

September in the Tallahassee Garden



Photo by Marie Harrison, UF-IFAS Okaloosa County Master Gardener: Lion's ear, *Leonotis Leonurus*, is one of the fall-blooming perennial flowers which can be planted now.

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Trees and Shrubs: While October and later in the fall is the ideal time to plant new shrubs and trees, September is the time to prepare for planting. Begin with a soil test and make any recommended improvements to landscape beds. You may pick up a soil test mailing kit from the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension office at 615 Paul Russell Road during weekdays, 8 am to 5 pm. Good drainage is needed for healthy plants. Soil that drains too quickly can be improved by tilling in composted organic matter. Soil with poor drainage can be improved by additions of organic matter and clean sand. Or, better yet, select types of plants that can tolerate wet feet.

Annuals and Perennials: Clean beds and replace mulch as needed. Deadhead flowers that have finished blooming. Chrysanthemums may be planted this month. For an extended bloom period look for a selection of early, mid-season and late-blooming cultivars. Most mums should be planted two feet apart. Spaced too closely, the plants will become spindly and upright instead of mounding and spreading. Most other perennials may be planted, too. Examples of fall-blooming perennials include lion's ear (*Leonotis Leonurus*), pineapple sage (*Salvia elegans*), Mexican sage (*Salvia leucantha*), Philippine violet (*Barleria cristata*), firespike (*Odontonema strictum*), and cigar plant (*Cuphea micropetala*). Petunias can be planted in mid- to late September. Wait for cooler weather before planting pansies, dianthus, snapdragons and other cool-season annuals. Sow wildflower seeds.

Fruit: Give citrus and other fruit trees a last fertilization of the year, giving new growth time to mature before the cold weather. Wait until next month to plant strawberries. Oriental persimmons ripen now through December. Pick them when color has developed to the yellow/orange/red stage and most or all of the green is eliminated. Unblemished fruit will keep at room temperature for up to thirty days.

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Vegetables and Herbs: Plant fall vegetables now, including broccoli, cabbage, carrots, collards, endive, escarole, leeks, turnips, radishes, mustard, beets, kale, edible-podded peas, spinach, Swiss chard, and green onions. If you plant early in the month, you can still plant tomatoes, squash, beans, and cucumbers. Plant herbs such as chives, dill, marjoram, cilantro, arugula, oregano, parsley, sage, rosemary and tarragon.

Lawn Care: If you haven't fertilized since spring, an application of a low-nitrogen, high potash (potassium) winterizer fertilizer, such as 5-0-15 or 5-0-20 could help now. Avoid high-nitrogen types of fertilizer. Winterizer fertilizer helps to conditions warm-season turfgrass for cold weather by boosting the potassium to nitrogen ratio. If you plan to fertilize do it before the end of September. Continue to water the lawn as needed. September is often a dry month and a thorough weekly soaking of one-half inch of water may be necessary.

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