August’s Gardening List

The tomatoes are finally starting to ripen! Did you know that temperature plays a very important part in the ripening process? Lycopene, the pigment that gives ripe tomatoes their red color, is only produced at ambient temperatures of between 50 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit. The optimum temperature for lycopene production is 68-77 degrees Fahrenheit. Any great deviation from these temperature ranges will mean that tomatoes won’t turn red. Sometimes when it gets quite hot, tomatoes on the vine may have a yellowish orange look. If practical for the size of your operations, it might be better to pick them in the pink stage and let them ripen indoors in cooler temperatures. Tomatoes need warmth, not light, to ripen, so there’s no need to put them in direct sunlight. Place them out of direct sunlight where the temperature is 65-70 degrees Fahrenheit.

Your Gardening checklist for August includes:

1. Water and weed
2. Fertilize annuals, especially those in containers. Remove spent annuals and replace with new plants to keep beds and containers fresh.
3. Divide irises and daylilies as they complete blooming.
4. Divide and transplant peonies.
5. Cut back yarrow, catmint, coreopsis and veronica by one-third when plants stop flowering to encourage new foliage and blooms.
6. Harvest herbs for freezing or drying.
7. Re-edge beds.
8. Keep compost moist.
10. Check plants for signs of pests and diseases.
11. Evaluate your garden with an eye for improvements.
12. Collect seeds for next year’s garden.
13. Study bulb catalogs and order garlic and flowering bulbs to plant this fall.
14. Add extra fall-blooming perennials to the garden.
15. Cut flowers to bring indoors to enjoy.
16. Direct-seed turnips for a fall harvest.
17. Propagate strawberries or weed them and thin out runners.

I have been busy harvesting and preparing vegetables from my garden and my friends' gardens. We are enjoying pickled beets, green beans and potatoes, summer squash, cucumbers and onions, peppers, sweet corn, and tomatoes this week! I have not put anything in jars or in the freezer yet. I have been sharing my “excess” with friends that do not have gardens. My favorite Garrison Keillor quote is, “July is the only time of year when country people lock our cars in the church parking lot, so people won’t put squash on the front seat.” I must admit that I have left some bags of squash hanging on doorknobs of unsuspecting friends.

Keep an eye open for pests in the garden and your landscape that may be planning to hibernate in the debris around your plants or the bark of your trees. Taking care of a few insects now may keep several generations out of your garden next summer.