

September 2020-Vol.6 No. 9

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The September To-Do List

By Cathy Caldwell | September 2020-Vol.6 No. 9



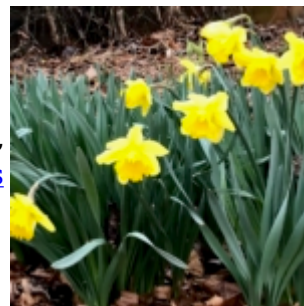
Fall is one of the best planting seasons, so get ready. It's especially good for **planting shrubs and trees**, though if it's still hot, delay for a week or two until weather is cooler. The ideal time is when the leaves begin to change color. For expert, detailed advice on planting trees, consult "Planting Trees," Va.Coop.Ext., [Va.Coop.Ext. Pub. No.426-702](#) and [Charlottesville Tree Stewards/How to Select, Plant, and Care for your Tree](#). And don't miss this new video, [How to Plant a Tree/Va.Coop.Ext. Video](#).

Water newly-planted trees and shrubs regularly throughout the fall. Don't rely on rainfall alone to maintain adequate moisture levels. To help hold in moisture as well as moderate the soil temperature, spread a three-inch layer of mulch over the rootball area after it has been well watered, but do not pile mulch against the plant's stem or trunk. Check the soil near the roots once a week. If the soil near the trunk is dry, your new tree or shrub needs water, and plenty of it, especially if there's been no rain. If the soil near the trunk is moist, don't over-water as that can kill a tree as surely as under-watering.

September is an excellent time to start **dividing those perennials** that need it (daylilies, garden phlox, irises, and oriental poppies should be divided every three to four years), and the ideal time to do this — adjusted somewhat for climate change — appears to be around the 2nd or 3rd week of September. Your new divisions need at least six weeks to get established before winter. As a general rule, spring-blooming plants are divided in fall, and summer-blooming plants are divided in spring. Many plants, however, can be divided in either spring or fall. Some perennials, including many with long tap roots such as *Baptisia australis*, do not respond well to division. Check guidelines for specific plants before dividing. For detailed how-to instructions on division, see the Clemson Cooperative Extension publication on "[Dividing Perennials](#)", which is very helpful.

September or early October is **the ideal time to divide or move peonies** so that they become well established before winter. Peony tubers are very fragile, so be particularly careful to keep the root mass as intact as possible. Space the plants at least three feet apart. This is important: Plant the roots so that the buds are only about one to two inches below the soil surface. If you plant them deeper, they will not bloom.

Spring-blooming **bulbs can be planted throughout the fall until the ground is frozen**. They do best if planted about a month before the ground freezes. A good rule of thumb is to plant bulbs when the average nighttime temperatures are in the 40° to 50° range. If bulbs are bought before planting time, store them in a cool, dry, dark place at a temperature of 60° to 65°F. See the [September 2015 Tasks and Tips article](#) in *The Garden Shed* for recommendations of deer-resistant spring-blooming bulbs in addition to daffodils. Fall is also the time to **divide bulbs**.



Fertilize bulbs: Any time after your bulbs have finished blooming is a good time to fertilize them, but they may not need fertilizer if you regularly add organic matter, like compost, to your beds. But if your narcissus and other spring-blooming bulbs look like they're not getting enough nutrients from the soil, you might consider fertilizing them lightly with a 5-10-10 fertilizer. Avoid high-nitrogen fertilizer (the N element, the first of the three numbers listed on the label).

Daffodils
Photo: Cathy Caldwell

Clean up your beds to prevent disease and pests next year. In addition to the all-important tasks of watering and weeding, it's important to **keep garden beds clear of plant foliage that might carry fungus or other diseases** from this season to the next. **Bag up diseased plant material and discard;** don't add it to the compost pile. As perennials die back in the fall, be sure to cut off the dead foliage and discard since the foliage could encourage insects and disease. Don't cut off the brown fronds of your ferns in fall since the old fronds help protect the center through the winter. Once you see new green fronds in spring, you can carefully remove the brown fronds. Or, just let them fade off naturally.

Save seeds For suggestions and instructions on seed saving, see [The Ornamental Garden in September/Garden Shed Sept. 2018](#). Don't forget to save the seeds from the pods on your Hyacinth Bean vine (*Dolichos lablab*).

Avoid Fall Pruning. Resist the urge to grab your pruning shears. You can remove dead branches, but then put away the clippers. Shrubs that bloom on new wood can be pruned in late winter. Shrubs that bloom on old wood can be pruned right after they bloom in spring or summer. If you prune in fall, you might mistakenly prune off buds that have already set for spring bloom. Or, you could encourage a late season flush of growth that could be injured by cold weather.



Bittersweet climbing a tree. Photo: Cathy Caldwell

Attack Invasives If you've got oriental bittersweet climbing in your trees, or autumn olives filling in every available space on your property, fall is the ideal time to go on the attack. The "cut stump" method is quite effective for both these invaders. It does not involve spraying herbicide. Instead you "paint" the herbicide onto the cut stem or stump. If you're not familiar with the cut-stump method, you might start by participating in an autumn-specific Zoom training session offered by Blue Ridge Prism, [Fall Invasive Plant Workshops/Blue Ridge Prism](#). Now is also the best time to eliminate *Ailanthus*; read all about it at [Ailanthus Alert/Blue Ridge Prism](#).



Berries make invasive bittersweet easier to spot in autumn. Photo: Cathy Caldwell



Autumn olive. Photo: Cathy Caldwell



Mature Autumn olive. Photo: Cathy Caldwell

Fall Webworms Are you seeing more than usual? I'm wondering if it's related to climate change, which is supposed to lead to an increase in insect pests. Have you noticed any new pests? For more about fall webworms, see last month's article, [In the Ornamental Garden/Garden Shed Aug. 2020](#).

For more tips, see [Monthly Gardening Tips, September](#) .

And we recommend checking past Tasks & Tips articles: [Sept. 2015](#), [Sept. 2016](#) , [Sept. 2017](#), [Sept. 2018](#), [Sept. 2019](#).

Happy gardening!

Lasagna Mulching

By Cathy Caldwell | September 2020-Vol.6 No. 9



The practice of lasagna mulching — also called **sheet composting** — has borrowed language from housekeeping to describe a kind of slow gardening. I’m partial to the Italian flavor of the first title. In the long run, lasagna mulching makes vegetables taste better because it amends and creates nutritious soil. Indeed, lasagna mulching makes a new and better bed for anything we plant. It’s an excellent method for starting a new garden bed on a lawn. You’ll hear it called “sheet composting” because it’s a form of cold composting. It gets rave reviews because it caters to what all gardeners like to do best: watching and waiting as plants grow and thrive. Only in this case, we’re first watching soil grow and waiting a few months to add seeds or plants to a newly-rich earth. If you’re in a hurry, lasagna mulching is probably not for you; but the benefits of starting a bed for vegetables or ornamentals with this method usually outweigh the inconvenience of delays. Fall is a great time to start sheet composting for a new bed, since it will probably be ready by spring planting time, though you can start any time of year.

