

# August Gardening Tips for Los Angeles County Residents

by Yvonne Savio

August's garden bounty can be too much, just enough, or too little; but it's always a starting point in determining what to plant--or what not to plant-- next time around. Now you know from experience that the whole packet of zucchini seeds--or even all six plants from the pony pack--produces just too many squash. (The refrigerator and freezer are filled with casseroles and breads, and your neighbors hide when you approach with your basketful of four-inch-thick zukes.) Next time, you'll make do with just one or two plants, even though they're so cute when they're tiny.

You'll have a winter gold mine in your garden if you start seeds for overwintering crops this and next month. Yes, it's too hot to think about doing anything now but harvest and water and escape the heat, but think ahead to winter vegetable prices--and start sowing!

## Vegetables and Fruits

Sow beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbages, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chard, endive, escarole, garlic, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, thick-leafed and heading lettuces, onions, parsley, peas, white potatoes, radishes, shallots, and spinach. Savoy-leafed types of cabbage and spinach will resist frosts better than the more tender flat-leaf varieties. Last sowings of summer-maturing crops can also be made now--bush beans, cucumbers, oakleaf lettuce, white seed potatoes, New Zealand spinach, and squash.



The wealth of tomatoes range from thumbnail to grapefruit size, juicy to hollow, barely there to more than a pound, and a rainbow of colors. Photo by Yvonne Savio, © UC Regents, 2000.

Keep seed beds or flats moist and shaded during the hottest portion of the day until the seeds germinate. A light mulch helps keep the soil surface from crusting, especially over tiny seeds that take a while to germinate, like carrots and parsley. Boards laid over the seed bed also help to keep it from drying out. Prop them up or remove them when more than half of the seeds germinate.

Sow carrots, lettuce, and spinach a dozen or so seeds at a time every two or three weeks from now through October. This will provide a succession of succulent harvests through the winter. Leafy green plants like lettuce and spinach that are three or four inches tall and wide--or carrots that are at least one-half inch in diameter--before the first hard frost will be mature enough to provide harvests through early spring. If they're smaller, they'll not provide much to eat until spring, when they may bolt first.

When you plan the layout of your fall and winter gardens, consider which new crops should follow those just removed--follow heavy feeders with light feeders, and vice versa. Heavy feeders include beets, broccoli, cabbage, celery, collards, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, endive, escarole, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, okra, parsley, pumpkins, radishes, rhubarb, spinach, squash, and tomatoes. Light feeders include carrots, chard, garlic, leeks, mustard, onions, parsnips, peppers, potatoes, rutabaga, shallots, sweet potatoes, and turnips.

Transplant seedlings after they've developed their second set of true leaves. Carefully thin seedlings in growing beds. If you transplant these to another area, they'll be harvestable about a week or two later than the plants left in the original bed. Mulch transplants to help the soil retain moisture during the rest of the summer, and add more in October and November for frost protection.

Sowing bulb onion seed now will provide green onions through-out the winter and small bulb onions in late spring. Dig these up when their tops dry, and replant them as sets after the following January's frosts. They will develop into full-size bulbs the following summer. (The set-size bulbs that are larger than a dime may bolt when replanted, but they can be used in winter recipes as "pearl" onions, or used for their greens.)

If this sounds like too long to wait when sets are readily available commercially, consider that many more varieties are available in seed that produce better in our area than the sets, which are generally from the

Midwest. Unless you purchase the sets from a reputable nursery as soon as they are put on display in late summer or early fall, chances are they'll bolt because they've been kept too warm for too long. So, as inexpensive as seed is, and as simple as germinating them is, a little effort every so often produces many more quality green and bulb onions.

Cover young cole crop plants with spun-bonded-type row cover or spray with *Bacillus thuringiensis* (also sold as Bt, Dipel, and Thuri-cide) to protect them from cabbage moths. Red cabbage varieties seem to be less attractive to the moths than the green ones.

Fertilize tasseling corn and other vegetables that are setting--beans, cucumbers, eggplants, tomatoes, etc.--for increased yields. Plants appreciate this extra boost in food to use immediately in maturing their fruits. But during our extra-hot weather, be sure to water the plants well first so the fertilizer won't "burn" the roots.

