

September in Your Native Garden

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'To Do' List

As the days shorten the fall planting season begins. Don't wait until spring to do what can be done now – this will help you to avoid the frantic rush of the spring season. The soil is warm and typically dry in autumn unlike the cold wet soils of spring. Because of this, plants establish more quickly, returning in spring, robust and ready for another year in the garden. Choose new additions as well as adding more of those plants that thrived. Look to add plants that will bloom at times when there is a lull, plants that offer



desirable textures or those that are food sources for wildlife. Most garden centers and mail order native plant nurseries should still have a good supply of plants for the fall season.

Continue collecting ripe seeds of your native favorites so that you can expand existing plants that have succeeded. After cleaning the seed, store the seed in moistened soil in a ziplock in your refrigerator for spring sowing. Another method is to spread

the seed outside in November – don't cover the seed as that may prevent good germination in the spring.

Time to Assess

As the season marches on, it is the time to observe how plants have performed this year. For example, perhaps that spot where you planted some shade plants is really more sunny than you thought and the plants look pitiful from sunburn. Learning from mistakes is part of the gardening process, so try to analyze why a plant is failing. Most failures are due to 'wrong plant, wrong place' – the solution is to match plants with their cultural

requirements. While many plants may be tolerant of a wide range of conditions, some are not. Therefore, those more particular plants should be moved to a more appropriate site. The end of August through mid-October is a great time to dig and divide perennials that need to be relocated.

Fall blooming Natives to Add

Is there a lack of color in your garden in late summer and fall? There are so many natives to choose from that can provide strong, late season blooms. Yellow predominates, especially in the sun to part sun habitats. There appears an ample supply of composites - those flowers with the classic daisy structure. *Silphium* (such as the compass plant, cup plant and prairie dock), *Helianthus* (the various sunflowers) and *Heliopsis* (false sunflower) are among the most abundant, hailing from the prairies and savannas. Yellow *Solidago* species (the goldenrods) join in adding a softer, full bloom that consists of numerous small flowers. Other composites include *Aster* species that appear in shades of blue and purple providing striking color contrast to the yellow and golds. *Liatris aspera* is the latest of the blazing stars to bloom. Its tall purple spikes are a veritable butterfly magnet.

Color comes in many forms in the garden. The berries of *Callicarpa* (beautyberry) ripen to a lovely lavender color, signaling to migrating birds to come and feast as they pass through. American bittersweet, a native vine, has berries that ripen to a rich pumpkin orange. Most of the grasses are heavy with fattening seed heads. Consider as well the ornamental qualities of the ripening spore fronds of *Matteuccia* (ostrich fern) and *Osmunda* (cinnamon fern) or the brilliant orange berries of *Ariseama* (Jack in the pulpit).

Color is also provided by visiting wildlife seeking out food sources. Butterflies, especially the migrating Monarchs, continue to hunt for nectar sources. Goldfinches, indigo buntings and other seed eating birds forage on ripe coneflower seed, blazing star and other earlier blooming forbs. If you are collecting seed for future plantings, you may want to leave some as a source of food for our feathered friends.

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The following is a list of easy to grow, fall blooming native plants

For the shade to part shade garden:

Chasmanthium latifolium – creek oats

Eupatorium coelistinum – blue mist flower

Lobelia cardinalis – cardinal flower (tolerates more sun with moist soil)

Phlox paniculata – tall phlox

Solidago caesia – blue stemmed goldenrod

S petiolaris – woodland goldenrod

S drummondii - cliff goldenrod

For the sun to part sun garden

Aster – many species are available

Chelone obliqua - turtlehead

Helenium autumnale – Helen’s flower

Helianthus salicifolius – willow leaf sunflower

Helianthus silphiodes – silphium sunflower

Heliopsis helianthoides – false sunflower

Hibiscus lasiocarpus – rose mallow

Liatris aspera – rough blazing star

Rudbeckia subtomentosa – sweet coneflower

Silphium laciniata – compass plant

S. terebinthinaceum – prairie dock

Solidago rigida – stiff goldenrod

Solidago speciosa – showy goldenrod

Many grasses such as little bluestem, prairie dropseed, switch grass etc.