The fancy **definition** says lasagna mulching is a **cold composting** method used around the world for generations in order to convert green and brown organic material into vegetable or ornamental beds. It improves soil and recycles waste. The basic components are nitrogen (N), carbon (C), oxygen (O) and water (H₂O) — all proportioned to break down organic matter into good soil. [Oregon State U.Ext.Gardening](#)

[Techniques.](#)

Benefits. The advantage to the gardener is that cold composting requires less work and expertise than “hot” composting. Although termed “mulching,” it’s unlike mulching intended to conserve moisture around a plant because it actually creates a new bed in a place we plan to use later for growing something, in a few months to a year. The process will suffocate grass and most weeds, so you can start a new bed without digging. We can size our new bed as small or large as we have materials and space. It’s cheap, requiring few tools and minimal labor. Most of the materials are stuff we need to get rid of anyway and would rather avoid sending to the landfill. The real payoff is the advantage to the garden itself. The end product is better soil; better texture that is friable, meaning right size particles that retain water and cohere without packing. It’s a better substance filled with more of the living organisms (fungi and bacteria) that attract worms to “work” the ground so that it can become almost no-till. It’s a better way to amend the red clay of Piedmont Virginia. It will have fewer weeds and more of the trace minerals not easily obtainable in commercial fertilizers. One teaspoon of good quality soil contains more living organisms than the number of people living on earth today! [Soil Health Nuggets/USDA.](#)

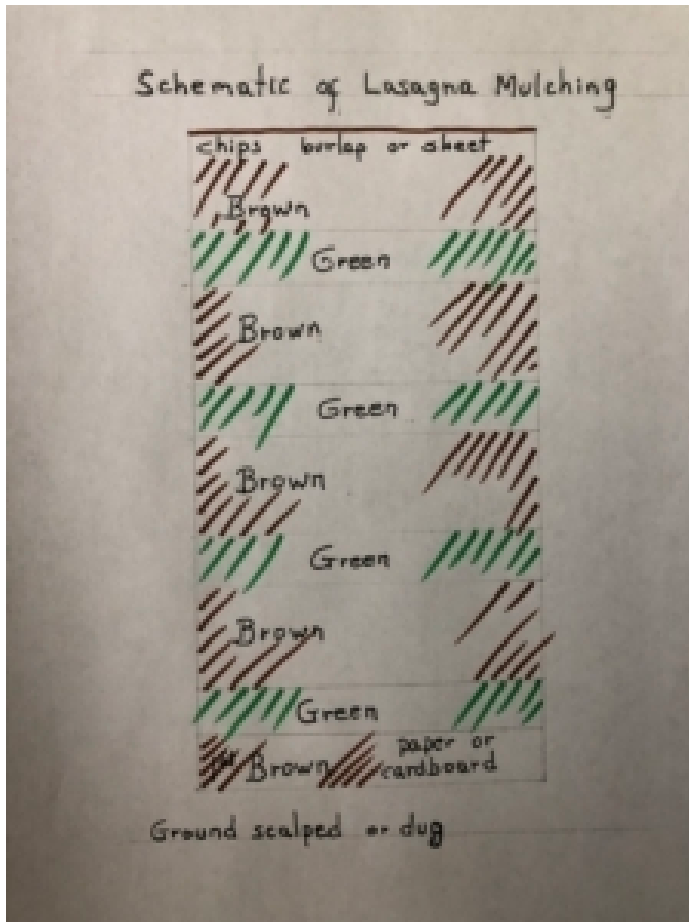
The Recipe: As with any composting, the basic recipe is 2/3 brown material (carbon) and 1/3 green material (nitrogen) mixed with enough water so that the whole mess is like a squeezed-out sponge. Too much water makes a soggy, smelly mess. Too little water dries out the pile and stops decomposition. Part of the wonder of lasagna mulching is that proportions for cold composting don’t have to be exact. Indeed, some experts recommend using equal proportions of brown and green material. Of course, if you’re trying to make a hot composting bed, that would require a more exacting mixture, using the 2/3 to 1/3 formula. The finer your pieces of brown and green material, the more surface area they will have to decompose more quickly and completely. But unless you have the means and time to chop things up into small pieces and carefully water, just relax and let nature do most of the work.

The Steps to Success:

Lasagna mulching requires months to finish and a considerable amount of material. Therefore, you will want to estimate in advance how much of these materials you can scrounge for free or buy over the months it takes to complete the composting process. Your raw materials will be:

- **green matter** (grass clippings, weeds without seeds), kitchen scraps (except no meat or grease), peat moss, worm castings, and manure (except no pet waste);
- **brown matter** (coffee grounds, spoiled hay, tea bags, nut shells, hair, newspaper and cardboard, wood chips, sawdust, and a few wood ashes); and
- **water.**

Remember that some coffee shops will save their coffee grounds for gardeners; many people are happy to give away cardboard or newspapers; and some barns will give away manure. Fresh manure composts better than the bagged manure sold in stores. Fall is an easy time to collect leaves, which you can break down by running over them with a mower, an especially easy process if you have a mower that bags the clippings. Grass (N) and dead leaves (C) mown and bagged together make a great start for this project. Never use walnut wood chips or sawdust from treated lumber. Diseased vegetable vines, especially from tomatoes, or leaves and hay sprayed with herbicide are not appropriate fodder for lasagna mulching.



Lasagna mulching diagram by David Garth

Steps:

1. Outline the space for the new bed. The final product will be at least one to three feet high, so you may want to contain the bed with large rocks or a wood frame.

2. Begin by scalping the ground with a mower by setting the blade very low to cut whatever is growing right at the ground. You may want to dig up long roots. Being lazy, I'm taking my time by covering the space with black plastic to cook live plants to death over summer so I can plant in fall. See photo where I have just started a bed. Know that some roots are deep enough to sprout anyway (e.g., dandelion, wire grass) and some seeds can lie dormant for years.



*As part of Step 2, you can top the bed with black plastic in order to kill most growing things, so that the lasagna bed can be built on relatively weed-free ground.
Photo: David Garth*

3. The **first layer will be brown carbon material**. Four to six layers of newspaper or a single piece of corrugated cardboard (thank you, home delivery). Plastic tape is best removed. Wet this layer thoroughly.

4. **The next layer will be green nitrogen material** (grass clippings, kitchen scraps, etc.).

5. **The third layer is brown**, trying to add a little more than

twice as much brown as the amount of green in the second layer. This gives roughly 2/3 brown carbon to 1/3 green nitrogen. Proportions need not be exact since this is cold composting.

6. Next layer is green.

7. Continue to alternate layers, roughly in these proportions, until the pile is about 18 inches to 3 feet high, sprinkling water whenever the pile begins to dry out.

8. Your last layer should be brown carbon material, which you may cover with chips, burlap or an old cotton sheet to keep it together, especially in windy weather.

