

## Enjoy the Golden Days

For some gardeners, watching summer blooms fade into compost fodder evokes nostalgia for summer. Others treasure October as a time to enjoy a different palette as the leaves change, fall grasses and asters emerge, and nature slows down. These are also the weeks we designate as cleanup time!

It is tempting to chop off all those dried stalks but don't get carried away as the goldfinches haven't finished tugging at those seed heads. One chore that can be done more easily now is replacing the mulch around the boxwood and azaleas. It is a fine thing to do following a good rain. Keep the mulch away from the base of the plant as you do not want to make a snug harbor for field mice. And this is one place where enough is enough. You do not have to leave a doughnut of mulch where two inches will do.

Every season has its distinctive charms. Spring flowers arise in tidy little clumps of bulbs, modest carpets of phlox *sublata*, stately tulips. Summer is flamboyant with color and a wealth of vegetables, but autumn is wild and undisciplined. Perhaps to really love a fall garden, you have to embrace a degree of untidiness.

The late asters fling their stems about and sag in the rain, the goldenrod bends and nods and takes over spaces once reserved for other species. Grasses, too can outgrow an allotted plot but demand forgiveness when the early morning sun sparkles off the dew caught in their gently hued blooms.

The reluctant, rabbit munched stems of the toad lily, *Tricyrtis certa* are finally festooned with the odd little purple speckled 'lilies' emerging from the leaf axils. October is the time when the brightly striped leaves of *Carex* and *Hakonechloa* lighten shady paths accenting the gold in changing leaves. Late summer blooms of *Lantana* continue to flower as this shrub tries to become a tree.

Another plant that spreads quietly around sturdier stems and finally blooms is the *Patrinia scabiosaefolia*. The one I have is white although I expected it to have the yellow panicles as advertised. This is the season when we begin to notice the berries that provide color and food when other plants are dormant. One unexpected dash of orange/red was on the terminal cluster of berries on the false Solomon's Seal. The true Solomon's Seal is *Polygonatum* but I vaguely remember that the false member had recently been allowed into the genus tribe?

Hollies earn their keep when their berries ripen. A few years ago I encouraged my grandson to attack the shapeless and spindly Foster holly with the chainsaw. The new growth is compact and loaded with berries, and to think it might have sulked and died? The deciduous hollies, loved because their leaves are not cutting edge, do come into their own as they lose their leaves. There is something so sassy about a cloud of red berries on bare branches.

To everything there is a season and we are fortunate to live where winter is just a notation on the calendar and not a dreary expanse of grey skies and cold feet! Let's count our blessings!

**Bees:** If you have a hive on your property, it is probably situated in a spot where it will stay for years. In other places, bees may be considered seasoned tourists. For example, beekeepers with thousands of hives will be loading them onto tractor trailers for the trip to Florida citrus groves. Once those trees are pollinated the bees will repeat their assigned tasks in apple orchards, blueberry fields, and cranberry bogs. In California's Central Valley there are 600,000 acres of almonds that need bees and last winter half of the country's commercial hives were trucked in to do the job. This migration pattern has been in place for years but recently it has been under

scrutiny as the loss of bees has accelerated. The losses have been explained as a result of Varroa or other mites and viruses. Researchers were surprised to find a great number of different pesticides in their analysis of wax and pollen bread (the mixture of pollen and honey fed to the young bees). Also troubling was not only the high number of pesticides but the presence of fungicides as well which interacted with the pesticides making them more lethal.

Gardeners can help bees by providing nectar plants and avoiding pesticides and fungicides. Bees are attracted to single flowers in yellow, blue, and purple. They love herbs, particularly those in the mint family as well as sage, yarrow, hyssop, alfalfa, echinacea, beebalm, goldenrod and thyme.

Fortunately the health of the tiny critters doing this billions of dollars service has received attention. One of the country's largest environmental groups, Earthjustice has filed suit against the EPA on behalf of beekeepers because the EPA approved a new pesticide, Sulfoxaflor, which is related to other chemicals lethal to bees.

10 Oct 13