

Important Tasks Revealed For Fall Gardeners

A recent newsletter by Kim Powell (landscape specialist, Horticulture Department, N.C. State University) highlighted a series of important gardening tasks for the autumn gardener. I have added to and modified his list and believe the following information will answer many forthcoming questions.



Carolina. Remember to stay at least 25 feet from buildings and avoid planting trees under power lines.

■ Prune off faded blooms of crape myrtles. Most crape myrtles have been blooming for the past month or so, and as the flowers fade, seed heads form. Now is a good time to tip prune those seed heads off for two reasons: (1) flowering is encouraged; and (2) weight will be relieved from the branches. You will notice how a crape myrtle in full bloom is easily bent out of shape after a summer rain shower. The flowers form on this season's new growth, which is usually not strong enough to support the weight of a wet bloom or seed head.

■ Spring flowering bulb catalogues are arriving, so it must be time to start thinking about next year's garden. Now is a good time to design that garden, but wait until it cools off a bit to actually do anything. Spring flowering bulbs are best planted in late October through December. Now is a good time to take a soil sample.

■ Late Summer Renovation: After 4 or 5 months of growing, many landscape beds are probably in need of a good weeding and edging. I have seen numerous plantings that would benefit from a total late-summer renovation. This would include hand-pulling the annual weeds and grasses and spraying a contact herbicide on the tough perennial weeds and grasses.

The perennials and most woody plants can stand a tip pruning or even a heading-back trim. Some perennials will probably need staking. After these projects are complete, re-edge the bed, apply a pre-emergent herbicide if necessary and add a fresh layer of mulch.

■ 2,4-D, Amitrol, Roundup and Banvel are contact herbicides labeled for poison ivy and poison oak control. If you want an organic control method, buy a goat. And if you are concerned about the quality of the milk, don't worry.

According to University of California researchers, goats eating poison oak do not produce milk that is contaminated. They conclude that it is safe to use goats to clear poison oak. They also assumed that it was safe to use goats to clear poison ivy and poison sumac, since the toxic chemical, urushiol, is essentially the same in all three. No urushiol was found in the milk or urine samples of goats fed on 100-percent poison oak for 10 days.

■ Now is a good time to prepare sites for tree planting. September through December is an excellent time to plant trees in coastal North

■ Take pictures of areas before and after landscaping. "Before" pictures are always good to have, especially when you've finished installing a nice garden or landscaping feature.

■ We've all heard and used the expression, "If it's not broken, don't fix it," and there is a lot to be said for putting this statement into practice. But sometimes we might want to change our planting strategy and experiment with new plants or new cultivars of plants. Landscape beds often need a break from the same combinations of plants, especially bedding plants.

On a recent visit to Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Ga., Kim Powell reported seeing the following plants used in various landscape beds. There's no reason why we shouldn't try some of the same combinations in some North Carolina landscapes.

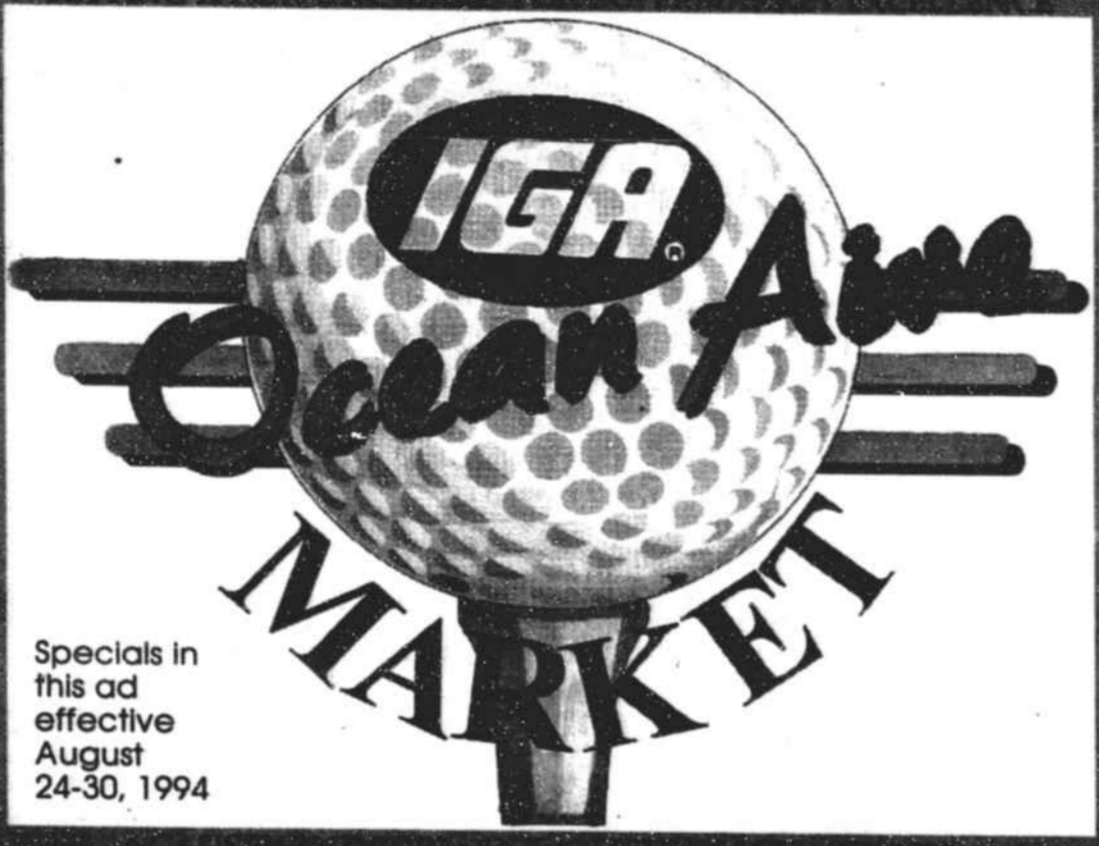
(The common names are followed in italic by the scientific or cultivar name.)

- Summer Bedding Plants For Next Year's Garden**
 Lantana (*Miss Huff's Hardy*, *Radiation*, *New Gold*)
 Annual Hibiscus (*Red Shield*)

- Silver Dollar (*Eucalyptus cinera*)
 Egyptian Starflower (*Pentas Lanceolata*)
 Sweet Potato (*Ipomea Blackie*)
 Wormwood (*Artemisia Powis Castle*)
 Narrow-leaf Zinnia (*Zinnia angustifolia*)
Excellent Fall-Blooming Perennials For The Adventurous Gardener
 Sage (*Salvia Madrensis*)
 Mexican Bush Sage (*Salvia leucantha*)
 New England Aster (*Aster novae-angliae*)

Swamp Sunflower (*Helianthus giganteus*)
 Tartarian Aster (*Aster tartaricus*)
 Send your gardening questions and comments to the Plant Doctor, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia NC 28422. Please send a SASE for a reply or if requesting information.

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