Some vegetables are more tolerant of salty areas in the garden. If an area has received repeated applications of manure or other concentrated fertilizers, the salt content may be high. Asparagus, beets, kale, and spinach do well under these conditions, but celery, green beans, radishes, strawberries and most fruits cannot tolerate it. Other vegetables and cantaloupes, figs, and grapes are generally of medium tolerance.

Root cuttings of herbs. Mature, woody, spreading herbs can be propagated by dividing the plant and using the new outer shoots.

Lift melons off the soil surface get them away from moist soil and crawling pests. Boards, cans, or plastic baskets from strawberries or cherry tomatoes serve well. Stop watering plants the week before they're ripe to allow the sweetness to concentrate and to minimize fruit-cracking problems.

Continue to keep vine vegetables (especially beans, cucumbers, squash, and tomatoes) picked, whether or not you will use the harvest that day. If many fruits are allowed to overmature on the plant, production will slow and then cease.

If you have kept plants well-picked, but fruit set has stopped, suspect hot weather. Fruit set will begin again about ten to fourteen days after the temperature stays below 85 to 90 degrees.

Harvest fruits and vegetables as early in the day as possible, especially if they are not to be eaten that day or will be refrigerated. Research at the University of California, Davis, has found that the six hours before sunrise is the best time to harvest. As soon as the sun hits the fruits or vegetables, the pulp temperature begins to rise, and even shading them will not delay the temperature rise for long. Each five degrees lower temperature when the fruit is picked will extend shelf-life for another three days. Tomatoes, in particular, develop more chilling injury--that telltale graininess and mushiness--when they are cooled after being harvested when thoroughly warm.



Figs bespeak Mediterranean climes and, with proper pruning, bear two crops a year. Photo by Yvonne Savio, © UC Regents, 2000.

Freeze excess vine-ripened tomatoes for winter use. After washing them, cut out the core, cut them into quarters, and place them on a cookie sheet so the pieces don't touch. When they're frozen, transfer them to bags or containers for use as desired. The peel will slip off easily when the tomato pieces begin to thaw.

Prune vegetable plants of their leaves that have become ragged from age, disease, or insect attacks. Then water plants well. Healthy new leaves and blossoms will appear, and fruit set will begin again. This is especially effective with beans, cucumbers, and squash.

As vine crops reach the tops of their trellises, pinch off the lead vine; the side shoots will take over the major growth and food production.

Toward the end of the month, pinch off the last blossoms of eggplants, peppers, melons, squashes, and tomatoes. Plant energy will then be spent maturing fruit that's already set, instead of setting more fruit that won't ripen sufficiently before fall cold (yes, it's coming!).

Drying is an excellent choice for preserving fruit that is not very sweet or not quite ripe, as the sugar intensifies during drying. Drying grapes and figs is easy. When harvesting, leave the stems on so there are no open wounds. Wash and separate the individual fruits, sorting out the spoiled ones. For grapes, this requires gentle handling of the whole bunches. Place the fruits to be dried on a rack in the sun, and cover them with a double layer of cheesecloth for protection from birds and insects. Special care must be given to separating individual grapes so that no moisture remains between them to mold overnight. Be sure that the fruit is dried in air that's at least 95 degrees, to prevent fungus from developing. Turn the fruit pieces and grape bunches every day until they have dried to the extent you prefer. Whole trays can be turned at one time by placing a second rack on top of the fruit and then flipping the "sandwich" over. If the fruit dries too much, the pieces can be softened somewhat by sprinkling them lightly with water and separating them on a rack placed indoors for a day. Really sweet fruit sometimes dries into an unpleasantly strong molasses flavor.

Feed and water bramble fruits and strawberries. The size of next summer's fruit is determined this month and next--the more fertilizer and irrigation, the bigger the berries will be next spring. Propagate bramble fruits by bending the cane tips to the soil surface and burying one or two nodes an inch or so deep.

