

SEPTEMBER HORT BY MARILYN GUIDROZ

Okay, ready, set.....no wait! This is the month for planning your landscape and garden areas. Careful planning ahead can save you a lot of time, energy, money and regrets. It is still summer weather and Valley Center can be quite hot and dry this month. Don't worry, next month is the best planting time of the year. Try to hold off your Fall planting for a few more weeks.

Meanwhile let's get started with a list of reflective questions:

First, what is working in the garden right now? Enjoy the bright blooms of the drought resistant sages (Salvias), perennial sedums, and warm season flowers and vegetables that are still going strong. Continue to water deeply (unless the plant is summer dormant) especially if the hot, dry winds arrive.

Second, what changes do you want to make? If any plant choices have been less than pleasing to you in the garden this year it is time to clear them out and prepare the soil for new ones. Evaluate the general condition of your soil and make necessary improvements such as working in organic amendments and topping with organic mulch. This is also the time to repair or replace irrigation and drainage systems.

Third, are you ready for the fire season? The annual grasses and weeds should already be cut back to the ground, wood piles need to be located away from the house and surrounding shrubs need to be irrigated to maintain fire resistance.

Mid-September to mid-October is the time to divide irises and to purchase the best (plumpest) spring-flowering bulbs to save and plant later. However, now is the time to plant Tazetta hybrids (Narcissus) bulbs in drifts along paths. The drought-resistant corms of Chasmanthe, Crocosmia, Freesia, and Watsonia are also available to plant now.

OCTOBER HORT BY MARILYN GUIDROZ

It's here! The very best month of the year has finally arrived. Everything looks and feels better. Now we can GO. It is a green light for gardening. Nursery stock is plentiful.

Rule number one: Do your homework. Plant permanent additions to the landscape that have enough room to grow to their natural shape without a fight. Unnecessary pruning to keep a plant smaller wastes water, time and energy and never lets the plant grow or bloom properly.

Rule number two: Buy small. Plants with smaller root systems suffer less transplant shock and adapt to the new environment better than larger sizes. Shop around and save money. Purchase only healthy looking specimens.

Rule number three: Group plants together that share the same watering requirements, sun exposure and soil conditions. If the plant needs good drainage, such as lavender and rosemary, install on top of soil mounds within the planting area.

Cool Season Vegetables - Pull up the last remains of the summer vegetables and flowers. Now is the time to plant cool-season flowers and vegetables for winter and spring. One word of caution, be careful to buy only the winter varieties at the nursery. Sometimes the summer flowers and vegetables are still out.

Wildflowers - October is the ideal month to plant glorious wildflowers. The winter rains should take care of most of the watering needs. Select an area that receives six to eight hours of full sun. Lightly rake the soil to a depth of only 1 inch. Spread the wildflower seeds blended with four parts sand or soil to one part seeds for a more even coverage. Cover seeds with a layer of soil no more than 1/16" deep. Keep soil moist for 4 to 6 weeks. Reduce the water frequency gradually once the seedlings grow 1 to 2 inches tall. Protect the seeds and seedlings from birds by spreading garden netting over the area supported by stakes and weighted down with rocks or wire staples. The beauty of native wildflowers is that they will naturally reseed themselves year after year in most cases.

Fall Color-Seasonal foliage color adds charm to any garden. Purchase the plants that show the most pleasing color at this time of year. Among the most commonly planted are the Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar*), Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*), Crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*), Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), and my all time favorite, Chinese pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*).

Fall flowering trees and vines are also something to consider for the garden. You will notice the Hong Kong orchid tree (*Bauhinia x blakeana*), Floss silk tree (*Chorisia speciosa*), Flamegold tree (*Koelreuteria elegans*) and Goldenrain tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*), which has lovely seed capsules that hang on for a long period of time. Two colorful vines are the Cup-of-gold vine (*Solandra maxima*) and the Flame vine (*Pyrostegia venusta*).

Bulbs -Purchase only the best and plumpest bulbs. They will perform better than the slim ones. Plant daffodils and Dutch iris once the soil and air temperatures cool off. It is best to wait until next month to plant anemones and ranunculus. Store them in a dry, cool area such as the garage. Refrigerate hyacinth, tulip and crocus bulbs in the lettuce drawer for six to eight weeks before planting in December.

NOVEMBER HORT BY MARILYN GUIDROZ

Rain? No rain? What is a gardener to do? That is the question for this month. Those of us who have ever tried to predict this never really know for sure.

While the rest of the country knows that winter means cold and what to do about it, Southern California is a very different story. This is the time of year that our summer dormant plants begin to wake up and grow! Native plants green up, Mediterranean

plants look for more water, and the succulents like Aloes, Aeoniums, Cotyledons, and Senecios perk up and look great! This is also the time for our roses to give the best blooms.