Finishing. When the bed is about a foot or so high, there are several options to consider. Plan on three to six months as the minimum time to wait before planting. The higher you build your lasagna bed, the longer it will take for you to build and for the bed to build good soil. Turning the material every so often hastens the process of breaking down the raw components into the final product. If you need to plant immediately, you can add a few inches of topsoil over the bed for seed or for setting out seedlings. Over time, the newly planted garden bed will sink; and you will have to water regularly any plantings on top since the lasagna layers underneath dry out more quickly. If you can stand the wait, simply water the lasagna mulching bed from time to time until the material settles and the new soil crumbles easily in your hand. Then, remove any stems or twigs that failed to disappear and fill your new bed with stuff that grows better than ever. Some gardeners find the lasagna bed takes a year or more to reach peak performance.

Rest easy, knowing you have partnered with a natural process to make a better earth.

SOURCES:

“Sheet mulching — aka lasagna composting — builds soil, saves time,” [Oregon State U.Ext.Gardening Techniques](#)

Lasagna Gardening: A New Layering System for Bountiful Gardens: No Digging, No Tilling, No Weeding, No Kidding! (Patricia Lanza, Rodale Press, 1998)

“Sheet Composting,” [Univ.Nebraska Ext. Lansing County](#)

“Lasagna Gardening,” Clemson Univ.Coop.Ext. [Clemson Home & Garden Info.Center](#)

“Lasagna Gardening,” [Univ.Cal./CalaverasCountyMasterGardeners](#)

“No Dig Garden Beds,” [Univ.of Fla./lawn-and-garden/no-dig-garden-beds/](#)

“Backyard Composting,” [Va.Coop.Ext./HORT-49-PDF](#)

“Gardening Tips: Lasagna Compost,” Marin Master Gardeners, Univ.Cal.Agr.&Nat.Resources, [ucanr.edu/sites/MarinMG/?story=662](#)

Rose Champion

By Cathy Caldwell | September 2020-Vol.6 No. 9



After a summer of drought, extreme heat, and marauding insects and deer, you're probably on the lookout for a plant that can withstand all these assaults. But perhaps you were thinking that there's no such plant. In fact, there is: rose champion. It withstands hot, dry summers, has a long season of bloom, and best of all, is shunned by deer and other four-legged nibblers. Oh, and it is not bothered by pests or diseases, is easy to grow, and holds up nicely as a cut flower.

Rose campion (*Lychnis coronaria* or *Silene coronaria*) has been classified by some experts as a short-lived perennial and by others as a biennial, but since it reseeds like crazy, it will function like a perennial in your garden. It has a basal rosette, which looks much like lambs ears (*Stachys*), out of which grow multiple tall stems (2-3 ft.) topped by small, brilliant magenta flowers. It starts blooming in late May in this area, and continues through July, and into August. This plant, a native of Europe, has been popular in gardens for at least 2,000 years, and has been in cultivation in the United States since colonial times. In recent decades, however, it has become a rarity in nurseries and garden centers, though the seeds are readily available. Apparently, the fact that it doesn't bloom until its second year renders it less appealing to the nursery trade.



But what about the name?

Unfortunately, the species name is an unpleasant reminder of the current coronavirus pandemic.

Horticulturally speaking, the term “coronaria” refers to its use in making garlands, perhaps for champions. And yes, the common name *campion*, refers to athletic champions. The genus name *lychnis* comes from the Greek name for lamp, and is believed to refer to the use of the leaves as lamp wicks.

Rose campion. Note basal rosette — a first year plant — in foreground. Photo: Cathy Caldwell



Video: Champion of the

The brightness of the flowers is not universally appealing, and some gardeners feel that the flowers do not play well with others. Here's how Phillips and Burrell put it: “The campions have strongly colored flowers that can be difficult to incorporate into the garden.” And Allan Armitage refers to the flowers of the species as “gaudy,” though recommends the hybrids, including ‘Abbotsford Rose’. All three are more fond of the white-flowered version — ‘Alba’ — and the bicolor ‘Angel Blush’. Don't be discouraged, though. In my humble opinion, the key lies in is using it effectively:

it's all about placement and pruning. If you're not yet excited, just **watch this video:** [Champion of the Garden, Rose Campion/Okla.Ext.](#)

I've had the magenta-flowered rose campion for several years now, and they're great in **masses** (as shown in the above-mentioned video). They've been a bit tall for my borders, but with timely pruning, they fit in with others more felicitously. I also employ pruning to control the number of seedlings that appear next year; I prune some plants in mid-summer to encourage a second, shorter (in height) flush of bloom, while leaving others to set seed.

Tracy DiSabato-Aust has experimented with **pruning and deadheading rose campion**, and her advice is highly recommended. She offers a couple alternative methods:

- You can **pinch or cut back the stems before flowering**, which will give you **shorter, more compact plants** that will play well with others in your mixed borders.
 - If you do this cutting back when the plants are 15" tall and in bud, they will flower at 2 ft rather than at the normal 3 ft., though flowering is delayed by 2 to 3 weeks.
 - If you cut them back when they are only 6 inches tall, there will be no delay in flowering.
- You can **deadhead every week or so through July and August** to prolong bloom by several weeks.



This plant was pruned in August and is now blooming on much shorter stems. Photo: Cathy Caldwell

I should also note that if you cut back your rose campion down to the basal rosette right after its initial bloom, it will "behave more like a perennial" — and have a longer life.

Growing

I started with one plant a few years ago; thanks to the seeds from that one plant, I now have countless plants. The best way to start, however, is with seeds, and you can plant those seeds now — or as soon as the weather cools off. Planting the seeds in early fall is highly recommended, as is sowing the seeds close together if you want a massed effect. The seeds need about three weeks of moist cold for good germination. If started indoors in spring, seeds require light and three weeks of moist chilling. Rose campion grows well in any good, well-draining garden soil, either acidic or alkaline, in full sun. Though it will tolerate dry conditions once established, it needs plenty of water during the germination and establishment period.



Rose campion 'Alba'

Photo: Leonora (Ellie) Enking, CC BY-SA 2.0, [Creative Commons](#)

I should mention that there's a relatively new variety of rose campion that has shorter stems, larger, double-flowered, rose-red blossoms, and is sterile. It was discovered and introduced into commerce by the BBC television show, *Gardeners' World*.



Rose Campion 'Gardeners' World' — a new double-flowered cultivar. Photo courtesy of Select Seeds, Union, CT.
www.selectseeds.com/Seeds & Plants

SOURCES:

Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Perennials (Ellen Phillips & C.Colston Burrell, 1993)

Armitage's Garden Perennials: A Color Encyclopedia (Allan Armitage, 2000)

The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: Planting & Pruning Techniques (Tracy DiSabato-Aust, 2006)

[Lychnis coronaria 'Blych' Gardeners' World/ Missouri Botanical Garden](#)

[Plant of the Week: Rose Campion/Univ.Ark.Coop.Ext](#)

[Lychnis coronaria/Missouri Botanical Garden](#)

Featured Photo: courtesy of Missouri Botanical Garden PlantFinder.

Upcoming Events

By Susan Martin | September 2020-Vol.6 No. 9

PIEDMONT MASTER GARDENER GARDEN BASICS CLASSES ON ZOOM

Fall Classes

Saturdays, 2:00 - 3:30 PM

September 19

“Year-Round Beauty With Bulbs” with Pat Chadwick

Learn how bulbs can add color and drama to your garden in summer, fall, and winter, as well as well as in spring. Registration deadline is September 14.

