






## Tips for the Garden – September

 It's time to save seed. If your perennials and annuals are finished their blooming, put a small brown bag over the seed heads and use a twist tie or pipe cleaner to secure the bag in place. As the seeds mature and drop, they will fall into the bag. This seed collection method saves a great deal of time and you have the ripest seed possible. Once the seeds have fallen, cut the bag from the stems and shake any remaining seed loose. Clean the seed by removing any non seed parts from the bag. Label the bag with the plant name and date collected and store in a cool dry location ready for next season's planting. If the seeds are from a perennial plant, they can be sown in a designated starting bed. Some perennials will need the cold winter temperatures before seed dormancy is broken and will begin sprouting next spring. Label your beds with the date planted and the name of the plant. By listing detailed information – you will begin to keep good records for future planting.


 If flower arranging is your passion, cut flower stems in early morning when plants are least stressed. Have a bucket of tepid water waiting for the newly cut stems. Clean and remove lower foliage outdoors and compost. Select blooms that are not totally open but showing color. These blooms will last numerous days indoors for the kitchen table or entry hallway arrangement. You will be amazed how your designs will brighten your days as summer slowly fades.


 Repotting house plants now with a sterilized potting mix will invigorate your plants before they have to be moved indoors for the winter. Wash plants down with a fine mist of water then water well with a compost tea, which will help the plants to re-establish quickly. Also, make sure to thoroughly scrub pots to remove any caked fertilizer salts from the pots' surfaces. Your plants will be fresh and clean and welcomed indoors without any unwanted pests.


 Harvesting herbs for drying – the best time to harvest is several days after a rain. Pick herbs at the end of the day when the plants' surfaces have had a chance to dry out. Remove any unwanted parts such as discolored or browning leaves. Take several stems of herbs and tie them together then hang to dry in a well ventilated location – preferably out of the sun. They will take several weeks to dry depending on the thickness of the stems and leaves. Once dried, the leaves can be stripped and put into jars. You can save the stems and bundle them to add to soups and sauces. Dried stems can be thrown into your fireplace to freshen the air when the fire is slowly fading.


 Harvesting herbs for fresh use – the best time is in the early morning when moisture content of the plant is high. The herbs will be more tender and desirable for cooking. Now is the perfect time to pick sweet basil for pesto


making. Make large batches and seal into zip lock bags and freeze. The pesto will taste freshly made when preparing winter meals. <http://allrecipes.com> or <http://www.cooks.com>


 Plant annual rye in the areas of your vegetable garden where the crops have been removed. The rye will die out in cold temperatures and will begin to break down providing additional nutrients for early spring crops. <http://www.organicgardening.com/learn-and-grow/cover-crop-basics?page=0,2>

 Planting garlic is a fun activity for the entire family. Garlic heads can be purchased at local garden centers or farm stands. Break the garlic head apart and plant each clove approximately 4 inches apart. Use salt hay to cover the newly planted rows to reduce weeds. You will harvest fresh, yummy garlic in late June of next year. To add winter interest, plant garlic cloves and kale in containers for winter greenery and winter harvesting.


 Order your spring blooming bulbs now so they can go into the garden before the first heavy frost. You can purchase bulbs at area garden centers or through catalogues. Bulb catalogues also have great opportunities for fundraising for local schools. Consider a back to school bulb sale for cash-strapped educational programs.


 Take photos of your vegetable garden to remind yourself where you planted this season's vegetables so that you don't plant the same vegetables in the same spot next year. Rotating your crops will give higher yields and will prevent higher incidents of disease in the future.


 Fall is a wonderful time to plant trees. If you decide to plant a tree on your property, call the utility company before digging. For Pennsylvania PA One-Call Center 1-800-242-1776. Nation- wide contact <http://call811.com/>. Do this at least three days before planting. It will save a great deal of aggravation when planting. For proper tree planting methods check out the downloadable document from Cornell for planting and pruning instructions <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/3572>. To view a YouTube video <https://www.arborday.org/trees/planting/>. By the way, select smaller statured trees that need little or no pruning for under power lines.


 To maintain healthy trees, have your trees assessed by a certified arborist annually. If you are looking to have large tree work done on your property this fall and winter, contact a certified arborist. A good consumer site is [http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/Hire\\_Arborist.aspx](http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/Hire_Arborist.aspx) Certified arborists have been trained, tested and approved by the (ISA) International Society of Arboriculture. If you are planning to prune lower branches yourself, there is an


excellent educational document through the Pennsylvania Cooperative Extension at <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/pdfs/uh099.pdf>

 Rejuvenating an old lawn? Dead patches can be revived by loosening the soil with a grading rake, mix in a small amount of mushroom compost and then seed the area and then cover lightly with salt hay. These areas will fill in quickly with fall rain and cool evening temperatures.


 Creating new garden beds? It's the perfect time to create no fuss garden beds. Mark out the area with flags or with spray chalk. Next, layer three to five layers of newspaper across the entire area. Cardboard works well too! Then cover the entire area with mushroom compost. You can define the bed edges with a spade by poking the ends of the newspaper into the soil. If you have clay soil, repeat the layering process several times. Come spring the bed will be ready for planting and mulching. I recommend triple ground hardwood for finishing mulch or licorice root.

 Pick up small branches that fall after storms for kindling for your fireplace. Have an old basket ready to fill. Set this by your back door or in a garage to keep the kindling dry for the first fire of the season. Don't use pine branches as they create sparks in the fireplace and gum up chimney flues.

 Snip here, snip there. Take cuttings of plants that have gotten too big to bring indoors. Cuttings of coleus, wandering jew, geraniums and basil can be done now while the stems are still softwood at the tips of the plants. (The cooler it gets at night – the more difficult it is to get cuttings to root easily because the stems get harder as night-time temperatures decrease.) Cut off the top six inches of the plant and clean the lower leaves off the stems – compost them. Lay the cleaned cuttings into a sink or basin filled with room temperature water and let the stems lay in this bath for about ten minutes. Then gently swish them around and check for any critters – usually flying and crawling insects will come off during this process. The bath also provides the perfect hydration for the cuttings before they are potted up in a sterilized potting mix. Use a six inch pot and insert three to four cuttings in each. The soil mix should be thoroughly moistened (allow to drain) before inserting the cuttings. Then slip the pot into a clear plastic bag and place it into a north window away from direct sunlight. During root development, you may have to add some water to the tender cuttings while in the bag or open if there is too much condensation. Tug gently on the plant after two weeks to see if there is resistance. If the stems do not want to move easily – you will know that your plants have roots and are ready to un-bag and move to a sunny window for the remainder of the winter for next spring's planting.

 Pre-package garden vegetables in freezer bags and freeze. You'll be ready for later use.

Too many miniature tomatoes - freeze them whole. You can use these in soups and stews throughout the winter.

 Have your children help to collect pine cones that have fallen in the garden. Use them to top off winter planters to give a finished look, in place of mulch. And, keep bagging the cones for winter projects too!