September in the Tallahassee Garden

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Cigar plant (Cuphea micropetala) is among fall-blooming perennials that can be planted now

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The bad news is that it’s still too hot and humid to really enjoy gardening this month. The diehards are still out there but many gardeners have given up until cooler weather arrives.
The good news is that the end is in sight. Cooler weather is just around the corner.

Right Plant, Right Place

September is the time to plant fall-blooming perennials for a great show of color. Consider African bulbine (Bulbine frutescens), Philippine violet (Barleria cristata), firespike (Odontonema strictum), cigar plant (Cuphea micropetala) and lion’s ear (Leonotis leonurus). Vines that will provide excellent color include sky flower (Thunbergia grandiflora) and pink trumpet vine (Podranea ricasoliana). Vegetables to plant this month include cabbage, collards, bok choy and broccoli transplants. Mustard greens, lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard and radishes can be started from seed now. Plant most of these perennials, vines and vegetables in full sun for best results. The exceptions would be Philippine violet and firespike, which could both benefit from afternoon shade. Ornamental grasses may also be planted now. They prefer a sunny location but can tolerate some shade. Wait until October or November to plant trees, shrubs, winter annuals and spring-flowering bulbs.
Water

September can bring drier weather, so check container plants, hanging baskets and flower boxes daily and water as needed. Apply one-half inch of water to your lawn once or twice a week during dry periods. Be prepared to water newly planted selections every day or two until they are established and we see cooler weather.

Fertilizer

Winterize your lawn with a 5-0-20 product this month, if you haven’t fertilized since spring. Annuals and herbs can be fertilized monthly with a 15-0-15 product. Also, this is the time of year to inspect your lawn for sod webworm damage. These caterpillars feed at night. Look for ragged grass blades that are chewed down to the stems. The damage spreads very rapidly. If you spot damage treat with a lawn insecticide, following label directions exactly, and spray only the affected areas and a little buffer beyond.

Mulch

Check the mulch in your flower beds. It should be applied to a depth of two to three inches. Mulch helps to keep soil cool, retard weed growth and conserve moisture. Just be sure to pull mulch away from the stems of plants to discourage stem rot.

Maintenance

Do only very selective pruning on spring-blooming shrubs. Remove crossed and broken branches, but be aware that pruning now will remove some of the flower buds and reduce spring flowering. Do all pruning before the end of the month to allow new growth to harden off before our first frost. Divide and transplant clumping perennials this month. If you are planning on installing any new planting beds this year, this is a good time to get started. Try putting a layer of six to eight pages of newspaper in the area of the new bed then cover with a thick (four or five inches) layer of mulch. It is not necessary to remove all sod first, which can be a daunting project. There will be plenty of weeds to pull this month, but they should begin to slow down in October.

Wildlife

Continue to keep bird and hummingbird feeders clean and filled. With this hot weather, I find that I have to fill the bird baths at least twice a day. Recycle pruned or fallen limbs by making a brush pile on your property to provide cover for birds and small animals. Consider installing bird and bat houses to attract these creatures to your yard also. Bats can eat as many as one thousand mosquitoes in a single day and many birds feed on insects as well.