October 17

“Bring in the Birds!” with Leigh Surdukowski.

Go beyond the feeder and make your yard a paradise for birds. Registration deadline is October 17.

November 21

“Water-Wise Gardening” with Deborah Harriman.

Become a steward of the environment by managing water efficiently in your landscape. Registration deadline is November 16.

Classes are **FREE** but registration is required. **To register**, send your name to **info@pmgarchives.com** by the deadline indicated for each class.

2021 MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER TRAINING VIA ZOOM

Hosted by Virginia Cooperative Extension Rapidan River Extension

For residents of counties: Charlottesville/Albemarle, Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange, and Fluvanna

Master Gardeners are volunteer educators, in partnership with Virginia Cooperative Extension, dedicated to working through community outreach education and promoting science-based environmentally sound horticulture practices and sustainable landscape management.

Please join one of our **upcoming orientation sessions on Zoom:**

October 8, 6:00 - 7:00 PM

October 15, 6:00 - 7:00 PM

October 22, 6:00 - 7:00 PM

TO REGISTER AND RECEIVE ZOOM LINK, contact VCE Culpeper County at **540-727-3435** or **CAMILLA@VT.EDU**

For More Info and Details on Applying

Albemarle/Charlottesville residents:

<https://pmgarchives.com/volunteer/become-a-master-gardener>

or bbthierwechter@gmail.com

For additional Albemarle/Charlottesville

orientation sessions, contact bbthierwechter@gmail.com

Fluvanna County residents: <https://www.fluvannamg.org/>
or sue.tepper2@gmail.com
Culpeper, Greene, Madison, and Orange Residents: camilla@vt.edu or
540-727-3435

See this [flyer](#) for further information.

MONTICELLO'S FALL PLANT AND NURSERY SALE

David M. Rubenstein Visitor Center

931 Thomas Jefferson Parkway, Charlottesville, VA 22902

Saturday, September 12, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Saturday, October 17, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Sunday, October 18, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Fall is the perfect time for planting and the Monticello nursery will have a wide range of plants available for sale. Join us at the David M. Rubenstein Visitor Center for three exclusive and physically distanced plant sales. The Monticello nursery will have a variety of trees and shrubs available in September and discounted perennials in October. Our knowledgeable nursery staff will be on hand to answer your gardening questions. **Registration is required** and space is limited. **Registered guests will be allotted one forty-five minute reserved time to shop and purchase plants. Credit card sales only! Go to this [link](#) to register for your time.**

JAMES MADISON'S MONTPELIER

Nature Exploration Series: *What Tree is That?*

11350 Constitution Highway
Montpelier Station, VA 22957

Saturday, September 12

10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Join our Horticulture team and the Virginia Master Naturalists onsite as we study the stately specimens, the native beauties, and the exotic interlopers found through the grounds to determine what they are. A great opportunity for the novice plantsman to hone your tree identification skills. Space is limited, so sign up now! **Free/members, \$15/nonmembers.** Register [here](#).

IVY CREEK NATURAL AREA VIRTUAL GUIDED WALK OR SELF-GUIDED, ON-SITE WALK

**Co-sponsored by Jefferson Chapter Virginia Native Plant Society
and Ivy Creek Natural Area**

**First available for download on or about
September 19, 2020**

This walk led by Tana Herndon will look at the early fall wildflowers in the sunny areas, the field, and along the reservoir. With her guidance, you will investigate the goldenrods and other aster family plants, potentially including Maryland goldenaster and beggar-ticks; you will also look for seed pods and the uncommon Oval ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes ovalis*).

See this [link](#) for information on different ways of taking the walk, and how to get a list of native plants that will be highlighted.

THE NATURE FOUNDATION AT WINTERGREEN

Hike with a Foundation Naturalist

Join a Foundation Naturalist for an **interpretive hike** and explore Wintergreen's natural environment! These hikes are rated moderate to strenuous. Meet at Trillium House parking lot. **Registration and payment due before event.** Due to Covid- 19, we are following the state's restrictions. See this [link](#) for information about the different types of hikes available, and to register.

"Meet the Mushrooms" Hike

Saturday, September 26

Register for either 1:00 PM or 4:00 PM

Join Mary Jane Epps for an introductory tour into the world of mycology. The goal of this venture is to educate each hiker on the basics of mushroom identification. You will tour various locations around the Wintergreen landscape in search of the many mushroom varieties our ecosystem can produce. The hike is rated as moderate. **Registration is required;** see this [link](#) to register.

Fall Wildflower Virtual Symposium

"From Our Woods to Your Woods"

Symposium Opens October 2

REGISTER BY SEPTEMBER 25

With your registration:

- You gain access to Symposium programs for 30 days so you can attend when it's convenient for you. You can also attend over and over; no more trying to decide which activity to go to and which one to miss.
- You can attend our From Our Woods to Your Woods Live Roundtable with Executive Director Doug Coleman.
- You are entered into three raffles.

Fee is \$60. This online event benefits The Nature Foundation's work within the Nelson County Public Schools. See this [link](#) for more information and to **REGISTER.**

The Nature Foundation at Wintergreen Greenhouse

Native plants and shrubs are available for sale at the greenhouse on Thursdays & Fridays from 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM. The Nature Foundation is accepting native plant orders via email to Doug Coleman. If you are looking for something specific it may be best to contact us before you come. See a list of . Order via email: director@twnf.org. Customers will be given a date and time to pick up their plants at the greenhouse.

TREE RISK ASSESSMENT

Virginia Cooperative Extension Webinar

Thursday, September 17

10:00 AM

Joel Koci of VSU provides an introduction to tree risk assessment. See this [link](#) to register in advance.

WAYNESBORO TREE WORKSHOP FREE WEBINAR SERIES

Cosponsored by the Virginia Department of Forestry and

Virginia Cooperative Extension

12:00 noon - 1:00 PM

Wednesday, September 2
Leveraging Technology & Other Techniques to Care for Mature Trees

Wednesday, September 9
If Trees Could Talk: Urban Tree Ring Analysis

Wednesday, September 16
Seeing Trees & the Forest

Wednesday, September 23
Green Industry in the Woods & Weeds: Expanding your Business with Woodland Health Services to New & Existing Clients

Wednesday, September 30
Urban Tree Canopy Cover: Structure, Function, & Assessment

REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. For information on this series and to register, see this [link](#).

PLAN IT NATIVE
Landscape Conference by Deep Roots KC
September 16-18

3.5 day ONLINE Conference

See this [LINK](#) for more information, including fee, and to REGISTER.

[BLUE RIDGE PRISM](#)
Partnership for Invasive Species Management

FALL WORKSHOPS VIA ZOOM
(Cost is \$10 per person)

Tuesday, September 29 (1:00 - 4:00 PM) - [REGISTER HERE](#)

Wednesday, October 7 (1:00 - 4:00 PM) - [REGISTER HERE](#)

Thursday, October 22 (1:00 - 4:00 PM) - [REGISTER HERE](#)

VIRGINIA CONSERVATION NETWORK PRESENTS THE VIRTUAL EVENT

“An Afternoon With Dr. J. Drew Lanham”

Friday, October 2

1:30 - 2:30 PM EST

Dr. Lanham is an Alumni Distinguished Professor of Wildlife Ecology and Master Teacher at Clemson University, and the author of many poems, essays, and the award-winning, *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man’s Love Affair with Nature*. This event is **free and open to the public!** Registration can be found [here](#) or through the [Facebook event](#).

