

## Five Tips for Late Summer Gardening

By George Schoellkopf, Hollister House Garden

Gardening has been even trickier than usual at this time of year; it has been the hottest, driest summer I can remember. So here are some tips for successful late summer gardening that I have found useful.

1. Providing enough water for your plants is obviously crucial in a dry summer, but it helps to **know which plants are less needy than others**. Yes, there are plants, such as hostas, heucheras, and most annuals, that will look miserable if not kept moist. But there are many others that, once established, can more or less fend for themselves during a drought, with only a little help from the gardener. Baptisias are good sports when water is less abundant and their handsome blue-green foliage holds up all through the summer. Another stalwart during hot, dry weather is eupatorium, in its many and varied species and varieties. The wild Joe Pye weed, *Eupatorium purpureum*, which reaches six or seven feet, often flops just as its blossoms open in mid-to-late August, but the newer varieties are far more worthy of a spot in your garden. Three-to-four-foot-high eupatorium 'Little Joe' with its attractive plumes of dull mauve blossom is perfectly erect without staking, even after a downpour. A delightful new variety for me is *Eupatorium caanabinum* 'Florepleno', four-feet-high with purple stems, apple-green foliage, and delicate trusses of soft pink blossom. It is happily blooming now.
2. I am always hoping to **find flowers that bloom in September but look like spring**. One such is *Allium tuberosum*, Chinese chives, which makes neat one-foot clumps covered with scads of little star-shaped blossoms in September. This year it is early—along with everything else. Another little-known late summer bulb is *Scilla autumnalis*. It looks very like the common spring-flowering *Scilla siberica* except that the flowers are pink instead of blue. It is delicate and needs careful placement to look its best.
3. **A nice trick with taller late-blooming perennials is to cut them back by about a third in June**. This will prevent them from flopping and only sets back blooming time by a week or so. New England asters, *Aster novae-angliae*, respond especially well to this treatment. My friend Wes taught me how to extend the blooming period of my bee-balm, *Monarda didyma*, by selectively cutting back every other stem so that the shortened stalks bloom later.
4. For those of us who love true blue, **a little-known annual for mid-to-late summer is *Salvia uliginosa***, four-feet-high with loose flower heads of brightly hued sky-blue florets. It lights up a border and will occasionally survive a mild winter if planted in soggy soil since its Latin name means "swamp-dwelling."
5. For the lazy gardener, **self-seeding plants can make life easier**. The way *Browallia americana* seeds itself generously around the garden reminds me of forget-me-nots in spring, except that browallia, with deep blue flowers, is taller, at around 12 to 20 inches. Fifteen-inch-high *Perilla frutescens* with its deep purple leaves provides welcome contrast in a border. It is so prolific that it is sometimes called "perilla gorilla" by its detractors. The best variety, 'Crispa', has darker leaves with slightly ruffled margins.