

# A LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE TO AUTUMN

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There was a time when I actually took gardening advice very seriously, especially the instructions about what chores to do in the garden during each season. That was when I was in a "developmental stage" called YOUNG! Well, as with everything else in life, I am now in a stage where the key word is COMPROMISE! And that's on a good day. Other key words are MAYBE LATER and YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING.

My better self does pretty much adhere to the Spring TO-DO list, because it involves lots of planning, shopping, and having fun, and I have energy stored up from winter.

I also try to keep up with the Early Summer Chore List, mainly because everything looks beautiful, it's not too hot, and the mosquitoes haven't arrived in force. Also because it's pretty easy - water, feed, deadhead, and take lots of photos!

Late Summer is more COMPROMISE and less EFFORT, meaning that I water, get rid of a few dead things, and think about - but don't get around to - another feeding and serious pruning. But heat, humidity and mosquitos result in less being outdoors and more enjoying the colors through the porch window! And if I squint and turn my head just right, I ONLY look at the plants that are doing well!

And then there's FALL, and that's when my "inner lazy bum" really kicks in. I know it's the perfect time to plant perennials, divide established plants, re-arrange the in-ground plantings for maximum effect, and prune (while leaving enough debris to provide refuge for critters). In other words - GET TO WORK.

Well, guess what I discovered. *Almost total neglect* has it's own rewards! I do lots of window-box, hanging planter and patio pot gardening, and the key here is to pull out all the dead stuff - because empty looks better than dead! Then you can plunk in a few still-alive plants in small pots to fill the gaps - or not!

Pots are also very forgiving in the fall because they can be moved around, hidden, or featured, depending on what's happening in them.

I have also learned through the years to plant a few things that will reward me with beautiful fall color without any work. These include *Fall Anemone* (perennial), *Thunbergia* (annual), and *Vinca* (annual). I've probably said it before, but the *Thunbergia* is an unbelievable work-horse. I pot it up in

6" pots and just place them at the foot of my picket fence, where the pots are somewhat protected by other plants, and by fall they have COVERED the pickets with intertwining vines and the most delightful yellow and coral-colored flowers.

There are also plants that are hit-or-miss as to whether they will do well in fall, depending on weather conditions. This year *Million Bells* are still going strong, and my *Bougainvillea* is only just flowering now. Go figure. After raving about my *Rudbeckia "Indian Summer"* being such a great long-flowering plant, mine did quite poorly this summer which I think is because they wanted it hotter and sunnier in the early season. So to anyone who believed me - I'm sorry!

Now for the best part! I bought quite a few NATIVE PERENNIALS at our Spring Mini Plant Sale and also from good mail-order outfits, and have grown them in pots all summer to learn about their growth and flowering habits. My plan was, and still is, to develop an ALL NATIVE POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY GARDEN along my driveway. I was sure that I would have to break my NO WORK IN FALL rule in order to dig out all the unwanted plants, enrich the soil, work out the perfect design, and then dig, dig, dig! That is, until Greg Lowenthal spoke to us about "Gardening With Native Plants"! He advised us that natives not only do not need enriched soil - they don't like it and will grow leggy and unattractive if fertilized. Aha! So much for dig and enrich. He then suggested that one develop a Native Garden gradually, planting specimens wherever you think they will look good and do well. That means I'll plant as many as I want to or have the energy for, and can overwinter the others in pots until spring or beyond. He assured us that they will mostly overwinter well in pots, and I can check the LINPI website for more information.

This "relaxed" approach to fall gardening did take some mental courage on my part, since I have had a lot of company this fall, and if there is one trait that all gardeners share it's the desire for our gardens to look their very best for visitors! But the desire to hoard my energy for feeding and housing guests outweighed my desire to create a perfect fall garden. And you know what? "Good Enough" is a fine motto!

I wish you all much enjoyment of your fall gardens, with as much or as little effort as you wish to put in!

