

# AUGUST GARDENING TIPS

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By Jeanne Grunert



Here in south central Virginia, August is "back to school" month. Schools return to session by mid-month, and with it, the stores are filled with school supplies and dorm room supplies (we have two universities in our rural town.) Most of the gardening supplies are on sale at the big box and variety stores; you can pick up tools, seeds and accessories such as bird houses at steep discounts. Other big box stores in town offer annuals on sale for pennies. Some have seen better days, but we have at least another two, if not three, months of fairly kind weather ahead, and if you want a pop of color to replace something that's faded, it's an excellent way to add color to the garden without breaking the bank.

August is also the time to look ahead, to dream of fall and the glories it brings. And, believe it or not, it is also time to look far into the future -- to next spring! Now is the time to order your fall flower bulbs such as tulips, crocus and narcissus, to think of where they will be planted and to mark the garden areas where you intend to plant fall bulbs.

If you haven't begun a garden journal, these last lingering days of summer are a fine time to start one. And with school supplies on sale this month, choose a journal that meets your needs and suits your personality. I tend to keep my garden journal like a scrap book, taping and stapling seed packets, plant labels and other odds and ends to pages of three-hole punched paper. I insert it all into a three-ring binder along with sheets of loose leaf for notes. It makes for an easy to keep, if messy, gardening journal. You can also use your favorite journal, a ruled notebook, or a specially printed gardening journal for your notes. But do start one. It's the best way to keep track of your garden's progress, note important planting dates, and list the plants you've collected.

## August Gardening Tips

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- Weeding remains important, especially if your area, like ours, received plentiful rains this summer. Tip: weed when the ground is moist. Weeds pull out easier. Early morning dews suffice if rainfall is absent.
- Water gardens, especially vegetable gardens, in the evening.
- Soaker hoses or drip irrigations places water at root level, where plants need it the most. If you can invest in soaker or drip hoses, do so for your vegetable garden.
- Harvest tomatoes, peppers and other vegetables daily.
- Pinch tomato plants back and give them a dose of vegetable fertilizer or a balanced fertilizer for late-summer tomatoes.
- Start seeds for fall crops: broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage. Start outdoors or indoors under plant lights.
- Towards the end of the month, plant carrot, turnip and beet seeds for fall and winter harvest.
- Refill hummingbird feeders regularly as the little birds fuel up before their fall migration.
- Fill bird baths with clean water to offer wildlife a drink during hot weather.

- Determine your autumn bulb purchases now. It's easy to get carried away by the beautiful pictures in the catalogs. Just remember that for long-lasting plants that return yearly and are disease and deer resistant, daffodils are a good bulb. Tulips are beautiful but are like deer 'candy', and often do not produce abundant blooms after a few years. Crocus will naturalize, as will daffodils. Naturalizing means they increase and spread out each year.
- When buying bulbs at the store, remember the mantra: the bigger the bulb, the bigger the flower. The bulb contains the future flower and energy for the plant. Larger means better. (Larger relative to the type of bulb - for example, buy the biggest tulip bulbs when comparing various packages of tulips.)
- Don't plant bulbs yet if they arrive in the mail or if you purchase them now. Store in a cool, dark, dry place such as the cellar. They can be planted after Columbus Day and before the first frost.



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