

Gardening tips for September

Will it rain again?

At the time of writing, it hasn't rained for months, or it hadn't rained for months and now it's started, it probably won't stop. Last year was too wet, this year too dry, welcome to the world of gardening - again (ref. see last year).

September is normally harvest time, however, with such dry summer, harvest had been much earlier, it isn't usual to see stacks of straw bales in the fields in the first week of August. Is it climate change or just the normal vagaries and vicissitudes of the Great British weather? For those of you who are old enough (id est. all of you reading this) remember 1976, was it was just a dry summer? Nobody had invented climate change back then, we were all far more concerned with how an American peanut farmer had become the President of the United States, or how to record TV programmes on VHS and a computer company calling itself Apple seemed determined to change our lives forever! So back to gardening if anyone is interested.

The Veg Patch

As crops finish, don't delay, get them onto the compost heap (not the crop, but the plant, the crop should be in your fridge, freezer, oven, saucepan etc. Time to prepared for what comes next. So, what does come next? If you have grown peas and/or beans cut the plants from their roots leaving the roots in the ground. The roots with their nitrogen fixing nodules will provide valuable nitrogen for next year's veg.

Sow spring onions (yes, I know it's autumn). There is just enough time to get a good crop before the frost sets in – remember frost? It is a thing that use to occur before climate change.

Winter crops on the veg patch can be a challenge, one that is worth trying is winter spinach, spinach beet or leaf beet. Buy the seeds and follow the instructions on the pack. Once the plants get going and you have persuaded the pigeons to dine elsewhere this can be a rewarding crop and, in the winter, who would have thought it.

Tomatoes

Unlike last year, blight hasn't had a chance of ruining your cross unless you have been very unlucky. There hasn't been any benefit growing a blight resistant tomato this year other than growing a new variety. Although slow to get going, the plants are very sturdy, very green and leafy with a good

number of good-sized fruits. I'm just hoping they will ripen. Generally, continue to feed tomato plants until all the fruits have finished growing and ripening. If your tomatoes refuse to ripen due to weather, don't be tempted to make green tomato chutney, put them in a bowl with a rapidly ripening banana, the ethylene gas given off will ripen your tomatoes before you can say "have my tomatoes ripened yet?"

The Flower Garden

With such a dry summer, do you still have any flowers? The usual gardening advice is to keep deadheading which is fine if you still have anything that still needs deadheading.

If you are after colour, head to the garden centre to see what is in the sale. Summer flowering plants can be tempted to continue flowering well into the autumn.

Cut back yellowing leaves on roses, these can be the worst affected diseased leaves, put them in the garden waste bin rather than the compost. Composting doesn't always kill off all plant pathogens.

Sow hardy annuals such as marigolds into open patches in the flower border, rake over and water in and label the area so that you don't plant something else in a few weeks when you have forgotten why that part of the border is empty. Next spring you will have a riot of colour.

Divide hardy perennials such as Agapanthus, Hosta, Iris, Salvia, grasses etc. to maintain their vigour and health, more importantly by dividing, you get more plants for the garden. After a dry summer, dividing plants in autumn can be more beneficial than doing the same in spring, just remember to keep well-watered until established.

The Water Garden

Think about netting over the pond before leaves fall. Remove dead leaves from waterlilies and cut back marginal plants, also give the filter in the water pump a good clean ready for winter.

Lawns

The lawn will have taken a hammering during the summer drought. Don't be tempted to start watering, generally, it is a waste of water, time and money, just let it recover all by itself over the winter. If you feel the need for some lawn TLC, try an Autumn lawn feed but make sure it IS for Autumn and NOT any other time of year.

And finally, don't forget the Autumn Show on Saturday 10th September, Rudgwick Village Hall starting at 2.30 pm. For more details on this and for membership details and to ask garden related questions please go to our website www.gardenreg.org.

Keep gardening.

Richard Haigh EGRGA Chairman