



## **Sowing Seeds of Knowledge Reaps Conservation with Beauty**

**Environmental Edition, Mary Lovings, Editor**

**Landscape Design Edition, Dr. John Barnett, Editor**

**Horticulture Edition, Gail Berthe, Editor**

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This has been quite a summer—hottest on record according to the weather prognosticators. Having grown up in Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma I've experienced hotter, but never more humid—and believe me the humidity makes a big difference in how hot the weather feels. But we are nearing September as this Scattering Seeds is being written (and with any luck this will be the right month for the Horticulture Issue) so cooler, more pleasant weather is about to return. Fall plantings of both vegetables and ornamentals can commence. Some of the plant possibilities will be explored. There are also the 'tasks' of the season to be completed—it's too late for some things and too early for others—the trick is to know what should be accomplished. An intriguing subject was recommended by one of our readers—using ornamental plants as food crops. This subject will be explored also. I'd better get thinking and typing...and there is the update on the Million Pollinator Gardens Project

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### *Using Ornamental Plants as Food Crops*

This topic is really two parts—using pretty blooms to decorate a salad, or casserole, or any food. This can be such a pretty and legitimate food added to the original, undecorated, salad. One of my favorites is nasturtium—the leaves are very spicy and make a great wrap for a small appetizer, and the blooms are pretty and spicy in a salad. <http://www.treehugger.com/green-food/42-flowers-you-can-eat> is a good website for a complete list of suggestions. A few that intrigue me include: allium (an ornamental onion!), bachelor button (a great favorite of mine but don't see it much in Georgia and have had no luck growing it—any ideas...?) marigold (spicy as you might expect) dianthus, clover, most forms of Viola (pansy, Johnny-

jump-up, etc.) are lovely in fall and spring salads. The flowers of herbs provide a large choice of ‘edible flowers’. A few mint leaves plus a small mint flower floating in a glass of iced tea—this has just made me very thirsty!

There are some very important facts to consider before you use ANY plant for a food source.

- 🌿 Has it been treated with insecticide—never use a plant sprayed with insecticide! If you don’t know for sure don’t use it!
- 🌿 Carefully wash anything you plan to eat and which has been cut from the garden—this is just good common sense
- 🌿 Organically grown plants are, of course preferable
- 🌿 Know your plant nomenclature before using it as food—being pretty is not enough reason to use it as food. The web (google) is such a wonderful tool.

The second part of using plants as food involves a sport/hobby which holds no interest for me. Foraging in the wild has become a significant skill. The ability to survive in a disaster situation or to the use of wild foraged food in the fanciest of restaurant has become a topic of interest to a wide range of individuals. To learn more about true disaster foraging consult a military source. This skill is gaining popularity as a sport! There are several considerations:

- When foraging, be aware that many of these plants are rare and should not be harvested to extinction—a real possibility just as any endangered plant species.
- Some popular foraged plants, mushrooms for instance, must be studied to know which are poisonous and which are edible. Know what you are doing before eating, and be positive it has not been sprayed with any insecticide/herbicide. This pretty much eliminates anything growing by the side of the road!
- Wild animals also depend on many of these edible species as their food source—don’t over harvest.
- Use common sense in any endeavor.

This can be a very rewarding, interesting hobby, but do not attempt to be involved without learning the hazards and rewards prior to foraging.

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## *Murder in the Happy Gardener's Garden!!!*

The day before attending the Redbud District's board meeting in early August I realized a perfectly horrible mistake and told the awful truth as part of my official report! Later, I sent a short 'true confession' to Vicki Cooper, Editor of Redbud District's Newsletter and said she was welcome to use it for the Reporter if she thought it was of interest. It is important for us to not indiscriminately kill creep crawly bugs. (Japanese beetles and tomato horn worms are top of my list to slaughter with gusto) Here is the story as written by the Happy Gardener and shared in the Redbud Reporter. Many of you have already read it or heard me confess at board meeting. You don't need to read it again!

### *Tomato hornworm-- Butterfly Caterpillar-- Swallowtail Butterfly* *Murder in the Garden*

It is very important to know the exact creepy crawler you may be considering *Eliminating* from your garden! Don't jump to conclusions as I did. Result: ***Murder of about two dozen prospective butterflies!*** The horror of it was awful...my side of the story involves tomato hornworms who were destroying my one tomato planted in a large container with a dill, rosemary, basil, thyme. Using my standard elimination method: stomping the life out of bad guys *Eliminated* probably two dozen hornworms, cut back the tomato plant, and it is once again putting out blooms. Later, as I was checking for more tomato horn worms there were at least 12 on the dill plant...in the first place tomato hornworms don't eat herb plants—only tomatoes, but in a flurry of disgust I put them on the ground and *Eliminated* the disgusting critters and felt better for it. A few days past and there they were back on my parsley and again *Elimination* was achieved just before the light dawned, and I should have known better all along! The caterpillars on the dill and parsley plant were **Swallowtail Butterflies!!** I was a murderer!! Too late I knew the right answer—just leave them alone and all will be OK—even the parsley will come back. It is my opinion hatred of the tomato hornworms clouded my reaction and thus the murder of several prospective butterflies.

Strange as it may seem there is one time to not destroy a tomato hornworm! Tachinid flies as shown in the picture destroy hornworms. The tiny white objects are

tachinid fly larva which will invade the hornworm and kill it! (Isn't nature clever?) I've only seen this 'attach of the tachinid fly' once in my gardening career, but if you do observe it remove the hornworm from the plant and place it in a spot where the tachinid fly larva can mature and attach other hornworms. The percentage of really bad bugs is extremely small— less than 5%. Research what you plan to do before you actually do it!



