

NORTH COAST YARD & GARDEN

HORTICULTURAL NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE OHIO GARDENER

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IN MY GARDEN

Happy autumn! Despite being three weeks shy of the equinox, it is clear that summer is fading into fall. Nighttime temperatures regularly dip into the 50s, and rain has returned to soak the parched soil.

There are still plenty of blooms in the garden. Hardy hibiscus (*H. moscheutos*) and rose-of-sharon (*H. syriacus*) are putting forth their tropical blossoms, and asters, goldenrod (*Solidago*) and sweet autumn clematis (*C. paniculata*) are budding or blooming as portents of autumn. Scotch heather (*Calluna*) is covered with color, while helenium and coreopsis hold on to summer with their fiery oranges, reds and yellows. Viburnums of all sorts are decorated with their ripening berries, and chaste tree (*Vitex*) has joined butterfly bush (*Buddleia*) with its fragrant flower spikes so attractive to butterflies.

The vegetable bed continues to produce despite the many problems. Several watermelons are swelling daily on the vine, and tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, and Picklebush cucumbers require daily inspection for ripe fruits. Tomato and pepper plants have fewer leaves this year, resulting in sunscald on the shoulders of some fruits. Overexposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can burn vegetables as well as the gardener, resulting in whitish, sunken patches with papery skin. Tomatoes and peppers with sunscald are still good to eat, although the burned area will have poor flavor and texture and should be removed. Summer plantings for



fall harvest benefited greatly from the rain, and are growing rapidly.

Established trees and shrubs all over the neighborhood are showing some fall colors, especially on the leaves toward the interior of the plant or on the underside of branches. This happens each year to a small degree, but is much more prominent this year. This is the response of the tree or shrub to the root loss sustained during the excessive rains back in May and June. Once the soil dried out in August, there were not enough roots left to support the moisture demands of all the leaves, so some had to go. The leaves that receive the least sunshine produce little sugars, so they are the first to be eliminated. These plants will all recover, but they would benefit from a dose of fertilizer once the whole tree or shrub changes color. The fertilizer will be stored in the roots for use next spring.

FEATURED VINE

CLEMATIS PANICULATA

Gardeners are familiar with the large-flowered versions of clematis, whose showy blooms in spring and summer earn the nickname “queen of the vines”. One of the easiest clematis to grow, and one of my favorite, is sweet-autumn clematis, *Clematis paniculata* (formerly *C. terniflora* or *C. maximowicziana*). It differs from its showier sisters in many respects. Its flowers are small and borne in clusters (panicles). It is a vigorous grower, easily reaching twenty feet or more in length in a single season, even after being pruned to the roots the year before. It reserves its blooms for late August or September, when the entire vine becomes a white, snowy drift. But the best feature of sweet-autumn clematis is the fragrance, which is not cloying, but light, crisp and sweet. A bower covered in sweet-autumn clematis in full bloom makes a lovely niche for reading, musing, or simply enjoying the warm but dry September breeze.

Sweet-autumn clematis is simple to grow. My vine is a division off my great-grandmother’s plant, which grew on an arbor at the back of her garden. The roots send up multiple stems, so it was easy to dig a section with several stems from the edge of the clump. The best time to do this is in the late fall or spring, after the vines have been cut back, but before new growth has appeared. I planted the clump on the north side of the lamp post in my front yard. Clematis in general prefer to have their roots shaded, but sweet-autumn is not particular. I planted it on the north side of the post so the vines would be encouraged to circle around the post in search of additional sunlight.

I never fertilize my sweet-autumn clematis, as it is on a small post and I don’t want the vines to grow too long. In fact, I regularly



pinch vines in May and June that grow too long too quickly, or stray away from the post. If you have a very large fence, trellis, arbor or bower, any general purpose fertilizer would help it fill the space rapidly. Don’t overdo the fertilizer, particularly after mid-July, or it may produce fewer flower buds in favor of green leafy growth.

By mid-August, sweet-autumn clematis will be covered in buds. My vine has begun blooming as early as August 15, and as late as September 12, but typically the first flowers peek out in time to see school buses return to the neighborhood. The flowers last for four weeks in normal fall weather, although a rainy September years back washed the flowers out after only two weeks. The flowers give way to typical clematis seed heads – little balls of long, swirling strands. These are nearly as beautiful as the flowers, but I take them as a cue to cut the vine down within inches of the ground. This species of clematis produces viable seeds, and can easily become a nuisance if it is allowed to scatter them about the garden. By cutting down the vine after the flowers are finished, I can decorate my lamp post with cornstalks, Indian corn, pumpkins, and other harvest decorations, just in time for the frosty nights leading up to Halloween.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

TOMATER RAIDERS

If critters like squirrels, chipmunks and raccoons are raiding your garden for tomatoes, but taking only a few bites and discarding the remains, they may be after the moisture inside the fruit. This behavior increases during hot and dry weather, and you may find that a large dish of water placed near the garden eliminates most tomato theft.