HEARTFLAME GARDEN OPEN DAY

Saturday, October 17

1:00 - 6:00 PM

Heartflame Garden is a private garden located at **650 Sandy Bottom Road near Elkton, Virginia**, adjacent to Shenandoah National Park. It is a lovely three-season display garden with about two acres of

cultivated gardens and another four acres of rolling hills and streams to explore. The garden is open by appointment, and also offers “open” days when an appointment is not required. Check this [link](#) for more information, including contact information.

VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION VIDEO LIBRARY

VCE offers a **variety of video** on topics geared to both beginner and more advanced gardeners. Examples of topics include:

Cut Flowers in the Home Garden
Container Gardening with Vegetables
Cedar Apple Rust
Common Diseases in the Home Garden
Good Bugs, Bad Bugs
Late Blight on Tomatoes

For these and many more videos that address specific topics or those of more general interest, see this [link](#).

September in the Edible Garden

By Ralph Morini | September 2020-Vol.6 No. 9



September is a busy month for committed edibles gardeners. Tasks include harvesting, cleaning up, final planting for fall, early winter harvest, and cover crop planting for beds that are finished for the season. We'll touch on each area to help you plan your actions.

Harvesting

Many summer vegetable plantings will be reaching the end of their productive lives. It is a judgement call on when to stop the harvest and remove plants. It depends on plant condition, pest impact and intentions for that garden space's next phase. Picking when fruits and vegetables are young can help keep plants going a bit longer. Items like tomatoes can be picked before fully ripe to minimize pest damage, while maintaining most "summer tomato" qualities. There are a number of ways to [ripen green tomatoes off the vine](#).

This is also the time to consider how to optimize late season herb harvest. Pinching flowers will help prolong leaf production. Plants can be dug up and potted, or cut and rooted to be moved inside. Alternatively, they can be cut for immediate use or [preserved by freezing or drying](#).

Planting

In our local hardiness zone 7a, some produce and vegetables can be planted through mid-September. These include beets, kale, collards, mustard, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, radish, spinach and turnips. The earlier they are planted the better, since growth will slow as days shorten and temperatures drop.



Homemade row cover over kale patch. Photo: Ralph Morini

Pests like cabbage worms continue to attack brassicas including kale and collards until the first frost. Protecting new plantings with a row cover can minimize pest damage while offering a 4-5 degree temperature benefit and longer growing period after frost. Check out this Garden Shed article for [simple row cover construction ideas](#).

Preparing Beds for Winter

If you are finished for the year, it is good to do a few things to prepare beds for next spring. First task is to thoroughly clean up the garden area. Removing spent plant material is essential to minimize wintering-over pests and disease-carrying vegetation. It is best to bag and dispose of any plant material that might harbor pests or diseases.

Once cleaned, it is good to add organic matter in the form of compost, mulched leaf litter, or organic

fertilizers, providing decomposition time to make nutrients plant-accessible by next planting season. If you aren't planting a cover crop, mulch beds with an organic mulch like straw, chopped up leaves or aged wood chips

Best practice is to plant a cover crop and keep live roots in the soil year round. Cover crops bring several benefits including building soil structure, reducing erosion and compaction, suppressing weeds, adding organic matter, and in the case of legumes, fixing atmospheric nitrogen for plant use. There are a couple of basic cover crop choices: winter-killed and winter-hardy.

- **Winter-killed cover crops** die out after a few hard frosts, but their root and surface biomass help hold the soil and they can be used as mulches or tilled under in spring. Oats, field peas, oilseed radishes, and rapeseed are common types.
- **Winter-hardy cover crops** can either grow through or go dormant in winter but resume growth in spring. They should be cut in spring prior to going to seed, with the greens composted, used as mulch, or tilled into soil as a green fertilizer. If greens are tilled in, allow 2 or 3 weeks after tilling for decomposition prior to planting. Winter-hardy choices include winter rye, winter wheat, hairy vetch, Austrian winter peas, and crimson clover.
- **Mixed Covers:** Some farmers report positive soil effects from mixed cover crops that bring diversity to the soil. Check out your options from wherever you purchase your seed.



New fence and beds ready for organic matter additions. Photo: Ralph Morini

If you are planning a new garden or garden expansion for next year, now is a good time to begin preparing your soil. Tilling to remove or bury surface vegetation, adding organic matter, and mulching or cover cropping prior to winter will put you in good shape next year. The picture above shows my own expansion. I

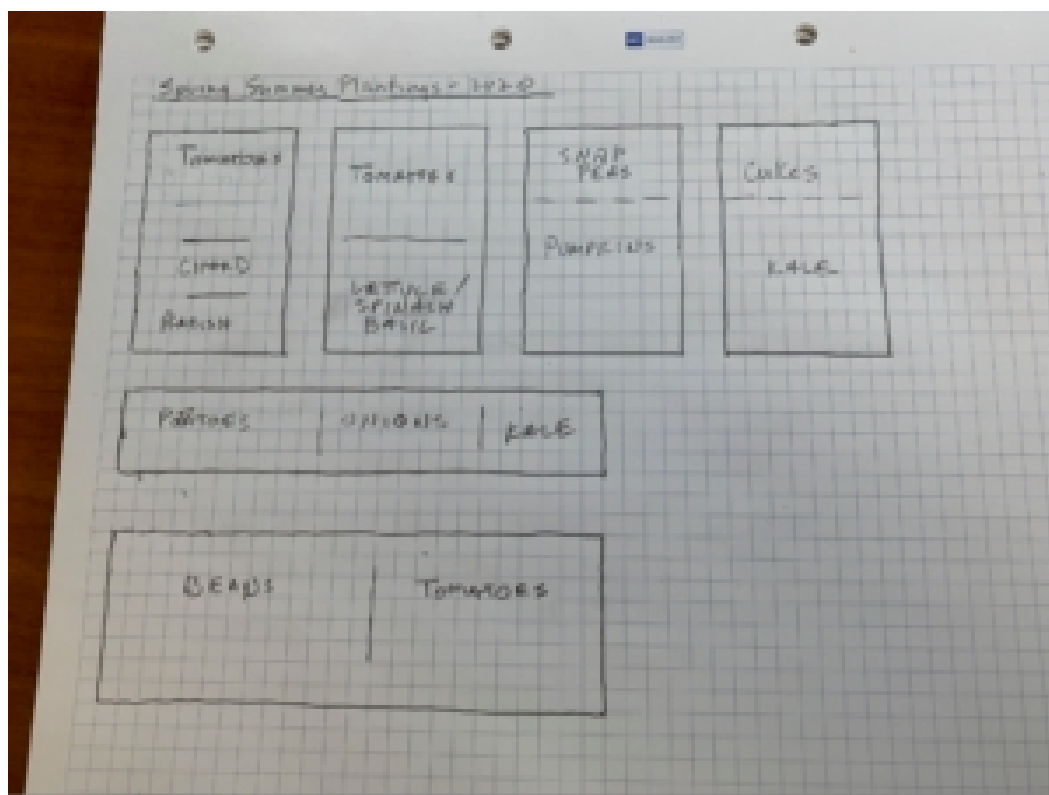
turned the surface grass under to add some badly needed organic matter to my clay subsoil. Planting a cover crop this month is the next step.

