



# Scatter Info As We Bloom and Grow

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Horticulture Edition

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Isn't it simply amazing how one day it is summer and POOF! September 23 comes along, and it really feels like Autumn, or at least that is the way this year has changed seasons. No fall colors yet but chrysanthemums are just starting to bloom and so is the *Salvia leucantha*, and the asters. (More about the salvia and asters later in the newsletter.) Zinnias are also blooming profusely right now—



for some reason they didn't do much in July and August when you expect them to be glorious—who knows! Hope you are looking forward to the passing of another season and anticipating the gardening chores needing your attention. Having lived in both southern California and Gulf Coast Florida change of seasons was the thing I missed most. Will have to admit the fifteen years of living in Buffalo did make winter a bit long. But oh the glorious summer! Buffalo is famous for their 'Garden Walk' the last weekend of July every year; over 300 gardens on tour and each garden is beyond lovely and unique. The owners are also there to share their experience with you.

But I digress—this is supposed to be a synopsis of various horticulture information relating to Georgia and sharing information.

Disclaimer—I got so excited about the information which follows it really is mostly 'dig in the dirt gardener' knowledge. It is what works for this Happy Gardener. For more 'authoritative' rules check your favorite horticulture books, your favorite local gardener, or internet searches. Gardening is fun—lose some, win some and just keep on trying and remember it is YOUR GARDEN.

## NEW PLANTS FROM CUTTINGS

Fall is a good time to think about favorite plants you might like to have to enjoy in your garden. You might consider this from two angles—there is a favorite shrub or perennial in your garden but you could really use a few more of them in a different location, but you really want to insure it will be an exact replica of the existing plant—or your neighbor/friend/relative has a plant you covet for your use.

Cuttings from your own plant or with permission from someone else's existing plant is a good solution. Not instant gratification, but a deep sense of accomplishment of having propagated a new plant at a minimal expense! It is not a difficult task in most instances. This can be a good time of year to try your skill at this task. (Do consider that it is illegal to propagate a trademarked plant.)

- What will be needed?
  - Sharp, sterile shears and knife
  - Moist paper towels
  - Clean working surface
  - Sterilized containers—small size—3 to 4 inches
  - Sterile moist potting soil or Vermiculite
  - A wooden sharp/pointed dowel—size of a #2 pencil
  - Rooting hormone
  - Clean clear plastic bags or clear plastic sheet large enough to cover your pots plus some sterile dowels to keep plant from toughing the plant
- How to successfully accomplish the task
  - Greenwood cuttings best done when spring growth is complete—mid-May to late June. This topic will be covered this spring
  - Hardwood cuttings are taken from dormant plants (growth is not evident—after first freeze and before early spring growth begins). This topic will be discussed in the January edition of Scatter Into—Horticulture
  - **Softwood cuttings—our topic for October!**
    - Choose well hydrated and healthy stems
    - Stems should not have been recently fertilized with a high nitrogen fertilizer (the first number on the fertilizer package—12-10-10 for example 12 being the nitrogen content (this is a whole other subject not going to be covered here!))
    - Cut with sterile shears a 4 to 5 inch stem which must include a growing tip—immediately wrap in a water moistened paper towel to preserve it as you harvest the rest of the stems needed
    - Prepare the cuttings on clean work surface
    - Prepare the sterile containers with the pre-moistened soil or vermiculite and using the pointed dowel or a #2 pencil make a hole about 1 1/2 inch long in the soil
    - Always sterilize the shears by dipping in a 10% bleach solution—one part bleach to 9 parts water after each cut!!
    - Remove the leaves from the bottom half of the stem

- Cut ¼ inch below nodes (where the leaf attached) at the bottom of the stem—the part now without leaves!)
- Cut the leaves remaining at the top half of the stem by ½
- Lightly nick each node on the stem that will be going into the soil to expose some of the green inner bark (the cambium layer) don't nick too much!
- Dip 'leafless' bottom half of the stem in root hormone, place the stem in the prepared hole, and firm the soil around the stem.
- When all the cuttings are in their containers water gently to settle the soil and place in a warm (68° to 72°) bright location, but not in direct sunlight. This is optimum—find the best compromise you can!
- Place either a clear plastic sheet or individual clear plastic bags over the plants to maintain a humid atmosphere. Use sterile wooden skewers to keep the plastic off the leaves. Also do not let condensation drip on the leaves.
- With softwood cuttings at the end of 2 weeks you can start checking for root formation!

