

September 2010

Most Septembers are blessed with a spell of 'Indian Summer' weather when high temperatures deny the fact that autumn is just around the corner and we have hit the high spot of mellow fruitfulness. Rainfall will be a regular feature, usually in heavy downpours accompanied by thunder and lightning.

Beds and Borders

If autumn is a lean time in your flower borders, fill the gaps with suitable plants or just squeeze a few pots of colour between fading beauties. Every garden centre will have plenty of plants in bloom including the reds, yellows and oranges of perennial rudbeckias, echinacea and helenium and a wide variety of Michaelmas daisies (*Aster Novi-belgii*) that vary in colour from blue, through purples to pink and red.

Unfortunately these autumn bloomers are not without their problems as they are susceptible to powdery mildew disease. However if you see a white powdery deposit on the leaves of Michaelmas daisies this can be easily remedied with sprays of FungusClear Ultra or FungusClear 2 Gun! a couple of weeks apart.

Autumn is nature's best time for planting shrubs and trees. The cooler temperatures above ground mean that shoots, stems and leaves all stop growing - whereas below ground the soil temperature stays warm enough to encourage the spread and growth of roots. If you aim to finish your planting by the end of October, your new plants will be well established before winter sets in.

Plant new roses, shrubs and trees while the soil is still warm. For coloured berries and winter colour consider Cotoneaster, Pyracantha and Callicarpa. For winter and early spring colour look to Viburnum, Mahonia, Camellia and Forsythia. Summer flowers are easily available from shrubs including mock orange (*Philadelphus*), Potentilla and Ceanothus. Autumn colour using Buddleia, Hebes, Hypericum and Hibiscus should be considered.

To prepare soil for planting add plenty of Levington Rose, Tree and Shrub Compost. This special compost will provide the best start for outdoor plants as it contains plenty of plant nutrients to see your new plantings are established as quickly as possible.

Patio

Buy your bulbs from the garden centre early in the season so you have the pick of the bunch when it comes to variety and colour. Some bulbs such as daffodils, chionodoxa, snowdrop, winter aconite, crocus and anemone blanda appreciate being planted in September. Early planting in pots of Miracle-Gro Bulb Booster Compost is a great way to encourage these bulbs to develop a huge root system before the onset of winter. This ensures the plant can

take up plenty of energy next spring so the bulb and its offsets produce flowers for many years to come.

When planting in pots or in soil borders try to get the spacing right allowing at least the width of a bulb between each one. Cover the bulbs to the recommended depth and enrich the surface with a slow release fertilizer such as Miracle-Gro Bulb Booster. This will release nutrients while the soil is warm enough and plants are growing yet will stop completely during cold weather so nutrients are not wasted. Best of all, a slow release plant food like this will hold on to enough nutrients so that it is able to feed emerging bulbs in the spring when they need all the energy to form new flower buds for the subsequent year's blooms.

For winter display you can't rely on flowering plants to produce colour or interest throughout the year. That's why you need to introduce evergreen plants and variegated leaf forms to mix with your chosen flowers. There are several very useful herbs that are evergreen for most of the year, including Thyme and Sage. The common thyme is a hardy perennial with small yellowish leaves and small purple flowers whilst the variegated sage has cream and green splashed leaves with new foliage carrying attractive pink edges. Both herbs can be pinched out regularly to provide useful fresh flavourings to soups and casseroles.

The introduction of a silver leaved perennial such as *Cineraria maritima* 'Silverdust' will supply attractive intricate leaves that will decorate your pot during all but the harshest winters.

Top off your pot with violas in an interesting colour. The small pansy-like plants are generally self-coloured although varieties with 'faces' and 'whiskers' are available. These will flower on and off throughout the year depending on temperature and sunshine. To break the sharp edges of the pot place a couple of variegated ivies or trailing *Veronica peduncularis* 'Georgia Blue' so that the leaves trail over the pot. When put together the collection will provide interest and colour year round. Just remember to water when it is dry, even in winter.