More information on cover crops can be found in earlier Garden Shed articles including [Cover Crops](#) from September 2015 and [Minimum Till Cultivation](#) from the February 2019 issue.

General Tips

Garlic is best planted during October. Now is a good time to purchase seed bulbs before local retailers sell out. Internet suppliers offer more variety for experimenters or gourmards. For additional information, check out the article on growing garlic in the [October 2015 issue of Garden Shed](#).

Give your tomato plants one last feeding. Compost tea or fish emulsion should give them the extra energy they need to make that final push at the end of the season. **Pinching off small green tomatoes and any new flowers** will channel the plant's energy into ripening the remaining full-size fruit.



Journal noting crop locations to inform rotation next year

If you've been lax in your **garden documentation** this year, tour your own vegetable garden and make notes on this year's varieties, successes, challenges and chores, so that you can learn for next year. Make a sketch showing the location of this year's plants to be used next spring for rotating your crops, an important pest and disease management practice.

Continue to weed your garden to prevent the weeds from going to seed and germinating over the winter and spring. **Keep the strawberry patch** weed free. Every weed you pull will help make weeding easier next spring.

Pick pears when green and "hard ripe" — allowing them to finish ripening off the tree. Store in a cool, dark

place to ripen.

Check peach tree trunks and just below the soil at their base for borer holes. Probe any holes with a wire to kill the borers.

Remove two-year-old canes from **raspberry and blackberry plants** at ground level to reduce overwintering of disease. Fertilizers containing potassium, phosphorus and magnesium or calcium can be applied but do not cultivate or irrigate at this time of the year.

Fall weed control around fruit trees is crucial because **weeds act as hosts to overwintering insects.**

Plant lavender seeds in the fall for spring germination.

Whatever you do or don't do, enjoy the fall gardening season. Cooler weather, reflecting on the past season, and making preparations for a better next year can be very satisfying. This year, especially, our gardens have been a valued diversion. See you next month at *The Garden Shed*.

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Beyond the Lawn: Imagine the Options

By mking | September 2020-Vol.6 No. 9



The wonderful world of horticulture and landscape design offers endless choices for plant species and arrangements. With more than 390,000 different types of vascular plants on earth, which include trees, shrubs, flowering plants, herbs, and grasses, creative possibilities abound. By the way, vascular plants are those with special internal tissues that move fluids throughout the plant's structure.

Let's try something for a moment: Close your eyes for 20 seconds and picture a beautiful outdoor scene..... Okay, back to the printed page. I'm sure that everyone reading this article will have imagined something different, and I'm fairly certain that our visualizations were filled with a wide variety of attractive plants representing different sizes, shapes, colors, and textures. For most of us, beauty in the botanical world conjures up a dynamic collection of plant species that complement each other in aesthetically pleasing settings. These scenarios might be formally organized, as in carefully planned ornamental gardens, or they might reflect the informality of untamed wilderness, such as mountain hillsides covered with wildflowers.



Front hillside with turfgrass
Photo: Melissa King

Whatever you might have imagined, I doubt it was a suburban lawn. Oddly enough, that monochromatic palette of undisturbed green turf is a recurring theme in suburbs across the United States today. How did that happen? Well, way back in the 17th century, no native turfgrass existed in this country. The English landscape style was quite popular then, so travelers from Great Britain and Europe brought seeds along with them when they migrated to America. At that time, lush green lawns symbolized wealth and social status, and prominent leaders made large grassy areas part of unique landscape designs at their own residences, which captured the public's eye. Think about George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello as good examples of this approach. However, those lawns were hard to maintain, and upkeep required a significant amount of human labor.

A front yard with turfgrass remained a distant pipe dream for the masses until clever inventors came up with ways to simplify upkeep. The invention of the push mower (1830) and the advent of a sprinkler attached to a watering hose (1871) made lawn maintenance more manageable, but still beyond what most people could afford or be bothered with. Two developments changed that reality: (1) the invention of the power mower in 1919, and (2) the beginning of planned suburban communities in the mid-20th century. Gradually, green lawns became a dominant part of the engineered outdoor landscape for residential dwellings and neighborhoods.



Lawn monoculture
Photo: Melissa King

Some of you might ask, "What's the problem with that trend?" For starters, consider these facts:

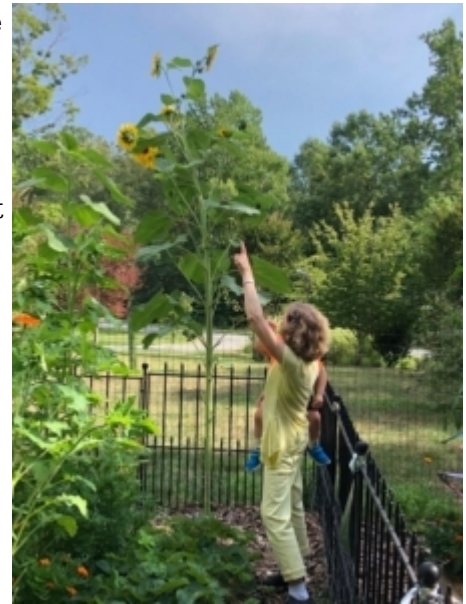
- Residential lawns in the U.S. cover ~40 million acres of land (approximately the size of Greece).
- Lawns consume a lot of water (~9 billion gallons per day), more than any other agricultural crop grown in this country. In arid and semi-arid regions where water is a precious commodity, lawn care reduces the available supply from reservoirs and underground aquifers.
- Chemical run-off from lawn applications of fertilizers (75 m tons per year) and pesticides (30,000 tons per year) pollutes watershed areas and harms natural ecosystems. The lawn care industry produces 13 billion pounds of potential chemical pollutants per year.
- Emissions from gas-powered mowers and leaf blowers contribute to air pollution. Hour per hour, a gas-powered mower produces 11 times as much pollution as an automobile.
- The sound from various power tools used for lawn maintenance contribute to unhealthy levels of noise pollution. The average lawn mower produces 90 decibels of noise, and studies show that repeated or prolonged exposure to sound at 85 dB or above can lead to hearing loss.
- Turf grass as a monoculture offers scant natural habitat for wildlife. A grassy lawn fails to provide sufficient food or appropriate shelter for birds, pollinators, beneficial insects, and other living creatures.
- Compacted lawn areas can act like hardscape (e.g., not absorbing rainfall), which adds to the problem of storm water run-off, erosion, and related issues for the surrounding watershed.
- Routine lawn maintenance requires an ongoing investment of human labor, in addition to the cost of tools and appropriate nourishment to keep grass healthy.
- Despite occupying considerable acreage, a lot of residential turfgrass areas are not used for any specific purpose. They simply take up space.
- Lawns produce more carbon dioxide (CO²) than they can absorb. The estimated greenhouse gas resulting from lawn care (fertilizer and pesticide production, watering, mowing, leaf blowing,

and turf grass management practices) is four times greater than the amount of carbon that grass can store.