Quick tip for the impatient—check under established plants such as azaleas, hydrangeas, etc. and you will probably find some lovely self-rooted plants. You can also use low hanging branches to make a small scraping on the bottom of the stem and put that in the ground and cover with some soil—do not remove from the plant. By next spring there will most likely be a rooted cutting to transplant. Also check under sasanqua camellias and there will undoubtedly be some nice seedlings—just carefully dig them up and replant on a nice early spring day. Forsythia is notorious for spreading by rooted branches. Just dig them up and put them where needed. And these suggestions are the tip of the iceberg! Gardening does not need to be horribly expensive with the finest array of new cultivars and exotic plants. Doesn't mean that wouldn't be nice—but not necessary for beauty to abound.

## MORE ABOUT FALL PLANT PROPAGATION

Fall is the time to divide spring blooming perennials. Divide is the operative word. Preceding information was for cuttings (and cuttings also includes perennials) while this information is about dividing. It is basically an easy process. Just dig up the plant and carefully break it apart keeping some of the original root and appropriately replant! Of course there are some 'rules' to follow—many rules are in the prior discussion about cuttings. Sterile equipment being probably the

most significant. The other fact is that root development is very important—therefore there should be at least 6 weeks between digging/division/planting and the first frost/freeze. Best source of information is your local extension agent or UGA has an outstanding website which discusses regional dates: <http://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.cfm?number=MP117>. Each plant species obviously will need different amounts of time to establish the roots and quite frankly it is a bit late by the first of October, but if you get out there this week probably you will be successful from Atlanta south. Sometimes the hardest part of division is getting a large overgrown clump out of the ground!

- Cut the foliage in half so you can see the ‘crown’
- Use two digging forks or sharp spades and make a cut around the perimeter of the crown and then dig it out of the ground. (Years ago someone gave me a clump of ‘ditch daylilies’ which I planted by a fence. Not too many years later I realized the error of my ways and started digging them up—I left the garden fork in the ground where it broke off from the handle as a monument to my stupidity! It is still there and will be for perpetuity! So are the ditch lilies, but they are somewhat under control and really are pretty—just invasive)
- Replant the new divisions in prepared soil and enjoy the fruits of your labor next spring.

Self-seeding is an old fashioned cottage garden technique or allowing annuals the opportunity to fulfill their mission in life—propagation of the next generation of themselves. Just leave annuals standing until their seed has the opportunity to fall on the ground and let nature takes its course. Cultivars will not come back true to the original cultivar, but in an eclectic garden this can be very interesting or very frustrating depending on the plant. The trick is to know what to let go to seed and what not to allow to reseed—top of that list for me is *Perilla frutescens*. There was a lovely cultivar a few years ago called perilla magilla (spelling of cultivar is probably incorrect!) but it reverted back to the common perilla which is wild basil and just about as bad as mint! I’ve pulled it out for years and still will have an occasion survivor. So rule is choose your reseeders with care.

## FALL TASKS YOU MUST NOT IGNORE

To maintain a functional garden—and one that is not a chore the rest of the year there are certain tasks that are essential. Spring and autumn are the seasons these must be completed—and timing is everything. Listed below are some of the most significant:

- Some tender perennials must be protected—three categories should be considered
  - Some are simply easier to just treat as annuals and not try to overwinter them—coleus comes to mind—purchase a new more mature plant in the spring make cuttings from it for your garden
  - Some tender plants (succulents come to mind) can be overwintered in a protected area behind established shrubs. I keep most of my container tender plants behind the azaleas which are in front of the garage. Works almost all the time!
  - Treasured specimens must be placed in a heated area
    - Garage, basement, crawlspace—check for disease, pruning issues etc. and place in the selected location. Light is not necessarily an issue with these plants—more about how to get these plants back outside in the spring in the later edition
    - Greenhouse—my experience with this option is non-existent. Obviously, follow all good horticulture practice and check with those who have a greenhouse!
    - Used as houseplants—more maintenance required
      - For all protected plants there are some requirements--For those less tender plants overwintered in protected exterior locations I really don't do much except make sure they are securely placed—these are all container grown so easy to move, depending on size! Do not cut back—the foliage will offer some protection to the roots
      - House plants or those brought inside the home--Check VERY CAREFULLY for disease, damage, and bugs. Take care of any disease issues prior to bringing inside—and isolate these plants while you try to nurse them back to health. Other healthy plants check for pruning needs, insects, general health and LIGHTLY fertilize. Place in appropriate lighting conditions and give weekly attention to them—water, rotating for sun exposure, fertilizer, pruning, insects etc. Any fertilizing should be at very low levels
- Mulch after the ground has had an opportunity to cool—
  - at least after the first frost—allows the roots acclimate to the colder temperatures and 'go dormant' at the appropriate time. Mulch with three inches of pine straw, wood chips etc. (Use pine boughs or similar material to protect very tender perennials after the first freeze. (I've had a Tibouchina survive probably 15 years. Last year I didn't

get it covered but it still came back but not until August and didn't bloom. Next year will be the test and I will get some pine boughs on it for sure—even if it didn't bloom the foliage is fabulous—just look at those velvet leaves and they press beautifully and turn a gorgeous reddish autumn color)



- Don't make 'hills' of mulch at the base of any plant—tree or perennial. The 'varmits' will thank you for a lovely winter home, but the plant will be damaged from the varmits or diseased by increased moisture around the trunk/stem. Leave a few inches away from the base of the plant
- There are other chores to complete which don't apply to just plants
  - Store hoses to protect from freezing.
  - Protect any weather susceptible containers, garden ornaments, water features.
  - Get leaves or debris from corners, nooks and crannies—the varmits again!

