

The Garden in August

By Rachel Anderson, Certified Professional Horticulturalist

It's a rare day that I don't come home with a few plants from the Nursery. My sweet and understanding husband kindly points out that our yard is getting pretty full, but it sure is lovely! My stepsons have both observed that there may not be any more space for more plants, but our garden is the best on the block! At one point this summer, even I could see how almost out of control things had gotten, so Anna (a friend and co-worker with a similar plant addiction) and I decided to go on a plant fast. That meant no plants for one week, even if they came to us for free! We solemnly shook hands and vowed not to succumb to our addiction. Well, as you can imagine, that lasted about one day - barely! We quickly justified our plant excess by explaining that we don't spend much money on other areas in our lives, i.e. new clothing. (If any of you have seen me around the Nursery, then you know this is true). Besides, plants are so beautiful! We don't feel too badly about our plant addiction because, as addictions go, it could be a lot worse. Anyway, there's always the middle of winter to try a plant fast again!

In the ornamental garden:

- Deadhead lavender. I like to use a pair of hedging shears for this task because it makes short work of it. Be sure not to go too far into old wood, as lavender tends not to re-sprout if you go too far down. However, you do want to trim down into the new growth a bit. This way you are helping to prevent an open woody center, which is so typical of some lavender. Bear in mind that if your lavender is already sprawling open in the center and really woody, it may be time to replace it. Lavender is a fairly short lived perennial, and usually only at it's best for five to seven years.
- Divide bearded Iris. Do this every two to three years to ensure healthy plants and maximum blooms. Save four to five rhizomes for your new patch, and replant the remaining in other areas of your yard or share with your neighbors.
- Towards the end of August, the Nursery will be starting to get in our bulbs for fall (I know - fall already?!). Look for bearded Iris and fall-blooming crocus and colchicum. Get these in the ground as soon as possible to get the best blooms this fall.
- Be on the lookout for seasonal leaf drop on Rhododendrons, and needle drop on most conifers. The inner leaves of rhodies and conifers turn yellow to brown and fall off in somewhat alarming quantities. Many people come to the Nursery worried that there is something really wrong with their plants, when in reality what they're seeing is perfectly normal. That's just how they grow and mature. Since this summer has been so dry, the leaf drop may be more pronounced than in past years.
- Deadhead dahlias. They're in full swing right now and, to keep them going strong, continue to pick flowers for bouquets. Don't have any dahlias in your garden? Well! Come by the Nursery and pick up a few because everyone needs dahlias! Their wide range of colors, shapes, and sizes are unrivaled this time of year.
- In August many plants begin to look kind of tired, regardless of how carefully you water, mulch, and fertilize. However, August is also the time when many plants come into their own, such as asters, coneflowers, rudbeckia, and grasses. Browse the Nursery to see what looks great this season.
- WATER! Our summer has been super dry (and lovely, I might add). Things that you don't normally water because they're so well established might just need a little extra help this year.

In the edible garden:

- Be on the lookout for powdery mildew on squash, grapes, and roses. This is a fungus that tends to show up in times of drought (contrary to what most people think when they think of mildew) and when plants are poorly fertilized. It also seems to show up when night temperatures are cool and days are hot. Pick off the worst of the mildewy leaves, and step up the watering if you haven't done so already.
- Late summer marks a decrease in garden pests, however one that is still going strong is the cabbage butterfly. You've all seen it whether you recognized it or not. The cabbage butterfly is smallish and a pretty, creamy white with one to four black spots on its wings. Its flight pattern is pretty spastic and comical. They look drunk! They typically lay their eggs on brassicas (cabbage, broccoli, kale, etc.), which hatch into tiny (at first) green caterpillars which can grow up to one-inch long. They'll leave your kale looking more like green swiss cheese! There are a few ways to combat this pest. The first line of defense is to use floating row covers, which prevent the butterfly from laying eggs in the first place. This is the best prevention. Another approach is hand-squishing the eggs and larvae while they're still small and doing minimal damage. The eggs are about the size of a pinhead and are white to creamy yellow. They're laid singly, as opposed to in clusters. Another option is to use BT when you see the young larvae, but this should be your last resort.
- Harvest your garlic if you haven't done so already. By now the tops should be withering. If you wait too long the outermost skins on the bulbs will start to fall away causing the garlic to come apart in the ground.
- Sow veggies for a fall and over-wintering crop. If you are starting from seed, be sure to keep your seedbed moist and cool to ensure good germination. The cool soil also helps to prevent premature bolting, especially if you are planting starts. Some great choices for this time of year are cilantro, scallions, spinach, Swiss chard, peas for fall harvest, lettuce, and kale.

I love being outside working in the garden. I love the connection I feel when my hands are in the soil. I love that plants are the enabling factor there. If plants are an addiction that keep me going out to the garden, making observations, making mistakes, and learning more every day, then please keep the plants coming! This can't be a bad thing. Happy gardening!



About the author:

Rachel has been gardening since childhood, thanks to her mom, and has been part of the team at Christianson's since 2002. She's a Certified Professional Horticulturist with a passion for roses and vegetable gardening. Rachel and her family enjoy gardening together and now share their urban garden with a menagerie of ducks, chickens, two cats, and a dog.

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