

WHAT TO DO IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH: **AUGUST**

Summer holidays are here and many of us go away at this time of year and ironically miss the results of our hard work in the garden! For those of us staying at home, routine chores such as tidying up, weeding and mowing continue but at a slower pace due to lower light levels and cooler evenings. Watering continues to be one of the most important jobs in keeping your garden looking at its best – always a worry during holidays but there are plenty of solutions such as automatic watering systems and water retaining gels.

TASK LIST

- Dead head the faded flowers of annuals and perennials to prolong flowering and prevent them from going into seed production. Stake tall-flowering plants to support the blooms as they grow. Trim back lavender after flowering and continue to cut sweet peas to prolong flowering.
- Continue to remove weeds and tidy up dying and brown leaves from around your plants. This will prevent the weeds from seeding and discourage the spread of pests and diseases. Weeds in the garden are harmful because they rob your plants of water and nutrients, and harbour insects and diseases.
- Ensure containerised plants are watered sufficiently, particularly in hot weather. Evergreens such as rhododendrons and camellias require special watering care to ensure that the buds for next year will form properly – even if it rains, pots are often in the shelter of a house and the leaves act as an umbrella.
- If you are away on holiday and cannot find anyone to take over your daily watering, move hanging baskets and containers out of the sun to a more shady position and stand terracotta pots on gravel trays topped up with water, so the pots can gradually absorb the moisture. It may well be worth investing in a micro irrigation system with a timer if you have a large number of baskets and containers.
- Take cuttings from summer perennials, hydrangeas, heathers, pelargoniums and fuchsias as these will root very quickly now and produce sturdy plants for over-wintering. Cuttings can also be successfully grown from houseplants.
- Keep the greenhouse well ventilated and damp down the greenhouse floor every morning to increase humidity. This helps to discourage red spider mite.
- Harvest vegetables such as courgettes, runner beans, sweetcorn, potatoes, onions and salad crops. Tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers should be fed regularly with a high potash fertiliser to ensure continuation of fruiting. Continue to sow a succession of salad crops.

- Care of lawns this month depends on the weather - if it's hot the blades should be raised and cutting is less frequent as growth slows down. If your lawn goes brown it will quickly return to life when it rains (it really isn't dead – just dormant!).
- Continue to be on your guard against pests and diseases on your plants both indoors and out and take appropriate action to rectify any problem before it takes hold.

OUR PLANTS OF THE MONTH

Alstroemeria
Alyssum
Aster
Begonia
Caryopteris
Centaurea (Cornflower)
Ceratostigma
Dahlia
Eucomis
Godetia
Helenium
Helianthus (Sunflower)
Hibiscus
Hydrangea
Hypericum
Lavatera (Mallow)
Lilium
Perovskia
Solidago (Golden Rod)
Vinca (Perrywinkle)

DIANA'S CHOICE

My choice of plant this month is the Dahlia which is a genus of bushy, tuberous, perennial plants native to Mexico, Central America, and Colombia. There are few more rewarding plants for garden decoration and cut flowers with many forms and colours to choose from. Dahlia plants range in height from as low as 12" (30cm) to as tall as 6-8 feet (180-240cm). The flowers can be as small as 2" (5 cm) or up to a foot (30 cm) in diameter. If the varieties are well chosen, suitably sited with plenty of space, they will flower continuously from August until the first frosts.