## **AUTUMN TASKS THAT ARE MORE FUN OR BRING SPRING BEAUTY**

Fall is not just time to do the essential but tiresome clean-up chores. Try to look at the essential work as anticipation of the quiet of winter with time to read and plan next year's spring beauty. It is also bulb plant time!

- Vegetable gardening in fall—in prepared beds or containers
  - Lettuce always lettuce—pretty in containers and great in the garden—use several varieties, cabbage and kale, broccoli, beets, ect.
  - The problem right now is you must check your areas last frost date. From the date count back to seed packages 'days to maturity' and then you will know the last date you can successfully plant your seeds. In a more protected spot you will have greater success with extending the front date a bit
  - Many of the plants are as ornamental as they are 'tasty', for instance cabbage, kale, lettuce—then there is my friend who had a lovely kitchen garden and she tied red ribbons around her broccoli at the holiday season—never did eat the broccoli! But it is your garden and you can use your way!
- Bulb planting—plenty of time left for this. I frequently don't plant daffodils until after the first frost. Planting them too early in the season creates a

problem with them they first appear in the spring—a hard freeze won't hurt them, but it really is too early for daffodils to bloom. Then there was the year I planted daffodil bulbs after the new year and they bloomed in June—not a good time for daffodils and in fact they did not 'thrive' for future years. But did cause comment in the neighborhood

- Some general rules include;
  - Well prepared soil,
  - Plant bulb at a depth 3 times the width of the bulb—in central GA I don't always go quite that deep
  - Use a low nitrogen fertilizer at planting—(nitrogen stimulates foliage growth and you want flower development which is in the last 2 initials on the fertilizer—K and P which stands to phosphate and potassium. See statement under 'Cuttings')
  - Unless the area is protected from deer and other creatures don't bother with crocus or tulips (there are some varieties which will grow well in Georgia—check with your nursery or Google) Many tulips are also annual which is a nuisance to this gardener. Hyacinth do well here and Muscari commonly called grape hyacinth are very easy to get establish.
  - To protect bulbs gophers, mice, voles and similar varmints plant them in a chicken wire basket; a layer of sharp gravel or grit both above and below the bulb; recycled strawberry baskets; kitty litter (used); human hair; all sort of things to smell bad, taste bad etc. Nothing ever bothers a daffodil because they are poisonous!
  - A naturalized bed of mixed bulb plants is a thing of beauty and for the most part great for a sustainable garden.
- Planting spring blooming perennials in the fall
  - In general plant spring perennials in the fall and fall perennials in the spring.
  - It is probably too late to plant spring perennials in most of Georgia by the first of October. If you have a **minimum** of 6 weeks before the first freeze then probably you are OK if the plant is a well rooted healthy perennial—consider the chrysanthemum which might have bloomed and be on sale at your local big box store—sometimes it is worth the risk—if it is healthy—cut the spent blooms from the plant before planting. Make sure what you are planting is a perennial—one year I did asters and later discovered they were an annual variety.



- Plants to consider for the fall garden to plant next year in the spring

- Asters—perennial and form large clumps which are just starting to bloom now. I have some Rebecca McNeill game me years ago which were brought here by her ancestors from Europe! They are a favorite, just as this wonderful horticulture authority is to all of GCG.



- Lenten rose—Helleborus  
It is a bit hard to say these are fall blooming or spring blooming! They start generally around Christmas and stay in bloom until after spring is over plus their seed pods are almost as pretty as the flower!



- Seed grown dahlia—almost didn't include these but I'm at the computer looking out the window and there is a lovely clump of red Victoriana asters blooming with a humming bird feeding and it is beautiful. They were one of the first things I propagated by seed after moving here in 1993. They come up every year—tubers overwinter without fail. These are not the exotic dinner plate dahlias but are a delight.



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Always remember each of your Scatter Info—Where you Bloom and Grow editions is here to help you. Please do ask questions or for more information or to share your opinions please to email me at [gail.berthe@gmail.com](mailto:gail.berthe@gmail.com).

*The Happy Gardener, Gail Berthe*