

village view

by Andrea Leonard

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Sultry August is nearly spent. When it's gone, there'll be but few days left 'til Labor Day- one final burst of summer, one grand long weekend to mark its close. The exodus will begin and the Cape will sigh. And so will I.

Cape Cod may not perceptibly rise a few inches from the surrounding sea like a loaded skiff when its passengers disembark, but should she do so we might not be too surprised. Even though the peninsula doesn't show her Plimsoll line, our spirits probably will.

Meanwhile, we've these few more weeks of sunbathing, fiddler crab hunting at low tide, and sunset watching over the boat-crowded bays. We've a few more weeks to ready ourselves for our most brilliant of seasons: autumn.

And we've a few more weeks to prepare our gardens for a late fall harvest.

Hot and humid though the last few weeks of August may be, the garden is still producing and will continue to for months to come if we bestir ourselves. The wildflowers of September, goldenrod and fall asters will burst into bloom without attention and helenium, boneset, bottle gentians and coneflowers will blossom unaided, but now's the time to plant fall crocus, Madonna lilies, and to order the spring bulbs for planting next month when the foliage begins to turn.

If you have potatoes in your garden, they can be dug as soon as the tops die down. Harvest and use your early onions, taking the white ones first. Yellow ones keep best. Thin root vegetables, carrots and beets, to permit uninterrupted growth.

After your August harvest, instead of allowing valuable garden space to remain idle, consider planting more vegetables for fall. The advantages are obvious: you'll make full use of the growing season and add to your winter supply instead of depleting it.

Although many vegetables planted in August will not mature fully, they can provide especially good meals when harvested young. Select varieties needing the fewest days to mature. Seeds need moisture for germination so be certain to keep them watered; it's unlikely you'll produce high quality vegetables at this time if you rely solely upon natural rainfall.

Beans, a warm weather crop, do well in a coldframe planted before the end of August. Try Topcrop which matures in 49 days. Tender young beets, harvested when hardly larger than golf balls, are delicious slightly undercooked, served with butter. Work the soil deeply before sowing seed, and thin early, carefully.

Broccoli is unharmed by light frosts; try Green Comet Hybrid; it matures in 40 days. Planted this late, carrots will not mature fully, but baby carrots are a gourmet's treat on crisp cool autumn evenings. They can be harvested well after frost if the bed is mulched.

Peas are a rare delicacy in the fall and more people should take the trouble to plant them. The early varieties such as Little Marvel, Sparkle and Frosty do best this time of year.

Radishes need little time to reach maturity and can be planted throughout August. Make small plantings; a few go a long way at each meal. Spinach is another cool-weather quick-growing crop. Excellent in salads as well as cooked, spinach is hardier than most late crops and withstands severe conditions, continuing to produce til early December.

Turnip grows best in the fall, of course; most varieties reach maturity in 40 to 50 days. They grow easily and provide a pleasant change from green vegetables. Turnips shouldn't be harvested until after the first hard frosts for freezing brings out their sweetness.

If the rest of the summer is dry, as late August and early September often are, make sure all your broadleaved evergreens receive adequate water. Soak the ground thoroughly, giving the roots and soil at the base of each plant a good half-hour's drenching at least once a week. If necessary, which it seldom is, keep up the watering program throughout the fall months.

Azaleas and rhododendrons, mountain laurel and andromeda will survive winter thaws and freezes far better if

they've had regular waterings before they must endure alternate rigors of winter winds and snappy sunny days.

To keep your flower garden in continuous bloom throughout the remaining pleasant weather, pluck fading flowers from annuals until frost withers and blackens them.

If, in June, you moved houseplants outside to brighten a terrace or patio, keep them free of insects now. You don't want buggy plants brought into the house in mid-September. Make certain these, too, get adequate water since wilting can set them back seriously.

If you've a greenhouse, there are many things you'll want to do while you can still safely keep plants outside without fear of frost nipping your tender favorites.

You'll want to be certain the glazing is snugly in place and replace any loose panes as required. If the benches are the slightest bit wobbly, replace or strengthen them to prevent possible collapse during the winter.

Ready your winter soil for future use. Most soil for potted plants can be premixed with sand, peatmoss and compost, ready to be fertilized when potting-time is at hand. If you prefer buying potting soil, large bags are available from florist supply houses.

Check your supplies of peatmoss, sprays and fertilizer; order now what you'll need over the winter. These will be less readily available and more expensive later in the year.

The time to give your greenhouse a thorough fumigation to kill any pests or disease organisms which may be present is shortly before you intend to bring in the plants for the coming winter season.

Sultry August may fail to inspire you to get at these tasks; you may feel more like lazing in the warmth of the sun than enthusiastically starting a fall vegetable garden. Remember though that the fall growing season is short. If you delay a week, waiting for a clear day in September when the air is sharp and invigorating, you could lose part of your harvest, especially those plants that won't stand a light frost.

Taking just a little time, this month, can pay big dividends; the really difficult work of preparing the garden is already accomplished. Sowing a few seeds, this time of year, isn't all that arduous, even if the weather's hot and humid.

You'll be glad you did it, come Hallowe'en.. or even Thanksgiving.