Our peculiar weather pattern is not only seasonal, with wet winters and dry summers, but cyclical as well. We will have several years of good rains followed by several years of drought. This is our normal pattern. A wise gardener knows that when there is abundant rain our plants need protection from TOO much water, and when there are drought years (usually seven in a row!) they will need more supplemental water to survive.

WET WINTER There are many problems from too much water. Rot, disease and soil erosion can seriously damage plants and the landscape. Make sure that your garden has good surface drainage and somewhere for the overflow to go. Properties generally have a high and low point. Observe the drainage pattern and remove all obstacles like soil berms, water wells, and debris to prevent flooding. Move potted plants, especially succulents under the roof eaves or raise them up on blocks.

DRY WINTER If we have a dry winter the methods of directing the moisture that does fall into the right places will greatly benefit your plants and trees. Soil berms, water wells and lots of mulch will direct the water to the root system. Have you heard of Pitcher Irrigation? This is nothing new. It is an ancient system of distributing water to the roots slowly. Sink porous clay pots in the right places and periodically fill them with water. This can be in a circle around a tree at the drip line or near shrubs. Place a central pot in the vegetable garden bed and plant beans or peas around it.

STORM DAMAGE Be prepared for wind along with rain. Training a young tree or maintaining a mature one takes special treatment. Dense trees need to be opened up inside to allow the wind to pass through without breaking branches. Remove all dead and weak branches. Pay particular attention to crossed branches or ones over your roof! If the ground is saturated and the wind grabs that canopy, it will go over. Stake young trees but tie them loosely so they can move and develop a strong trunk. Check all ties to prevent trunk damage and remove them when the tree is well rooted.

TRANSPLANTING This is it! Move the shrubs and young trees that are in the wrong places. This month is the time to get new plants in the ground and transplant the ones that need to move. Evergreens benefit the most by taking advantage of the natural rainy season to become better established before the heat of summer. Remember to keep as much of the root ball intact as possible. Allow deciduous plants to lose their leaves before being transplanted. You can remove all of the soil from a dormant plant and spread the roots out properly in its new hole. Cut back the tops to balance out the loss of roots.

PESTS Do you hate earwigs as much as I do? Please don't spray poison in the garden. Try this method for getting rid of them. Loosely roll sheets of newspaper up and put rubber bands on the ends. Soak them in water until really wet. Place them around your garden and trash areas before dark. Every morning close off the ends of your traps and seal in a plastic bag. I like to do this on trash day and have them hauled off the property right away. Don't just throw them into the compost pile. The little pests will be back.

DECEMBER HORT BY MARILYN

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere you go... The fall color has now given way to the bright decorative colors of red, green, and white. Our DVGC poinsettia sale comes at just the right time of year.

This brings up the seasonal subject of plant toxicity. Poinsettias are beautiful and popular at this time of the year. The poinsettia is not a deadly poisonous plant. If ingested, it can irritate the mouth and stomach, sometimes resulting in gastrointestinal discomfort. The sap may cause a poison ivy-like blistering on the skin unless it is washed off right away.

Pets and people may differ in which plants are toxic, and to what degree. It is best to place poinsettias, and other holiday plants, out of the reach of children and curious pets. Several of our favorite holiday plants should not be eaten, yet often they are not a serious threat in small quantities.

Plants safe for everyone:

Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*)

Begonia

African Violet (*Saintpaulia*)

Boston Fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata* 'Bostoniensis')

Gardenia (*Gardenia* 'Radicans')

Camellia

Rose

Low level toxicity if eaten:

Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) – all plant parts; minor skin irritation

Jerusalem Cherry or Christmas Cherry (*Solanum pseudocapsicum*) – berries or leaves

Holly (*Ilex*) – bright red berries in large amounts are toxic

Toxic only if large quantities are eaten:

Mistletoe (*Phoradendron serotinum*) – foliage or white berries

Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*) – bulb is toxic if ingested

Daffodils (*Narcissus*) – bulb is toxic; contact dermatitis severe when handling this plant

Cyclamen (*Cyclamen persicum*) – rhizomes are the poisonous part of the plant; minor skin irritation

Hydrangea – leaves, bark and flower buds

Some of the deadliest plants to avoid eating:

Azalea (*Rhododendron*) – leaves highly toxic; may be fatal if eaten

English Yew (*Taxus buccata*) – fruit (seeds) and foliage are fatally poisonous if ingested.

Not to be confused with the Yew Pine (*Podocarpus macrophyllus*) which may produce berries that have low toxicity if eaten.

Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) – leaves, seeds, and flowers

Larkspur (*Delphinium*) – all parts

Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) – all parts

December garden chores – None! Enjoy the holidays by harvesting your winter vegetables, making garden gifts like culinary herb pots, flower baskets and natural wreaths, then planning for your January pruning and bare root planting. If you didn't quite get all your Spring blooming bulbs in the ground, don't wait, plant them now!