Allow strawberries to root their runners after they've set their last crop. Strong new plants will be ready to transplant by October or November, and these will yield huge sweet fruits early next spring. Transplanting in the fall is preferable to the spring, as the plants become well-established in warm soil long before their spring burst of growth. Spring-transplanted plants barely get established before summer heat arrives, and very few fruits will bear before the following year. By that time, the "mother" plants will have already separated into many smaller plants, each vying for the same nutrients and water. Besides, it's much more pleasant working in the cool air and warm soil of fall than in the cold air and cold wet soil of spring, when your schedule is already full of tasks that must be done only then.

Remove tree suckers and watersprouts--the long shoots that grow straight up from the trunk base (sucker) or a branch (watersprout). Keep tree trunks--especially of young trees--painted with light-color, matte-finish, indoor latex paint to protect them from sunscald.

Water all trees deeply. Pick up and destroy fallen fruit. Prune and destroy dead and diseased limbs, but leave major pruning until winter. When harvesting is over, remove bird netting--if you leave it in place, it will become enmeshed in new shoot growth. Rake the area beneath each tree bare, and apply a new mulch. These clean-up efforts will prevent diseases from spreading and harmful insects from hiding for the winter.

Stop feeding trees later this month, or the resulting tender new growth will be damaged by winter frosts. The gradually cooling weather and lack of additional nitrogen fertilizer during September, October, and early November will help harden exuberant summer growth to withstand winter's cold.

## Ornamentals

Sow or transplant alyssum, amaranthus, balsam, fibrous begonia, calendulas (winter or pot marigold), candytuft (iberis), celosia (cockscomb), columbines (aquilegia), coral bells (heuchera), coreopsis (pot of gold), cosmos, gloriosa daisy (rudbeckia), coneflower, black-eyed-susan), marguerite and Shasta daisies, dahlias, delphiniums, dianthus (sweet william, pinks), forget-me-nots (myosotis), foxgloves, gaillardias (blanket flower), gerberas (Transvaal daisy), geums, gypsophila (baby's breath), hollyhocks, impatiens, larkspur, linarias, lobelia, marigold, nasturtiums, nemesias, pansies, petunias, phlox, Oriental and Iceland poppies, portulaca (moss rose, sun rose), fairy primroses (primula), scabiosas (mourning bride, pincushion flower), schizanthus, snapdragons, statice (limonium, sea lavender), stock, sweet peas, vinca (periwinkle), violas, and zinnias. Seedlings sown now will be ready for transplanting by early October



Shasta daisies are August's delight  
Photo by Yvonne Savio,  
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and November. Calendulas will provide color all through winter when they have been planted every three weeks from now through mid-December.

Refrigerate delphinium seeds for planting later this fall. They are cool-germinating, as are pansies, primroses, and violas. One technique is to start them on moist paper towels rolled loosely in plastic bags in the refrigerator. After they germinate, gently move the tiny plants to potting soil in a pan. When they're large enough, transplant them into their permanent garden spot for winter color.

Transplant seedlings late in the day, to reduce their stress in the heat. Shade them from intense sun for a week, and sprinkle their foliage each morning. After a week, they should be able to full sun.

Perennials to transplant include daylilies, bearded iris, lilies, peonies, and oriental poppies.

Attract hummingbirds to the garden by planting funnel-shaped flowers in red and pink colors. Abutilon (flowering maple), cannas, cleome, fuchsia, honeysuckle, monarda, penstemon, and red trumpet vine are favorites.

Feed azaleas, camellias, and rhododendrons an acid fertilizer for the last time this year, to help them set buds for early spring bloom. Continue feeding begonias, fuchsias, and summer annuals. Container plants and water-lovers such as baby's tears, coleus, and fuchsias may need daily irrigation during hot weather. Feed mums until their buds begin to show color and open.

Encourage longer blooming periods by removing mature flowers and seed pods of coreopsis, cosmos, gaillardia, marigold, and zinnia.

Increase bloom size of chrysanthemums and dahlias by removing half of the new buds. Prolong fuchsia blooms by picking off the faded flowers, yellowed leaves, and fruits. Trim back stems to force side branching and flowering, and fertilize and water them well. Prune summer-blooming shrubs when they've finished flowering. Shape hedges for the last time this season. Continue gently shaping roses after pruning suckers, unwanted branches, and spent blooms; cultivate manure, bonemeal, and cottonseed meal into the top three inches of soil, and water deeply.

