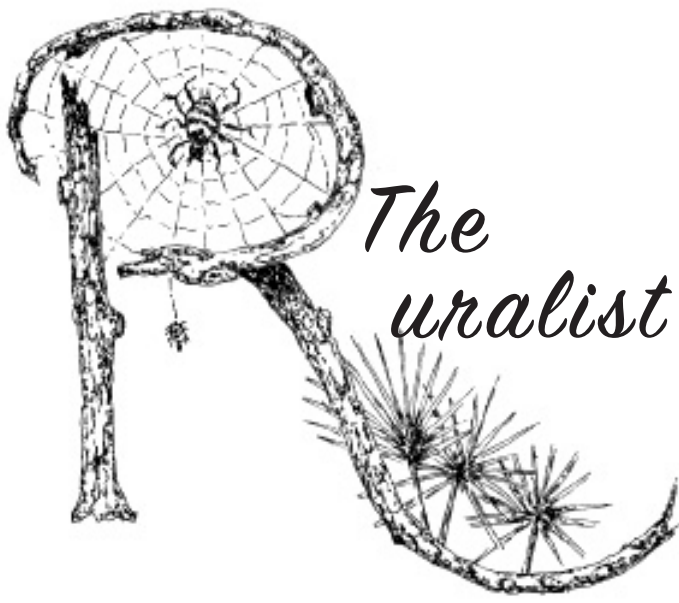


Summer in the Florida Garden

by Barb Howe



The
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What to Plant in July & August

July is the time to plant pumpkins and winter squashes. Pumpkins and winter squashes take between 80 to 120 days to harvest, depending upon the variety. Try some new varieties: pumpkin seed suggestions: Seminole, Sugar Pie, Long Island Cheese Pumpkin (the latter are flattened medium-ribbed pumpkins about the size of a wheel of cheese); winter squash suggestions: Delicata, Winter Sweet, North Georgia Candy Roaster, Blue Hubbard.

Order your seed catalog now and get ready for September and a Florida fall garden.

Recommended Seed Sources:

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange

P. O. Box 460
Mineral, VA 23117
(540) 894-9480
www.SouthernExposure.com

Johnny's Selected Seeds

Attn: Catalog Order
P. O. Box 299
Waterville, Maine
04903
(877) 564-6697
Johnnyseeds.com



I'm a native Floridian but even I am not a fan of gardening in the sticky Florida heat in mid-summer. Last year when it got too hot for me in late July I just quit entirely and let the weeds take over. It's 102° in the shade, I thought. I ain't going out there!

This was a mistake. Those weeds grew so thick so fast by fall it was a real chore to clear them all out. Plus, if you wait until it actually feels like fall in Florida you will miss growing some great winter crops altogether and be way behind in starting others and may have to rely on starts instead of seeds, which greatly limits your choices. With just a minimal amount of work in the cooler morning hours, you can stay on top of things in the garden and have an awesome fall and winter garden.

So! What should you be doing in July and August? Seeds you can plant now include southern peas, pumpkins and winter squashes and that perennial classic of the South: okra. Even if you don't like to eat okra you should still grow it for a couple reasons. One, the plant itself looks cool being about 4-5' tall with huge umbrella-like leaves, and two, the pods, when dried, make excellent quirky, architectural accents for cut flower arrangements. Several stems with 3 to 4 pods attached make an excellent gothic bouquet for Halloween.

The other thing you can do now to get ready for Halloween is plant pumpkin seeds but you'll want to water them regularly and shelter them from the brunt of the summer heat if they're the classic orange Halloween pumpkins. The seminole pumpkin is more heat-tolerant and is much easier to grow in Florida. You may want to hand-pollinate your pumpkins if you don't have enough bees visiting your garden. For instructions, Google how to.

Your winter tomatoes can be started from seed in August. Tomatoes stop setting flowers (which turn into the fruits) when night-time temps rise above 70°, so that's all summer long in Florida. Commercially produced tomatoes are grown over the winter in Florida, either in the open (if far south enough) or in greenhouses where frost is a danger. Tomatoes are like Goldilocks: they like things not too hot, nor too cold, but just right, so timing is essential.

One thing you can take a break from in the summer garden in Florida: fertilizers. Don't fertilize things now. It's the rainy season and the rains just wash all

those nutrients down the gutters and into our rivers and streams where they cause algae blooms. You may have heard of red or green tides plaguing Florida's coastlines. Fertilizer run-off is one of the main causes. The nitrogen in the fertilizers throw algae growth into overdrive and these massive algae blooms suck all the oxygen out of the water which kills the fish and other wildlife. Even manatees and dolphins have been killed and for people it can cause headaches, rashes and breathing problems. It's not worth it. Make your last feeding in May or June and then you and the plants take a fertilizer break until October. It's too hot to make fruit anyway (unless you're a banana).

If you don't want to grow things at all during the hot summer months, you could solarize your soil if you think you have nematodes (put black plastic over the garden area and let the sun bake it naturally) or you could plant a cover crop of buckwheat or partridge pea. Both grow well in poor soils and add nutrients to the soil which may be very tired after that vigorous/intensive spring growing season.

