

September in the Tallahassee Garden

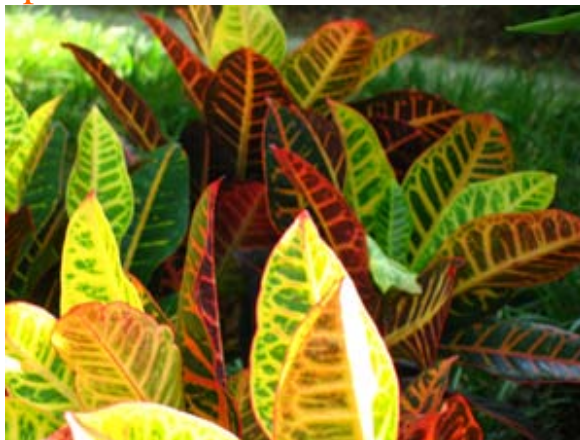


Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Quickly perk up tired flower beds now by using plants with colorful foliage such as crotons.

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Though it may be difficult to believe, fall will officially arrive in just three weeks (at least according to the calendar). Gardeners can work with renewed energy knowing that the humidity and high temperatures of summer are almost at an end.

If your beds of summer annuals need help, add fresh annuals such as narrow-leaf zinnias, begonias, torenia, or even plants with colorful foliage such as croton, coleus, or Cuban Gold duranta. These will provide great color through the fall, probably until November or December. Towards the end of September, when night temperatures begin to cool, you can plant petunias, dianthus, nemesias, diascia, erysimum, and snapdragons for fall and winter color. Fall flowering perennials to consider include cape honeysuckle (*Tecomaria capensis*), princess flower (*Tibouchina*), yellowbells (*Tecoma stans*), firespike (*Odontonema strictum*), lion's tail (*Leonotis Leonurus*), cigar flower (*Cuphea micropetala*), and African bulbine. Plant all of these in full sun for optimal blooming.

If you're looking for something different, try spider or hurricane lilies (*Lycoris radiata*). They are grown from bulbs and can be planted in sun or shade. After heavy rains in late summer or early fall they produce eighteen-inch spikes of beautiful clusters of red-orange flowers, seemingly overnight. The grassy foliage appears after blooming and lasts through winter.

Now is the time to start your fall vegetable garden in a sunny area of your landscape. Collards, cabbage, lettuce transplants and onion sets can be planted this month after temperatures cool a bit. Sow seeds of lettuce, collards, mustard greens, Swiss chard and

radishes. Be sure to keep seed beds moist until the seeds germinate. If the idea of a vegetable garden is too much of an undertaking, try a small salad garden of lettuce, arugula, carrots and radishes. If space is a problem, consider container vegetable gardening.

Plant herbs that will tolerate early fall's warm temperatures, like tarragon, mint, rosemary and basil.

Wait until cooler weather to plant trees and shrubs. They will put on little top growth during the winter but their roots will grow and help them to better deal with heat stress next summer.

If you've had lawn damage during the summer and want to encourage new growth before winter, fertilize this month if you didn't in August. Use a winterizer formula such as 5-0-20 or 5-0-15. Continue to fertilize annuals, herbs and vegetables monthly with an all-purpose 15-0-15 product.

Divide crowded amaryllis and daylilies this month. Divide plants carefully and add organic matter to the soil. Replant divisions eighteen inches apart and water well until re-established. Avoid severe pruning of shrubs and trees this month. Pruning stimulates new growth which could still be tender if we have an early cold snap.

September is typically one of our drier months, so this is a good time to check irrigation systems to ensure that you are getting adequate coverage, especially on new plants. Containers dry out particularly quickly, so check them often.

One of the most rewarding things about gardening in Tallahassee is having colorful blooms in the garden in every season. All that's required is some planning and attention to conditions in your landscape. Consider soil quality, amount of sun/shade, drainage and space when choosing plants to ensure successful gardening.

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