Do visit your garden centre to see the wide variety of plants that they have available for winter containers. If you need ideas look for shrubs such as euonymus, viburnum, senecio and hebe. For winter flowers think about Universal pansies, polyanthus and Daisies (Bellis). Small bulbs such as crocus, anemone and dwarf narcissi such as 'Minnow' and 'Tete a Tete' can also be pushed below the surface of the compost to provide interesting flowers in spring.

TOPICAL TIP

Encourage container grown flowers to continue blooming by applying some extra plant food now such as Miracle-Gro All Purpose Soluble Plant Food. This is particularly important if you used a Multi-Purpose Compost as this growing medium will have run out of nutrients and plants may be looking pale and tired.

Lawn

Dead leaves left on the lawn for a few weeks will encourage bare patches and worm casts. That's why it is important to rake up the leaves at least once a week.

Most lawns will have suffered from wear and tear during the summer and need some attention if they are to wake up next spring looking thick, healthy and attractive. First check over for dead and dying patches of the lawn that have been created by vigorous summer games and general hard wear and tear. To quickly and surely repair them use Miracle-Gro Patch Magic after preparing the soil. Use a rake or a light border fork to break up the hard surface of the soil and then water the soil well. Then sprinkle on Patch Magic to a thin layer that is around 3mm deep and water again.

Miracle-Gro Patch Magic is a revolutionary new combination of grass seed, feed and coir compost that guarantees to grow grass anywhere, even in those tough spots. It's the only patching mix that takes care of the seed so anyone can grow thick, beautiful grass anywhere – satisfaction guaranteed.

The unique compressed and dried coir material absorbs water like a sponge, expanding instantly and changing colour to show it is surrounding each seed in a dark, moist, protective layer. This super absorbent growing material continues to care for the seeds, providing them with nutrients and holding water right next to the seed. This improves establishment offering a patching mix that really works.

As a result Miracle-Gro Patch Magic! promises 50% thicker grass with just half the water. Best of all, in warm weather the protective coir layer changes colour when it dries out so that you can quickly see when the Patch Magic! grass seedlings needs more water.

To help the roots of the remaining grass to spread far and deep, dress the lawn with a special autumn fertilizer as soon as you are able. There are several to choose from. If you have no spreader then the 100m² size of EverGreen Autumn comes complete with a handy dispenser which makes spreading as easy as walking. Those people with a dedicated Evergreen Easy Spreader can buy Evergreen Autumn in bags or boxes, while those people with a top-of-the-range Scotts Evengreen drop spreader should stick with Scotts Autumn Lawn Builder.

Topical Tip

If you are planning to start a new lawn it's the ideal time to kill off all existing growth so that the soil will not be riddled with pernicious weeds. Use the systemic power of Weedol Rootkill Plus to kill any existing grasses and weeds making sure you apply on a still day so that wanted plants are not killed by any spray drift.

Vegetables

Flowers that form on your outdoor tomatoes in September won't have enough time to set fruit and ripen. So instead of letting the plants waste all that energy, it is prudent to pinch out the growing tips so the plant can put all its energy into ripening the fruits already in growth. Don't be tempted to strip the leaves from your tomato plants. They still need these power houses to convert sunlight and fortnightly doses of Tomorite feeding into sufficient energy to produce sweet, full-flavoured tomatoes.

Late crop potatoes should be ready for digging by the middle of September as the green growing stems above ground, called the haulm, start to wither and turn brown. Cut and remove the dying haulm and wait another 10 days before you start digging out your potato crop. Use a flat-tined fork placed well away from the growing point to lift all the potatoes to the surface. Leave them on the surface to dry out for several hours before placing in boxes for storage in a dark, frost-free shed. Use tubers immediately that have been spiked with the fork or show any bruise marks.