Ornamentals that are most sensitive to salty soil from over fertilization include azalea, camellia, cotoneaster, mahonia, photinia, and star jasmine. Least sensitive are iceplant (all types).

Choose a dry, sunny day to harvest globe amaranth, baby's breath, cockscomb, lunaria, strawflower, and statice for drying. Cut them before they're fully open, or they'll shatter as they dry. Hang stems upside down in an airy room to cure.

Collect seeds from non-hybrid flowers, and sow those that are cold-hardy, such as bachelor's buttons, dianthus, Oriental poppies, and stocks.

Remove faded blooms of perennials like coreopsis, Shasta daisies, delphiniums, penstemons, and yarrow. Cut them back to within six inches of the soil, and they may bloom again in the fall. Divide clumps that are too large or when they haven't bloomed much. Side-dress the plants with bonemeal and compost, and water in.

Red spider mites thrive in hot, dry weather. Hose them off from roses, evergreens, shrubs, and ivy. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the undersides of leaves.

Root cuttings of azaleas, ceanothus, carnations, fuchsias, geraniums, honeysuckle, hydrangeas, English ivy, marguerites, pachysandra, roses, succulents, verbena, wisteria, and evergreens--especially arborvitae, euonymus, holly, juniper, and yew. Geraniums and impatiens make nice winter-blooming houseplants.

Continue to water shallow-rooted flowers such as azaleas, baby's tears, begonias, camellias, ferns, fuchsias, and rhododendrons frequently while the weather is hot, including sprinkling the foliage. If the

surrounding soil is clay, however, be sure you've provided sufficient drainage, or the plants will drown. A mulch will help to moderate soil temperatures and keep it evenly moist.

Water lawns early in the morning so they dry quickly. This reduces development of fungal diseases that thrive in wet, warm conditions, especially overnight. Feed Bermuda, dichondra, St. Augustine, and other subtropical grasses. Wait till the weather cools before feeding cool-season grasses.

Plant trees and shrubs for brilliant color this fall. Trees to choose from include liquidambar, ginkgo, Japanese maple, pin oak, red oak, Chinese pistache, Chinese tallow, tulip tree (Liriodendron), and zelkova. Shrubs include arbution, cotoneaster, crape myrtle, escallonia, euonymus, hibiscus, holly, honeysuckle, oleander, pomegranate, and pyracantha. The berries will attract birds to your garden, as well.

## General

If you're not going to have a winter garden, cover crops are an excellent alternative; choices include alfalfa, soybeans, fava beans, winter rye, and winter wheat. Till them in next spring two or three weeks before planting as "green manure" to give it time to decompose and not "burn" seeds or delicate seedling roots.

Cover sunflower seed heads with cheesecloth when birds start pecking, but also leave a couple heads for the birds. Heads are ready to cure when the backside of the head is brown and dry, with no trace of green. Cut off the seed head, leaving a foot or two of stalk attached. Hang it to cure--still in the cheesecloth--in a well-ventilated, warm location. When the backs are entirely brown and crisp, the seeds should snap out easily.

Replace the bottom of a wooden box with half-inch hardware cloth or chicken wire for use as a colander. Collect fresh-picked vegetables in the box, and rinse them off to remove excess soil. The soil will remain in the garden, and only final cleaning will be necessary indoors.

Paint tool handles and a foot or so of hose at nozzle ends with a bright color of exterior enamel paint so you can find them easily when they're hiding in green foliage.

When planning several hours of work in the garden, take along a lightweight chair and a thermos with some cool liquid refreshment. Enjoy a periodic rest and appraisal of your efforts.

Simple household baking soda will get rid of mildew in your home and garden. Dissolve about one-quarter ounce in a gallon of water. Indoors, wipe the solution on windowsills or other mildewed areas. In the garden, spray it onto plant leaves weekly or after rain or sprinkling. The baking soda serves both as a preventative and a cure--mildew spores cannot spread or reproduce, so their development is stopped.