Tomato hornworm



Tachinid fly larva 'eating' the hornworm!



This is the caterpillar for the Swallowtail butterfly. Study the difference!

The information following will help you enjoy the autumn season as our climate changes from too hot to just about perfect temperatures, autumn perennials are in full bloom and the deciduous trees are in full autumn color.



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## The Tasks of Autumn

There are *tasks to accomplish and tasks that should NOT be done this time of year.* ( In mid or south Georgia you can give yourself maybe one or two weeks of September to get some last minute pruning done on established summer blooming shrubs. There is a cardinal rule of pruning—every time a branch is cut the plant makes new growth. The new growth will not have time to harden off before the first freeze. The chances are the new growth will be affected. You could cover the late

pruned plant when an early freeze is predicted and maybe be lucky—but unless there is no choice, it is better to complete all pruning by mid-August.) For flowering shrubs or trees prune shortly after blooming if they are flowering species.

September is a good time to purchase some fall perennials such as chrysanthemums, asters, snapdragons. Pansies can wait till later in September/early October. Purchase them with very tight buds so they can settle in the soil before full bloom. Keep them watered. Dig a hole deep enough to accommodate the plant and twice as wide as the plant. Fill the hole with water and prior to planting remove the plant from the container and place in bucket of water. The soil around the plant will be well hydrated. Gently loosen the root ball before placing it in the prepared hole.

Start prepping houseplants that have been enjoying summer outdoors. Give them a good bath with a soft spray and be sure to wash the back side of the leaf as well as the top—sometimes I just dip them in a big pail of water. Make sure there are no bugs hiding in the foliage or disease invading the plant before bringing indoors.

September is a good time to plant some cool weather vegetables—broccoli, Swiss chard, lettuce, cabbage (ornamental as well as food crop). The big box stores will have many suggestions. Plant them in place of annual flowers and enjoy the beauty as well as the flavor of the vegetables!

As the weather temperature begins to cool cut back on watering—if you have been doing any watering at all! This is not the time of year to make things grow—so stop fertilizing too.

Know your local average freeze frost dates! A good web site is <http://www.ufseeds.com/Garden-Zone-Finder.html> We are fortunate here in Georgia to not have extreme temperature variations. Yes, sometimes it snows and summer is hot and humid but that is much more interesting than boring sameness month after month...you really can't control the weather anyway - just learn to follow its routine!

Cutting back plants as the cold weather does it damage is a quandary—two schools of thought; it depends on your personal mind set! I personally like to leave **healthy** but weather damaged foliage on perennial plants because it is a bit of

protection for the possible hard freeze. Always remove any diseased branches/foliage. The pristine gardener prefers to trim back all perennial plants and if they need extra protection use pine branches. (it is best to not use extra mulch because that gives the small creatures of the field a lovely place to bed down for the winter) The roots are the most important part of the plant to protect, and it is your decision.

My last fall task to emphasize—and one I remind you every spring and fall...**Do not add mulch to your flower beds until after the first freeze in the fall and wait for the ground to warm in the spring before adding mulch.** , Furthermore, keep mulch away from the stem/trunks of the plants to prevent root rot; see the paragraph in parenthesis in paragraph above!!

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### *Million Pollinator Garden Project*

How is your pollinator garden progressing? It has been a fun experience for me, and there are more pollinators in the garden than the last couple of years. (all except for the Murder in the Garden episode) So far one yellow *Asclepius tuberosa* has bloomed but suspect the other seven plants may need to mature and will bloom next year. They are bare root specimens installed inside the fence where the deer don't roam. Every other *Asclepius* has not survived outside the fence area. My garden really already had a good collection of pollinator favorites but this year seemed better for bees and butterflies and other good bugs than past years. I did keep the bird baths and watering areas filled both inside and outside the fenced area. The vitex tree—it could consume us in very short time but we have learned to keep it pruned and the bees flock to it.

Registering for the Pollinator Garden Challenge is quite straight forward. There were two or three questions to which I did not know the answer—the questions involved more advanced computer technology than is common. I left them blank, and it didn't affect my registration. The website is easy to use. <http://pollinator.org/mpgcmapp/> , which is a project and goal in which NGC and GCG are committed. I registered as Concord Garden Club, GCG, NGC and it was an accepted registration. More important is really the fact we are helping maintain

a successful pollination project which is very important to our environmental status. (I didn't tell them about my butterfly murder!)

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Please know **your 'Happy Gardener'** representing the GCG, Inc. for **Sowing Seeds of Knowledge** solicits your suggestions and questions. Send any questions/suggestions to GCG Headquarters:

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Leave a message, and your call will be returned as soon as possible. This is your publication—helps our editors give you the information you want and need.

*Happy Gardening*

## **Gail Berthe, the Happy Gardener**

This is an unconfirmed report but my husband just said he had heard North Carolina has killed many bees with the blanket spraying for mosquitos in their state. I know there was some concern about indiscriminate spraying in Florida. It is imperative we as environmentally conscious gardeners make every effort to maintain the bee and butterfly population as possible by following rational methods of insect control.

<https://projects.ncsu.edu/cals/entomology/apiculture/mosquito.html> is the web site provided by North Carolina State University with information about general mosquito control spraying methods if you want more information. Honey bees are the most vulnerable to insect spraying.

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