

Haddam Garden Club

September 2017 Garden Blog Article

by Cindy Tillson



Move a Few Perennials

September is a delightful month to move a few perennials. It could be as simple as moving a taller one to the back so a shorter one will show next year. Most perennials are pretty easy to move.

If they are too crowded, Bearded irises should be divided in the fall. Carefully dig them out with a pitchfork. Divide the rhizomes (root part) by pulling them apart with your hands. A good rhizome will be about as thick as your thumb, have healthy roots, and have one or two leaf fans. Large, old, less than perfect rhizomes should be pitched. Wash the rhizome off and inspect for iris borer (a fat white worm). Destroy any borers you find. Trim the fans to 4-5". Replant divisions 12 to 18 inches apart (closer for dwarf varieties). Incorporate compost into the soil and set the rhizome higher in the planting hole than the fine roots, which should be fanned out. A bit of the top surface of the rhizome should be just visible at the soil surface. Water well at planting but only if they dry out after that.

Peonies only need to be divided every 100 years unless you want to increase the planting area, share them or if the plants are growing poorly. September is the right time. Dig them up, discard the rotten and unhealthy looking pieces. Each fleshy root division should have at least 3 to 5 "eyes." The "eyes" should be planted, facing up, about one to two inches deep in an area you have prepared by incorporating a good amount of compost. If planted too deeply, the plant will produce foliage and no flowers. Plants should be spaced about 2 to 3 feet apart. Mulch with shredded bark or pine needles in early winter.

September is a good time to add compost around all of your shrubs, trees and perennials. It is the best organic slow release fertilizer and soil enrichment there is and fall is a great time to apply it.

Stop deadheading soon. The birds will thank you.

If your lawn disappointed you this summer, now is a good time to do something about it. First of all, get the soil tested. Detailed instructions are on the UCONN web site soiltest.uconn.edu or you can pick up directions and a form at the Extension Service or the library. It is just \$12 and can save you lots of guesswork and unnecessary expense trying various solutions.

If your soil is needy (as per the soil test), amend according to their instructions. If you don't understand what the results say you should do, call the soil science department at UCONN. The number is on the test results. They are most willing to explain.

Another issue lawns can have is compaction. In my case it is caused by dog traffic. The weed plantain is a good indicator. It has wide leaves that grow in a rosette pattern, flush with the grass. The solution to compaction is to aerate. You can rent an aerator and drive it around your yard. It pulls plugs out of the lawn and deposits them on the lawn. Now air and water can penetrate your lawn. It can do wonders. It is good to do every few years on general principle. Don't forget to pull the plantain.

Once you've determined the problems and addressed them, go ahead and overseed the bare spots and the crabgrass with a tough grass seed blend. Make sure the soil in your bare spots has had compost added. Cover the newly seeded areas with a light layer of straw to keep the birds from eating all of it and to shade the new plants. Make sure it gets water every day until the grass is up and looking healthy. Continue to keep an eye on it and don't let it dry out completely. With any kind of luck it will sprout and grow into that lush mat you had hoped for last summer. Things can still go wrong and sometimes it won't work. But it's an educated guess based on sound science.

When you mow, leave the clippings on the lawn. As they decompose, it feeds your lawn. You can get away with half the fertilizer you might otherwise use by doing this. Running the mower over the leaves and chopping them up very finely will add great organic matter to the lawn too.

As for my lawn? I will continue to have dogs who will continue to compact the lawn, trample the flowers and dig holes. If it's green and I can mow it, it stays. The dogs live there too. I do leave the clippings and chop the leaves with the mower.

If your lawn is too much work, convert some to field or meadow. Think of all the time you will have for other things, not to mention that it is a much better environment for pollinators and wildlife. You can add beauty by throwing some wildflower seed out there. Birds and butterflies will be delighted.

The Oak Tree was planted behind the library on July 19 with a small group in attendance. It is our sincere hope that the people of Haddam enjoy the beauty of the fall foliage, the shade that will offer in summer and appreciate the wildlife habitat it creates for many years to come. It should grow to be more than 80 feet tall! The scientific name for this tree is *Quercus bicolor*, the swamp white oak. It is a North American species of medium-sized trees in the beech family.

The Garden Club will be meeting this month after a 2-month hiatus. Our meeting will focus on our upcoming Garden Party by the River. It will also include a presentation by member KC Alexander showing the process she uses to make her flower notecards.

We hope to see you at the Garden Club's Annual Garden Party by the River on Sunday, September 17 from 4-7 PM. Contact Lynne Cooper at lcooper13@comcast.net or call her at 860 345-7373. It promises to be a delightful afternoon.