add several inches of leaf mold or peat to the soil before planting.
- Studies on tulip nutrition at NCSU have shown the importance of abundant nitrogen fertilization; 5 ounces of actual N per 100 square feet at planting time and again at leaf emergence is recommended.
- For early blooms in May and June next year, certain annuals can be sown now, including larkspur, nigella, calendula, Shirley poppies, annual scabious, and coreopsis. Sown in the open, they should be well established by the time the cold weather comes.
- Dig out the list of spring-flowering bulbs you made last spring, and start getting them into the ground so you can be among the blissful rather than wistful as next winter snows begin to melt. If you did not get a list started last spring, a few bulbs to consider for starters are snowflake, glory-of-the-snow, early crocus, snowdrop, and winter aconite.
- Plant new Madonna lilies as soon as they arrive. Do not plant them deeper than 1 inch from top of bulb to



ground level.

- Allow a few of the seeds of your favorite delphinium and hollyhock to ripen on their stalks. When mature, plant the seeds at once in a garden bed where they will grow into husky little plants that overwinter well.
- Plant roots of both garden and tree peonies in September or early October so they will have time to become established in the soil before winter. Dig a hole 18 inches across and 18 inches deep for each tuber. Space the holes so that the plants will be at least 3 feet apart. Make sure the roots are buried only 1 1/2 to 3 inches below ground level. Deeper planting keeps the plants from blooming.
- As you plant your spring bulbs, remember that a mass planting of one flower type or color will produce a better effect than a mixture of many colors. Flowers of bulbs stand out more vividly if displayed against a contrasting background. For example, white hyacinths among English ivy, yellow daffodils against a 'Burford' holly hedge, or red tulips towering over a carpet of yellow pansies.
- Sowing seeds of hardy annuals, such as sweet alyssum, pinks, and sweet peas, now will give the seedlings time to get established and develop good root systems before the coldest part of winter. This gives them a head start on growth and flowering next spring.
- A generation or two ago, gardeners overwintered geraniums as house plants. In sunny windows, the plants flowered, but usually grew quite leggy. Development of compact geraniums, such as the cultivars Hollywood and Orbit, provides incentive to try overwintering a few plants. In fact, some geranium producers are growing them as pot plants for fall and winter sales.
- Divide lilies-of-the-valley. Mix organic matter and fertilizer into the soil before replanting.
- Mums can be transplanted while in bloom, which makes them useful for instant landscapes in early autumn. Water thoroughly the day before (or at least several hours before) digging plants, retaining as much of the root system as possible. Dig the new hole, and gently loosen a small amount of soil from the outer soil depth. Water thoroughly after placing the plants to settle them in. As with any transplanting, it is best move mums in early morning or late evening when temperatures are cool. Monitor plants carefully for several days for wilting, and shade briefly during the hotter periods of the day, if necessary.
- Lots of spring bulb fanciers swear by bonemeal for fertilizing their planting beds, but the phosphorus in bonemeal is almost completely unavailable to plants until the soil temperature reaches about 50 degrees F. Bonemeal might aid your bulbs late in the growing season, but it does not aid flowering appreciably. More soluble phosphorus fertilizers may work better in spring.

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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