Collect all courgettes and marrows while they are still quite small and tasty. Optimum size for eating are 10cm (4") for courgettes and no bigger than 25cm (10") for marrows. Butternut squash that can be stored for winter use should all be picked before the first frost is expected. If they have a hard, rich orange-yellow skin that produces a hollow ring when they are tapped with your knuckle they are ripe enough for storage straight away in a dry, frost-free place. If the skin is pale and soft then place the butternut squash indoors on a sunny windowsill for a few weeks to ripen the fruits before storage.

Onions also need a drying period after harvest before they are stored away. In September when the foliage turns brown and topples over, dig under each bulb with a fork to break the roots and leave for a couple of weeks to start the drying process. After digging out the onions leaving the dead foliage in place, spread them out in wooden trays, exposing them to sunlight on dry days or leaving them in a dry shed on wet ones for up to three weeks. After this drying period you can string up the bulbs to make an onion rope or place in net bags or tights for hanging in a cool, well-lit place. They should store until spring.

Topical Tip

Watch out for caterpillars on winter brassicas such as sprouts and purple broccoli and spray as soon as they are seen with BugClear Gun! for Fruit & Veg.

Fruit

Plenty of fruit will be available for picking in September including autumn raspberries, thornless blackberries, figs, damsons, apples and pears.

Pick early ripening apples such as Worcester Pearmain, James Grieve and Discovery as soon as they are ripe. The first windfalls will give you a clue. Pick carefully by lifting the apple in the palm of your hand and give it a slight twist sideways. If it's ripe it should come away easily with the stalk intact and be ready for immediate eating.

Pears are usually picked before they are ripe enough for eating as they deteriorate quickly if left to fully ripen on the tree. Conference pears, for example, are usually picked when they are full sized, but still hard. In this way sound fruit without any blemishes can be stored in open wooden trays and eaten as they turn ripe.

Weeds

September is the ideal time for killing perennial and woody brushwood weeds such as bramble, bracken nettles, docks, thistles, perennial couch grass and ground elder. The weed plant needs to be actively growing to quickly and effectively absorb the weedkiller and move it right down to the end of the root system, so it's always advisable to water the soil where your weeds are growing a couple of days before treatment. Pick a calm dry day when rain is not expected and mix up your Roundup GC or Weedol Rootkill Plus weedkiller concentrate in a pressure sprayer according to the directions on the box. Spray carefully to lightly wet all the weed leaves, but avoid all spray and spray drift getting on to cultivated plants and desired vegetation including lawn and decorative grasses. These are not selective weedkillers and they will kill all green plants.

Japanese Knotweed can be treated with Roundup Tree Stump and Rootkiller using a unique method that inoculates the stems. Successful kill of this weed is not difficult or time consuming during August or September when the weed is in bloom. Amateur gardeners are advised to cut the stems of the plants in late summer, approximately 200mm above the base of the cane and 40mm above a node. Rupture the central stem tissue with a screwdriver and apply 10ml of a 20% solution of Roundup Tree Stump & Root Killer into the hollow stem within 15 minutes of cutting using the 10ml disposable pipette supplied with the pack. For the first time, killing Japanese Knotweed is deadly simple and extremely effective for amateur gardeners.

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL. USE PESTICIDES SAFELY

BugClear™ Ultra Gun!™ and BugClear™ Ultra Vine Weevil Killer contain acetamiprid. BugClear™ Gun!™ for Fruit & Veg contains pyrethrins. BugClear™ for Fruit & Veg contains rape seed oil. FungusClear Ultra contains triticonazole. FungusClear 2 Gun! contains myclobutanil. Home Defence Ant Stop! Granules contain spinosad. RoseClear® 4 Gun!™ contains sulphur and fatty acids. SlugClear™ contains metaldehyde. Verdone® Extra contains fluroxypyr, clopyralid and MCPA. Weedol® Max Gun!™ contains pelargonic acid.