Avoid using spray-on repellents on vegetables. Repellents are designed to make the plant smell and taste bad to the critters, so they will taste bad to you, too. They are also designed to resist washing off in the rain, making it difficult to simply wash off the repellent before eating. If the thieving behavior persists, try draping the plants with netting, although this will interfere with your own harvest.

TRELLIS SUPPORT

Trellises are a useful element of any garden, providing vertical elements to the landscape, support for vines, and screening out undesirable views. To get the most out of your trellis, don't just stick it in the ground on the flimsy slats at the bottom. These are not strong enough to support a heavy plant or resist strong winds, and contact with the soil will immediately begin to rot the trellis.

Sturdy wood or metal stakes can be sunk deeply into the ground for firm support, then screwed or tied to the trellis. Drill holes in the trellis and stakes before inserting screws to prevent splitting the wood. Attach the trellis to the stakes so that the trellis base is off the ground to prevent rot of the trellis itself. If the wooden stakes begin to rot or break, they can be replaced inexpensively and without having to remove vines from the old trellis and interweaving them into the new one.



TURF TALK

The stresses of summer heat, drought, insects and disease have taken their toll, and it is time to repair the damage. This is the best month to start grass from seed, as the air is cooler but the ground is still warm, allowing for speedy germination and root establishment.

The first step is to identify the grass in your lawn and get a seed mixture to match. Most likely your lawn has a mixture of Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass. Both have good texture and color. Use a 50-50 mix for well-trafficked lawns, or a 75% bluegrass, 25% ryegrass mixture for best appearance.

If the grass is in shade most of the day, it most likely has very thin-bladed fine fescue in it. Fine fescue tolerates shade well, and especially the dry soil caused by tree roots. A mixture of up to 75% fine fescue, with some bluegrass and ryegrass can cope with two or three hours of sun. Consider converting areas that receive no sun to shade-tolerant groundcover, perennial beds, or patios.

Turf-type tall fescue is becoming more popular in Ohio as it is very drought and traffic resistant and tolerates light shade.

This grass has a slightly different appearance, so don't use it to patch a bluegrass-ryegrass lawn. It is best to start from scratch if you want to use tall fescue to ensure a uniform appearance. Tall fescue can be mixed with bluegrass or ryegrass seed if desired.

Prepare the area to be seeded by killing off undesirable weeds and grasses with a herbicide containing glyphosate. Make sure these weeds are completely killed before seeding, so they don't reappear in your new lawn.

Next, expose the soil so the grass seed can absorb moisture from it, sprout and take root. It is often easier to spread a thin layer of topsoil over the area than to loosen the existing soil. This will also prevent exposing weed seeds in the soil to light and air, allowing them to sprout.

Spread grass seed evenly over the prepared area. I prefer to do this by hand, as it gives me the greatest control over how much seed I use and where the seed goes. Firm the seed into the soil by lightly stepping on it. Apply a starter fertilizer to the area, then water thoroughly so that the top several inches of soil are moistened.

The next phase is the most frequent cause of failure. Keep the soil surface moist at all times for at least three weeks, until the grass is well up. If you let the soil dry out, the tiny seedlings will die, and you will have to start over with fresh seed. Keep the soil surface moist enough to turn it dark, but not so wet that puddles form.

Mow the grass once it grows tall enough to need it. It is better to walk on the new lawn than to let it become overgrown and then scalped. Weeds are inevitable in seeded

areas, as you are making conditions that are ideal for seeds to sprout and grow. Don't worry about weeds until the grass has grown enough to require at least three mowings. Then use a lawn weed killer to eliminate broadleaf weeds. Annual grassy weeds will die in the first frost.

GARDEN CALENDAR

- This is National Organic Harvest Month.
- Clean up fallen fruit to avoid wasp and yellowjacket problems.
- Prune out raspberry and blackberry canes after fruiting ends.
- Delay pruning until late autumn to avoid stimulating new growth.
- Purchase spring-blooming bulbs to plant next month.
- Apply the fourth step of lawn fertilizer around Labor Day.
- Begin collecting seed from perennials and annuals for next year.
- Give Christmas cactus & poinsettias 12-14 hours of uninterrupted darkness for the next 6-10 weeks to initiate flowering by the holidays.
- Core aerate lawns with compacted soil or over 1/2 inch of thatch.
- Keep deadheading late-blooming perennials to keep them blooming as long as possible.
- Plant chrysanthemums, pansies and ornamental kale or cabbage early this month.
- Divide iris and peonies now.
- Take pictures or map your perennials to remember where they are next spring.

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