

## Garden Jottings for August

Who knows when the rain will come, we have had such a prolonged dry period. It is so sad to see flowers and plants that have taken so much time and effort to grow, plant and nurture and vegetables which are at their most productive just now suffering and dying. Try therefore to save and reuse any water you can and use it judiciously on only special items particularly newly planted ones. Mulch with grass clippings (if you have any!) around plants and shrubs. Hopefully, lawns will soon recover, as they always do, given a shower of rain.

Even if the lawn is not growing very much keep the edges trimmed – these always seem to grow regardless and become unkempt and shaggy!

Always water in the late evening as the ground will have more time to absorb moisture before sunrise and as always, “double water” your pots. Try to pick crops or flowers in the early morning when they are holding maximum moisture.

Think about placing plants where they will thrive best. Some types will survive regardless of scarcity of water, whilst others just curl up and die. Geraniums, Marigolds, Petunias, Antirrhinums, Gazanias, and other daisies will stand prolonged dry periods if you dead head and trim away dead leaves and stems and any plants becoming long and straggly. It will prolong the flowering season and improve the overall look of the garden.

A few Rudbeckia, Zinnias and Nicotiana that you have grown recently this year can be planted in bare spaces. Pot-grown Dahlias and Fuchsia are also useful fillers to place in the border, where Lupins and Delphinium have been cut down, to hopefully encourage late reblooming.

Hopefully, August, although always an uncertain month weather wise will be kind to us and give us a few weeks of recovered flowers and plants. I will therefore give some general hints and advice in the hope of future normality.

Cut back early summer shrubs such as Philadelphus and Lilac, taking out all the old flowering stems from the former and removing some old branches to the base.

Lilac blooms should be carefully removed, if you can access them, and any spindly, dry, and dead branches can also be removed to make a neat tidy shape.

Lift and divide Flag Iris plants, removing old, woody, or wrinkly rhizomes keeping one set of leaves on each section of root. Cut the leaves to a short fan shape and replant incorporating some fertilizer - blood, fish, and bonemeal, or Growmore - when you plant them on top of a narrow, raised hump, spreading the roots down the sides, leaving the rhizome on the surface as they like to be baked in the sun.

Plant Lilies and Crown Imperials now, remembering to mark the place to avoid spearing them with a fork when tidying the border.

Both of these bulbs benefit from a little coarse sand in the bottom of the planting hole and Crown Imperials should be planted on their side as they have a hole in the top of the bulb where the flower stem has died away and this can fill with water if planted straight and can lead to rotting bulbs.

Disbud Dahlia and Chrysanthemums to give larger blooms for cutting, just remove the two smaller buds and any lower buds from around the central flower.

Take cuttings of Penstemons, Gaillardia and Osteospermums. Place cuttings in a polythene bag when gathering to keep them fresh.

Take away leaves from the base of the stem then trim them to 3-4 inches cutting underneath the leaf node. Insert these cuttings around the sides of small pots and label.

Cut back Lavender as the flowers fade but not down to the old wood. Take a few stems for cuttings and from Rosemary, Weigela and Escallonia at the same time.

Insert them into pots of 50/50 compost and sharp sand mix. Water all cuttings thoroughly. Keep all your cuttings together in pots until Spring. This ensures that they have all rotted. To be sure of this, you should see fine roots appear about of the holes underneath the pots.

Keeping them in this way saves room if you have a small greenhouse or even only a frost-free porch or conservatory to keep them over winter.

Geraniums and Fuchsia are also good subjects to take cuttings from in the same way.

Cut down Summer fruiting raspberries, taking out old brown stems, saving the new green ones to grow on for next year.

Tidy up strawberry beds taking off old leaves, take some runners, peg these down into small pots or the ground where they quickly take root when they can be severed from the main plant to make new young ones.

These plants should be replaced gradually every 3-4 years.

Keep feeding tomatoes, pinching out any side shoots and tying them securely to canes as the fruit becomes heavy. Water them freely the same way as runner and dwarf beans.

These need to be picked frequently to ensure continuity of cropping.

Chop up herbs and freeze. Mint can be frozen like Borage flowers in ice cubes to add to summer drinks.

Onions can be harvested when the tops have turned over onto the soil and become yellow. Loosen them from the ground, carefully ease them up and leave them to dry on the surface. Keep them somewhere warm and dry to finish drying off. You can plait them into a rope or store them in old tights or net bags.

Cut down wildflower meadows or wild lawn areas. Shake seeds from Poppies, Cornflowers and Daisies and leave for a while to dry. Finally gather the hay and add to the compost heap. Small plants of wildflowers can be added to the area in Spring.

Most of all at this time of year, enjoy your garden – take a walk in the cool evening and take stock of areas you can improve next year and add notes to your calendar to remind you to plant bulbs in the next month or two.

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