

What To Do in September

Plant vegetable plants. Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, chard, collards, endive, kale, lettuce, mustard

Plant herbs. Plants: All perennial herb plants; plus cilantro, dill, fennel, parsley Seed: Borage, caraway, chamomile, chervil, chives, cilantro, dill, fennel, parsley, summer savory

Plant flower/ornamental seeds. Alyssum, calendula, cornflower, delphinium, hollyhock, Johnny jump-up, larkspur, liatris, love-in-a-mist (nigella), pansy, poppy, snapdragon, stock, sweet pea

Plant annual flower/ornamental plants. Alyssum, aster, calendula, cornflower, dianthus, larkspur, lobelia, petunia, phlox, snapdragon, stock

Plant perennial plants. All of them! Include some ornamental grasses in your design.

Plant trees and shrubs. Fall is the best time for planting in Texas!

Plant ground covers. Consider using horseherb or frog fruit as a native groundcover in shady areas. Horseherb has delicate yellow flowers. Frog Fruit has white flowers. Both can be mowed. Frog fruit will also tolerate full sun. Another native groundcover for shade is Pigeonberry, with pink flowers and tiny red berries that wildlife loves to feed on. Other well-adapted groundcovers are Wedelia, Mountain Pea, and Leadwort. Wedelia is a lush groundcover with small yellow, zinnia-like flowers for full sun to part sun locations. Mountain pea is an assertive groundcover with light purple flowers for sun or shade. Leadwort is a dark-leaved groundcover with intense blue flowers that prefers afternoon shade.

Plant wildflower seeds. They love full sun! You have until Thanksgiving to plant them, but September through early October is best.

Plant native grass seeds. There is a narrow window here in early September, while the ground is still warm, in which native grass seeds may be planted and established.

Divide perennials. Transplant or give away your divisions of: daylily, bearded iris, Shasta daisies, violets, wood ferns, and cannas.

Start, or add to, a compost pile.

Watch out for brown patch in the lawn. Fall is the prime season for this fungal disease. Symptoms appear as fairly circular areas of brown St. Augustine, which may expand outward and may green up again in the center. According to Howard Garrett, it is rarely fatal, just ugly. The dead leaves can be pulled off the green runners easily. If you have had Brown Patch in the past, there are four main organic treatments to do now to help prevent this fungus. They can be applied all at the same time or in stages. Apply a half-inch of high quality manure compost across the top of the soil as a topdressing, and water in.

Revitalizer(tm) is ideal for this. In addition to or instead of compost, our aerobically produced compost tea can be used. We have aerobic compost tea available. It should be applied within 8 to 10 hours from time of purchase to insure that the beneficial organisms in it are still alive. Corn meal can be applied to your lawn at the rate of 20 pounds per 1000 square feet. Yes, corn meal is effective because it stimulates beneficial soil microorganisms that fight the Brown Patch fungus. The most directly effective treatment for prevention is a granular product called Actinovate. This is a Streptomyces bacteria that inoculates the turf roots, and forms a protective barrier against the Brown Patch fungus. If you find yourself in the cool fall season with brown patch circles showing up in the lawn already, you can use an organic fungicide called Garlic GP. Rake up any dead grass, and spray liberally - the dead area and slightly beyond. You may want to spray again in ten days. Then, follow up with one or all of the above four treatments for best results. It's all about the balance of life in the soil - not choosing the "recommended" poison to kill, kill, and kill. Here are the things that contribute to Brown Patch: compacted, alkaline soil, mowing too short and high nitrogen fertilizer (as in

chemical fertilizers). Therefore, aerate, top-dress with compost, and use organic fertilizers. St. Augustine prefers to be mowed at no less than three inches tall. It is no longer recommended to "scalp" the lawn at any time.

Plant winter cover crops. If you have any bare soil, mulch it heavily for the winter. Better yet, you can plant a cover crop. Cover crops assist in preventing weeds as mulches do, but they also improve the soil as they grow. Covering bare soil with a living plant helps insulate the soil from temperature fluctuations and helps to crowd out potential weeds. The aboveground portion of the cover crop shades the soil, further preventing weeds from taking hold. Meanwhile, their roots open up the soil, allowing water to penetrate more easily and bringing up nutrients from deep in the soil. Cover crops can be planted in bare areas around existing crops as well, such as in vegetable gardens and around fruit trees. If it is feasible to till in the cover crop, it becomes known as "green manure," adding organic matter as well as nutrients to the soil. Certain types of cover crops known as legumes can fertilize the soil with extra nitrogen that they capture right out of thin air. With the help of a Rhizobium bacteria, leguminous plants such as clover, pea, vetch, alfalfa, or other members of the Bean Family, "fix" nitrogen from the atmosphere and make it available to the soil after they are tilled in. When planting any of these legumes, including beans and peas in your vegetable garden, be sure to purchase the correct Rhizobium inoculant for the crop. This powdered inoculant is simply dusted onto slightly moistened seeds before they are planted. The cover crops to plant in the fall are clover, hairy vetch, ebon (cereal) rye, Austrian winter peas, or annual rye. Till these in next spring or anytime before they flower. The exception is elbon rye, which should be tilled in before it reaches a foot tall, or it will be too tough to till. For all cover crops, wait at least two weeks, and preferably three or four, after tilling before planting anything else. This gives the organic matter a chance to decompose. Watering the area will help in the decomposition process. If you are using the cover crop as a "living mulch" around vegetables, wait until the vegetables are established, about 6" -8" tall, before sowing the cover crop.

(Thanks to Howard Garrett's Texas Organic Gardening Book, the Travis County Master Gardener Association's Garden Guide for Austin and Vicinity, and the staff of the Natural Gardener for some of this month's tips.)