Buckwheat seeds can just be scattered over broken up soil and they'll sprout pretty quickly. They grow about a foot or two high and honey bees love the tiny white flowers. When you're ready to put fall plants in the ground just take a hoe and chop up the buckwheat, working the remains into the soil where it will break down and provide nitrogen for your next plants. This is the same buckwheat you can eat, as in buckwheat pancakes, but harvesting and processing grains like this is probably out of reach for most home gardeners. Just use it as a soil conditioner.

Partridge pea is another heat-tolerant plant that's good for renewing the soil. It is also known as sensitive plant because its fronds respond to touch (children love this!). Partridge pea is a native legume and its yellow flowers are good for a variety of butterflies and caterpillars, including the beautiful Ceraunus Blue butterfly so that alone is reason enough to plant it.

Summers in Florida can be brutal so give your garden a break and go jump in that 72° water in one of our natural freshwater springs. Nature knows to dial things back when temperatures get extreme, so we should too.

Owls: Mythology and Folklore

Throughout history, the owl has featured significantly in mythology and folklore and is one of the oldest species of vertebrate animal in existence. Fossils have been found dating back 60 million years, showing little change over that time. One of the few birds that have been found in prehistoric cave paintings, owls have been both revered and feared throughout many civilizations.

In ancient Greece, owls were seen as a symbol of good fortune and symbolized science and steadiness. Their "human-like" eyelids and countenance have earned for them the familiar phrase, 'wise old owl,' which may have come from being associated with the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athene (or Athena). In contrast, the Romans saw owls as omens of impending disaster. Hearing the hoot of an owl indicated an imminent death. It is thought that the deaths of many famous Romans was predicted by the hoot of an owl, including Julius Caesar, Augustus, and Agrippa. While the Greeks believed that the sight of an owl predicted victory for their armies, the Romans saw it as a sign of defeat. They believed that a dream of an owl could be an omen of shipwreck for sailors and of being robbed. To ward off the evil caused by an owl, it was believed that the offending owl should be killed and nailed to the door of the affected house.

Beliefs on owls varied among ancient American Indian tribes. Some tribes

viewed owls as harbingers of sickness and death—death being referred to as "crossing the owl's bridge"—while other tribes saw them as protective spirits or souls of respected, recently-departed people. Some tribes even saw the owls as earthly incarnations of their gods. The Hopis believed the Burrowing owl to be their god of the dead. The Inuit explain the flat face and short beak of owls in the story of a beautiful young girl who was magically changed into an owl with a long beak. As an owl, she became frightened and flew into the wall of her house and flattened her face and beak.

In Malaya, it was believed that owls ate newborn babies. The Swahili believed that owls brought sickness to children, and in Arabia it was believed that owls were evil spirits that carried children off in the night.

The Welsh believe that if an owl is heard amongst houses, an unmarried girl has lost her virginity; if a pregnant woman hears the owl, her child will be blessed.

In Yorkshire and India, medicinal remedies were concocted of cooked owl meat to cure whooping cough, seizures, rheumatism, and other ailments.

Because of its ability to turn its head so far and its habit of watching things intently, it was believed that you could get an owl to effectively wring its own neck by walking in circles around it.

While there are many cultures that believe the owl to be bad (in Cameroon, it

has no name; it is only referred to as "the bird that makes you afraid"), there are others that believe owls to be good. In Babylon, owl amulets were used to protect pregnant women. In the Lorraine region of France, owls are believed to help spinsters find husbands. In Romania, it is said that the souls of repentant sinners fly to heaven as Snowy owls.

Over 1,000 owls, including the endangered Brown Fish owl, are killed every year during Diwali by black magicians in the hope of warding off bad luck and gaining magical powers. This is despite the fact that owls are identified with the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, in whose honor the celebration is held.

Amulets made from the bones, beaks and talons of owls are in great demand.

In France owls were also considered with great esteem, with several named as dukes; and, the European Eagle owl was called *Hibou Grand-Duc* and the long-eared owl was called *Hibou Moyen-Duc*. This probably stemmed from the custom during the middle ages that nobles below the rank of a duke could not wear a plume of feathers, hence the 'eared' owls must be the rank of a duke. Somewhere along the way though, this attitude changed, with the European Eagle owl being classified as vermin until the late 1960s.

In China, the popular name for owls, especially "eared" owls, is "cat-eared hawk."

In Poland it was believed that girls who died unmarried turned into doves, while those who died married turned into owls.

It was also believed that owls did not come out during the day because they were so beautiful and would be mobbed by other birds out of jealousy.

In Russia hunters used to carry owl claws, so that their souls could use them to climb to heaven when they died.

The Kalmuks held owls sacred because one was believed to have saved the life of Genghis Khan.

Humans, being natural storytellers and problem solvers create myths and folklore to help them accept things that either cannot or will not be understood any other way.

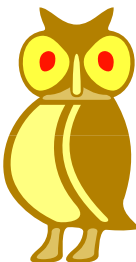
But who-oo-oo really knows? Do you?

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