

SOUTHERN HOMES

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The Once-in-a-While Gardener

By Judy Hotchkiss

July/August is the time to . . .

- **Correct drainage problems** with catch basins and drainage ditches carefully sited to carry away excess rainwater—a problem in early summer as this issue went to press. Elevate new plants slightly for maximum drainage. When installing new plants research their needs—moist, moderately wet, dryish? Many plants in this area don't expect watering every other day.
- **Water judiciously.** Dogwoods and azaleas are neediest because they're shallow-rooted. Junipers, hollies, nandina are quite drought-tolerant. Most garden plants will survive very well on one deep watering every 10 days to two weeks. (New transplants may need a little more.) Mulch your plants well then allow the hose to trickle so the water goes deep and evaporates less. Resist the urge to slosh on a little water every day. Container plants, however, are another matter, especially those in sunny spots—many do need daily water. Watch for wilting and water before they go into a complete droop.
- **Maintain your herbs.** Cut mint for iced tea and juleps all summer. Remove basil flowers so the plant continues to grow; otherwise it declines when flowering is accomplished. Replant dill now for a continuing supply.
- **Enjoy bouquets** of summer flowers. Try mixing the casual daisy shapes of coreopsis, cosmos and rudbeckias with soft, rotund roses. Experiment with foliage: reds of coleus and the soft gray of lambs ears or dusty miller. Think tiny—pink spirea and miniature pink roses in the tiniest vase or bottle look sweet.
- **Just say mow.** Cut off only one-third the grass's height at a time. Do it often enough (every 5-6 days) and the pieces

will be so small they'll sift into the turf—you won't have to rake or bag. Don't worry about thatch; overwatering and over-fertilizing are the culprit, not the clippings themselves.

- **Win the weeding war.** Meet glyphosate, the systemic compound known as Roundup which inhibits a plant's chlorophyll-making process, killing only actively growing plants whose leaves it touches. Unlike brush killers, Roundup biodegrades in the soil; a treated area may be replanted a week or two later. Dedicate an all-plastic garden sprayer to apply it. It's a great way to get rid of poison ivy, kudzu, weeds in sidewalks and patios, and to edge safely around tree bases.
- **Reap what you've sown:** beans at 4 to 6 inches; cucumbers, 3 to 4 inches; corn when silks turn brown; okra every other

Landscape architect William T. Smith's backyard is a midsummer riot of color including begonias, ageratum, cleome, sedum and garden phlox.



JUDY HOTCHKISS

day once the first pods are three inches (never over five inches); peppers at any size, but they'll keep longer if they reach full size. Watermelons are ready when the skin is just beginning to dull and the spot where it rests on the soil turns from white to yellow. Tomatoes are ripe when brightly colored but still firm.



JUDY HOTCHKISS

A bouquet of blazing color: summer Gaillardia and black-eyed Susans (rudbeckia).

- **Put the quietus on pesky insects.** Mosquitos can be a problem even if the summer is dry since they'll breed in any sort of standing water—from a forgotten bucket to an old tire. Get rid of the water. If insects still bother you, Tender Corp's new natural (i.e., non-chemical) bug repellent, "Natrapel," is a citronella-and-aloe-based lotion in a recyclable container. Once bitten, "After Bite" soothes bug and ant bites for gardeners.
- **Think ferns,** if you have none; they have a way of looking lush and cool on the hottest of days. Include them in your plantings next spring.
- **Plant fall-blooming bulbs:** colchicums (violet or pink autumn crocus) in partial shade or light sun, and yellow Amaryllis-family Sternbergia (winter daffodils and lilies-of-the-field) in sun. Be careful: both colchicum's seeds and corms are poisonous; handle with care.
- **Cut back floppy petunias** and remove all seed heads for a second flush of blooms in late summer. Fertilize other annual bedding plants. Replace those past their prime.
- **Pinch back chrysanthemums** for the last time in late July. Continue regular feeding until the buds show color.
- **Sow perennial flower seeds** for later transplanting into the garden: candytuft, pansy, sweet William, shasta daisy and foxglove.
- **Pull up a chair** or hammock and just be lazy. If your garden doesn't have a fine, shady area for taking it easy, this is the time to determine the best spot for one and make plans . . . for a formal gazebo, a rustic arbor or a sizeable hardwood tree to be planted this fall or winter. □