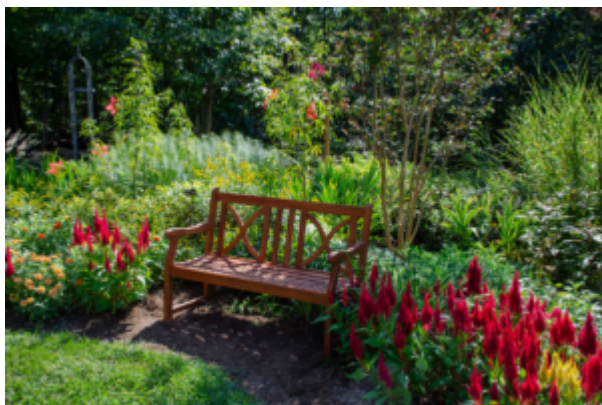
Perhaps those details will prompt you to ponder possibilities beyond the lawn. Maybe a peaceful refuge that supports wildlife would be more meaningful, worthwhile, and environmentally friendly. I wonder if you could plan something for your own yard with greater ecological value than a lawn. What if you decided to get creative with one spot as an experiment? Where would that be located? How could you redesign that small slice of your property? In what ways would that open up new options for the value and use of that space? What might you and your family gain from that transformation?

As you may have discovered from news reports this year, the Covid19 global pandemic and national lockdowns around the world ushered in a new era focused on plant power and home gardening. The International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIHP) put together an enlightening [fact sheet](#) that offers empirical evidence to support the “profound health benefits” of being in nature and participating in outdoor gardening activities. Their extensive research shows that:

- “Gardens provide a place for experiencing nature which is proven to benefit mental health, cognitive functioning, and emotional well-being.
- Gardening reduces depression, anxiety, obesity and heart disease, as well as increasing life satisfaction, quality of life, and sense of community.
- Gardens are essential to supporting recovery from illness, and merely looking at gardens can reduce stress, blood pressure, and muscle tension.”



*Tall sunflowers in vegetable garden.
Photo: Melissa King*



Tranquil outdoor setting. Photo: Mark Levisay

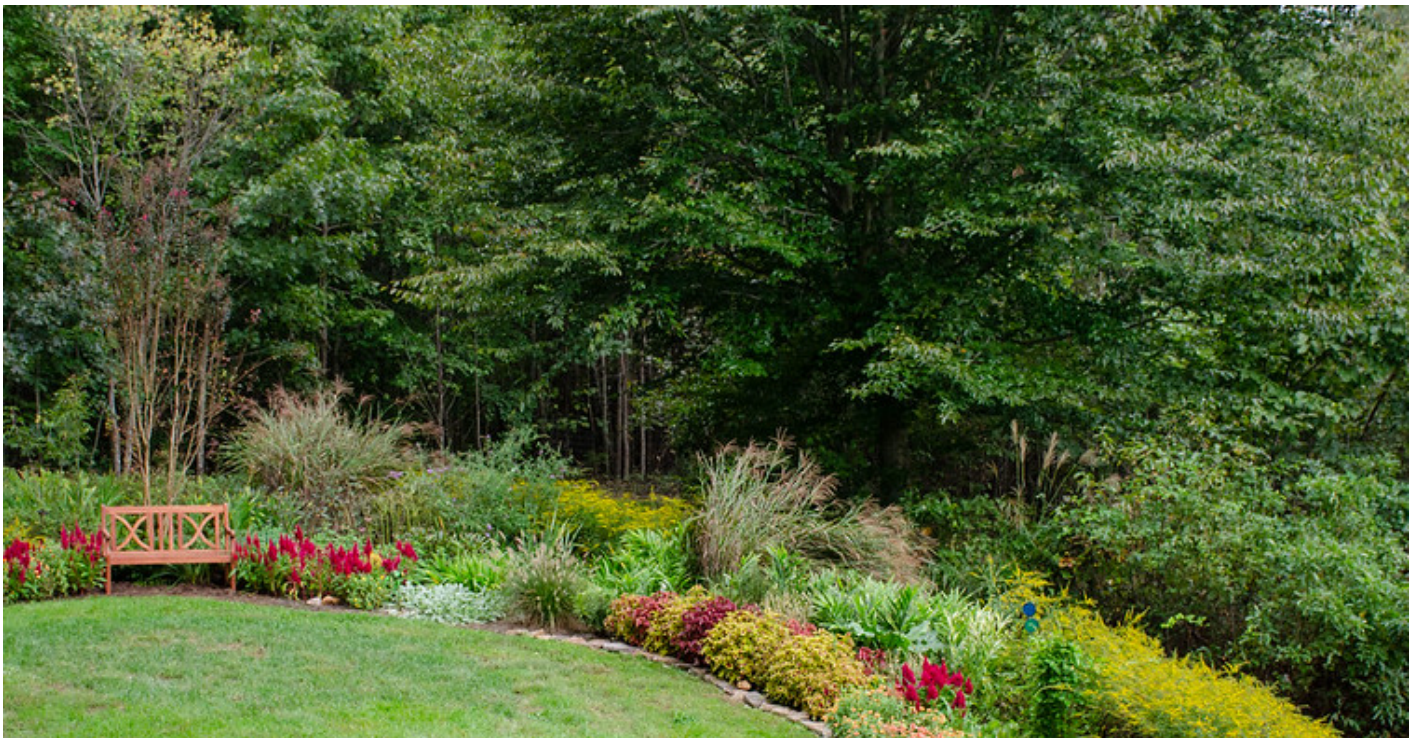
To learn more about the pleasures of gardening and the healing power of nature, you might want to read Sue Stuart-Smith’s insightful book, [The Well-Gardened Mind](#) (Simon & Schuster, 2020).

The compelling case for gardening and spending time outdoors in natural environments presents a unique opportunity for today’s homeowners. Why not take steps to reinvent part of your own yard? If enhanced green spaces lead to improved physical, mental, and emotional health and greater human resilience when facing adversity, perhaps reclaiming some of your lawn is worth the investment of time and energy. If you decide to take this leap of faith to create a tranquil haven on your property, what are the alternatives for that redesigned space?

You will need a reasonable plan, but before devising one, be sure you have a clear picture of what you've got out there already. Start by making a simple two-dimensional drawing of your home and the surrounding space. Label what's there and what goes on in these spaces, such as a front walkway to enter the house, swing set for children, field in back for soccer practice, shrubs beside the house for spring color, driveway leading to your garage, etc. Next, determine the orientation of your home site and add a compass rose to indicate north, south, east, and west on your drawing. This will give you a good idea of the sun's pathway from dawn to dusk. Then, add the trees on and near your lot, so you can readily discern the sunny and shady areas of your property. If there's a steep slope or sections that are difficult to mow, label those on your drawing as well. With that sketch done, what areas offer potential to become a new place of beauty or peaceful refuge?



