September Gardening To-Do

- Nope, it's not time to plant bulbs just yet. Wait until October. Go ahead and buy them now, but keep them in a cool, dry, dark place. And pay a little more for nice, firm, healthy "top-size" bulbs. Mail-order and small nurseries are ideal. The big box stores, I'm afraid, too often carry undersized bulbs that won't bloom well.
- There's a saying that beautiful lawns are made in the fall. As days grow cooler, it's a great time to reseed problem patches or lay new sod. We've been having some dry weather though, so water daily until established--usually in a couple of weeks. Now is also an excellent time to aerate a lawn.
- If you prefer a shorter look, start mowing cool-season turf, such as Kentucky bluegrass, ryes, and fescues, lower (about 2 inches) now that temperatures are cooler. Or continue to mow at the ideal height of 3 inches. With warm season grasses, such zoysiagrass, keep mowing at about 2 inches.
- Fertilize cool season lawns, such as Kentucky bluegrass, ryes, and fescues, to encourage good root growth. Do not fertilize zoysiagrass this month.
- Continue to harvest early and often for the most tender, sweetest produce and to keep plants producing well. For tips on harvesting visit our website at www.theiowagardener.com/harvesting_fruits_and_veggies.html
- Keep things watered. You'll enjoy your garden longer, and it will prevent plants from going into winter dehydrated, which can make them die out over winter.
- Make the tough calls. If any annuals this late in the season are struggling, pull them up and put them in the compost heap. If a perennial is looking shot, just cut it off at ground level now and discard the foliage.
- Brighten your garden with mums. Choose from either florist's mums, which aren't winter hardy but are very tidy-looking with large flowers or from hardy mums, which are more rough-looking but will come back again next year. Florist's mums are great for pots indoors and out while garden mums are good for planting in the ground for a permanent display.

Notes