

August Actions for Your Garden

BY DAVID ALSOBROOK



Summer is in full swing, and I hope your garden is putting on quite the show while your veggie baskets are getting wonderfully heavy. Here's how to keep the momentum going through this hot and steamy month.

Shrubs and Flowers: Keep the Show Going

Your roses are working overtime right now, so give them a helping hand by snipping off those faded blooms. This little trick redirects all that plant energy into making new flowers instead of seeds! Feed them every 2-3 weeks with liquid fertilizer, or every 4-6 weeks if you prefer the slow-release granular kind.

Those cheerful annuals - begonias, petunias, impatiens, and geraniums - might be looking a bit "leggy" by now. Don't worry, it happens to the best of us! Give them a good trim, water them well, and add a light dose of fertilizer. In a few weeks, you'll have compact, bloom-happy plants again.

Here's a wildlife-friendly tip: after your perennials finish blooming, resist the urge to tidy up completely. Those spent blooms and leaves make wonderful winter homes for birds, lightning bugs, and other garden visitors. If you're itching to divide plants or share with neighbors, August works fine, but waiting until September means less watering duty.

Vegetables: Harvest Time!

August is nature's reward season! Keep up with picking your summer squash, zucchini, beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, and melons - the more you harvest, the more your plants will produce. It's like a delicious cycle of generosity.

Once plants finish producing, clear them out promptly. This simple step prevents insect and disease problems from setting up camp in your vegetable garden.

Landscaping Thoughts: Painting with Plants

I'll be honest, give me a brush or pencil and I'm hopeless as an artist. But, over the past 20 years, I've discovered you can "paint" your yard with shrubs and flowers! It becomes wonderfully addictive, this ongoing adventure of adding, moving, and rearranging to create something better and different each season. That's part of what makes visiting other gardens so rewarding - you come home with your head full of fresh ideas.

Something liberating I've learned is don't get too hung up on those "full sun" or "shade" labels. My 50-foot border garden gets about four hours of sun daily as it travels around my house and trees, giving different sections their moment in the spotlight. I wanted to grow those gorgeous sun-loving perennials that supposedly need eight hours of sun, so I planted them anyway, and guess what? They're thriving and blooming beautifully right on schedule.

Starting a perennial garden? Don't be discouraged if it looks a bit sparse the first year. There's an old garden wisdom that perfectly captures the journey: "The first year it sleeps, the next it creeps, and the third year it leaps." I can vouch for this! My garden is in year four now, and there's so much extra growth that I'm constantly dividing and sharing plants with friends.

Garden Getaways: Local Inspiration

The Hinton Center in Hayesville is a treasure that does wonderful things for our community while offering some lovely gardens and walking trails. The Swing Garden showcases shasta daisies, oakleaf hydrangeas, beautyberry, catmint, and other perennials. Right next door, the Hope Terrace Garden features a delightful herb garden that the local chef actually uses in meal preparation, plus a variety of colorful flowers. Take time to walk the Labyrinth Path or explore the Vista Trail through the woods.

For a bigger adventure, the Atlanta Botanical Gardens in Atlanta and in Gainesville have spectacular gardens plus special exhibits. In Atlanta they are featuring an Alice in Wonderland inspired garden mosaiculture and a "kinetic tree" exhibition, while Gainesville has 21 larger than life metal sculptures of plants and animals.

Happy Gardening!



The Swing Garden at Hinton Rural Life Center.



A section of the author's Border Garden at his home.

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