Ornamental plants in front of home take the place of a grass lawn. Photo: Mark Levisay



*Ornamental border with bench
Photo: Mark Levisay*

Here are some ideas for horticulture additions:

- Flowers along a frequently used walkway
- Flower beds and ground cover around the base of existing trees
- Shrubs near the house or perimeter of your property
- Islands of color in your lawn to highlight special plants
- Raised bed(s) for growing vegetables

Once you have a dedicated space in mind, consider which horticultural options might work well in that location.



Pathway bordered with plants
Photo: Katie Kellett

Remember to start small, so the project will be more manageable. If your vision comes to fruition, take time to experience the revitalized landscape before moving on to dreams of larger lawn makeovers. Gardening is always a grand experiment with lots to discover and learn, step by step.



Plants near base of tree. Photo: Katie Kellett

By the way, if you live in a suburban development, chances are there's a homeowners' association (HOA). Don't forget to look into restrictions that apply to lawns and gardens before proceeding with your plans. You will want to comply with rules pertaining to outdoor spaces and submit any necessary letters of request or forms in advance of making changes. Or, meet with your HOA if you want to add a garden and aren't sure if that's permissible.

Now you're ready to reflect on your individual preferences for types of plants as turfgrass alternatives for certain sections of your yard. What plants do you find attractive? What arrangements or designs appeal to you? If wildlife visits your yard, will you need to protect plants from unwanted nibbles? Every gardener I know has had at least one story to tell about deer or rabbits greedily dining on newly-established garden plots, dashing horticultural hopes for long-term enjoyment. Your new journey is definitely a creative process, but it should be grounded in reality.

These suggestions are good candidates for lawn replacement:

- Native shrubs - Perennial shrubs, preferably **native varieties**, are relatively care-free and disease resistant. Most shrubs provide food (flowers, berries, seeds) and shelter for wildlife, so they may lure birds and pollinators into your yard. Shrubs can serve as focal points within large expanses of turf or as interesting features adjacent to property boundaries.
- Ground covers - These low-maintenance plants can form a thick lush carpet under trees, almost like mulch. Choose native perennials with attractive leaves, and you may be pleasantly surprised how quickly these naturally-spreading plants take hold. An edge barrier can help contain ground cover within the desired areas.



*Vegetable garden near house
Photo: Melissa King*



Ground cover near shrubs. Photo: Melissa King



Rock wall and flowering shrubs. Photo: Bobbye Cohen

- Vegetables - An excellent choice, if you have the time and inclination, is to create a vegetable garden. Building or purchasing a small raised bed, for example, is a great way to get started. Cultivating crops for consumption offers calm, quiet moments for observing nature's magic (e.g., seeds popping up, bees buzzing around blossoms, produce taking shape). Best of all, your efforts will be richly rewarded with delicious, nutritious food.
- Perennial flower beds or borders - Nothing surpasses vibrant, colorful flowers for visual interest, and if sited appropriately, you'll have frequent views of these delicate beauties. Depending on the spot, you can select from abundant choices of sun-lovers or shade-loving perennials. Be sure to think about the color scheme, varying heights for a "layered look," and bloom times for best results. Garden centers are generally happy to assist with plans for flower beds. You might want to take a look at "Getting Started in Ornamental Gardening, I and II, [The Garden Shed July 2015](#) and [The Garden Shed Aug.2015](#).



Vegetable garden with row cover. Photo: Mark Levisay



*Flowering plants with varied height along fence
Photo: Bobbye Cohen*



Perennial border along fence. Photo: Bobbye Cohen

- Ornamental grasses - There are many varieties to choose from, but most are quite hardy and tolerant of heat and dry conditions. Stalk heights range from a few inches to 12 feet, and grasses may be solid green, variegated, bluish-grey, or reddish. Before you choose, you'll want to read [Ornamental Grasses: Easy, Beautiful, and Invasive? The Garden Shed Nov.2017](#).
- Trees - You probably have some mature trees on your property, but there may be room for more. Think about smaller native trees, such as dogwoods, that add appealing shapes to the landscape. Trees are a valuable source of food and habitat for many animal species, and their roots help to anchor soil in the ground. Keep in mind where shade might be welcome when considering trees for certain areas of your yard.



*Island with ornamental grass
Photo: Bobbye Cohen*



*Shady slope with shrubs and plantings
Photo: Melissa King*

- Xeriscape - This type of landscape needs little or no water and may include rocks or other nonliving material among drought-tolerant plants as part of the design.



Bench under tree canopy
Photo: Bobby Cohen

- Places to relax – Don't forget the importance of comfortable spots for humans outdoors. You may want to add a bench, chairs, or other comfy furniture where you can catch a breath of fresh air while savoring the natural beauty of your repurposed outdoor space.

One more important recommendation before putting your plans into action is to arrange for a soil test. It's essential to know how healthy your soil is, including the pH level. This informative [article](#) in an earlier issue of *The Garden Shed* shares the why and how, and this [publication from Virginia Cooperative Extension](#) tells how to interpret soil test reports. You'll be surprised at what you can learn about what's under your feet.

Are you getting excited about the possibilities? I hope so! If everyone out there with a lawn made a commitment to convert just part of that turfgrass to some other horticultural option, we'd save lots of clean water, cut down on chemical run-off, reduce air pollution, sustain wildlife, and create more appealing landscapes for all to appreciate. This small step can make a difference in the overall health of the natural world, while contributing to better human health. Imagine what might happen if we used the \$16 billion per year that is currently spent on lawn care in the United States to invest in other initiatives and projects dedicated to biodiversity and a cleaner planet.

Online Resources

These resources provide guidance for replacing turf grass and redesigning residential landscapes.

<https://www.lawngonenative.com/> (Rich resource with design templates, background, plant lists, and more; an honors thesis by a Penn.State student)

<https://mgmv.org/turf-grass-alternatives-2020-video/> (Webinar about turfgrass alternatives)

[Tower Hill Botanic Garden/video-webinar-alternatives-turf-grass-lawns/](#) (Webinar on how to replace your lawn)

<https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/lawn-alternatives> (Well-researched article with photos, good links, plant lists, and more)

<https://content.yardmap.org/learn/removing-lawn-to-make-way-for-more-habitat/> (Reader-friendly article with step-by-step instructions for replacing turfgrass)

www.plantnovanatives.org/ "Lawn Care for Earth Renewal" (Explanatory article with good visuals to help you navigate revitalizing your green space)



Front yard with flower beds
Photo: Katie Kellett

[U.S.Fish&Wildlife Service/Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat & Conservation Landscaping](#) (Descriptions of native plants for various settings to support wildlife habitat)

<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/nativeplants> (Native plants for conservation, restoration, and landscaping)

[www.dcr.virginia.gov/Native Plant Finder](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/Native_Plant_Finder)

<https://pmgarchives.com/article/got-dry-shade-weve-got-solutions/> (Plants for dry shade)

[Getting Native Plants into Your Garden/The Garden Shed](#) (Where to purchase native plants in the local area, plus online sources)

[Responsible Lawn Management in the Era of Climate Change/The Garden Shed](#)

[Alternative Lawns/The Garden Shed](#)

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