
The Dirt: August Gardening Resources & Tips

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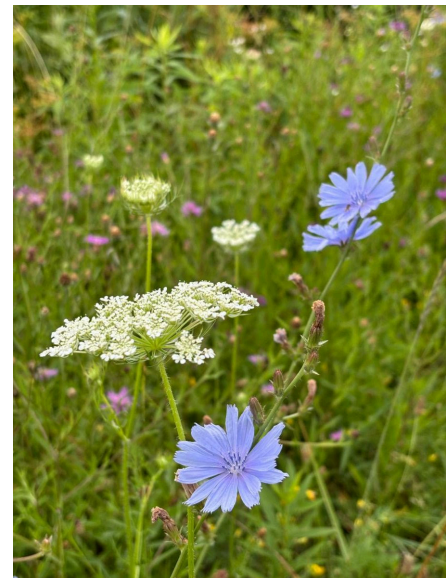
Gardening Resources & Tips from the MMGA

August 2025 The Heat Goes On...



...But we can slow down.

July saw its share of 90+ degree days (11), with 80+ a close second (10). So we gardeners have earned a slower August, a month typically filled with an abundance of flowers and produce. August is, for many, the last leisurely month of summer, so don't forget to drink deeply of what it offers. To that end, we show you how to make the most of cut flowers, why to get a bit ahead of fall chores (if the mood strikes, of course), and what those wonderful public gardens offer. These dog-days of August invite you to slow down and enjoy the results of all that hot weather toil.



In this month's issue of The Dirt:

- Featured Garden: Get in some lawn time at the Loring Greenough House, a two acre historic property in Jamaica Plain.

- Featured How-To: Make your cut flowers last long and look good.
- Monthly Native Plant: If you want bees, butterflies, and birds, plant *Agastache foeniculum*.
- Monthly Tips: Summer can be the season for dividing roots and more.
- Special Summer Tip: Re-learning plant diagnostics, via basil.

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They can subscribe online by clicking [HERE](#).

MASSACHUSETTS MASTER
GARDENER ASSOCIATION PRESENTS

Fall Gardening Know-How

Join us ONLINE

August 6, 13, 20 & 27th 2025

7-8:30 PM

Topics include

- Peonies – Love of my Life
- Invasives – What can Gardeners Do?
- Forcing Bulbs
- Lawns and Lawn Alternatives

Registration closes August 3, 2025

To learn more and sign up, click to visit
our website. Questions? Email us at
KnowHow@MassMasterGardeners.org

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Featured Monthly Garden

The Loring Greenough House

12 South Street

Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

617.524.3158

<https://loring-greenough.org/>

Author Shoma Haque, CMG, is the owner and founder of SHaque Designs, LLC. SHaque Designs focuses on creating sustainable, eco-friendly, and place-centered gardens in greater Boston. After a 25-year career, she made a transition from leading educational nonprofits to becoming a garden designer. Shoma holds a master's degree in urban planning from MIT, is a consultant certification through the Landscape Design School at the National Garden Club, is certified in Native Plant Studies through the Native Plant Trust, and is a Certified Massachusetts Master Gardener. She volunteers as a board member for the Urban Farming Institute and a Master Gardener Project Manager for the Loring Greenough House. Shoma lives in Jamaica Plain with her husband, two children, and rescue dog.

The Loring Greenough House (LGH) is a two-acre historic property located in the center of Jamaica Plain in Boston. It is a beautiful urban “park” that provides a significant green space and social hub for the local community. In any given week, especially in the summer, the grounds will host an outdoor movie night, a wedding reception, residents on lunch breaks, and the popular “Thursdays on the Lawn” event with food trucks, a beer garden, and space for kids to play and families to picnic. Up to a thousand people per week enjoy the gardens - this historic site is living in the present every day for local residents! The LGH has become a role model for integrating a historic house into the current neighborhood to be used and available to all, free and open every day of the week.



Today, it is one of the newest project gardens in Boston proper accessible to all Master Gardeners, who have taken a significant role in ensuring the land continues to be stewarded and well-maintained. Originally an MMGA site pre-Covid, it was maintained by an all-volunteer Landscape Committee for several years before it was resurrected as a project site in April 2025. An MMGA Garden Grant ensured that the site got off to a good start by funding much-needed gardening tools to be used by the Master Gardeners and local volunteers

The site is anchored by a gorgeous Georgian-Colonial style house built in 1760. Originally a 40-acre working farm, the house was in private hands until it came up for sale in the early 1920s, when the all-women Jamaica Plain Tuesday Club raised the funds to save it from demolition and redevelopment. It is now a cherished historic home and grounds, managed by the now non-profit Jamaica

Plain Tuesday Club (information on tours and events are available on the LGH website - www.loring-greenough.org).

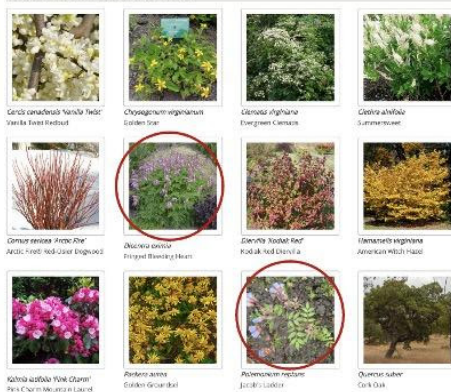
The grounds around the house are comprised of a well-loved lawn, several mature shade trees, deep shrub borders around the perimeter, a newly installed Native Plant Border and mostly-native East Border, and a colorful flower-filled Perennial Pathway for wedding processionals. Without MGs, the Committee and other volunteers were barely able to keep up with the work required to maintain the existing garden and at the same time, look to the future by planting more resilient, native plants. While the bones of the property were in good shape, deferred garden maintenance means that MGs have had the chance to do a variety of interesting gardening work, including pruning the varied shrubs, weeding (including invasives such as lesser celandine and aggressives such as gooseneck loosestrife), and planting perennials and bulbs to display a succession of blooms and foliage for the community to enjoy.



Loring Greenough House

PLANTS BY AREA

A. Compost To Cork Tree



The Native Border began as an empty patch of grass, extending over 270 linear feet along one side of the property. In 2021, the Landscape Committee decided it was time to beautify the area (and screen it from the unattractive parking lot next door). A small historic preservation grant initially provided funds for soil preparation, irrigation, and shrubs. Over the course of the next three years, a pro-bono landscape design was created that incorporated the existing indigenous plants and recommended additional plants (especially perennials &

groundcovers) with layering and seasonal interest, including foliage, bloom time, and color, that would thrive under existing conditions. Installation was completed in the fall of 2024. The hope is that visitors will be curious about the indigenous plants, read the plant tags, and be inspired to plant more indigenous plants in their own gardens.

A Native Plant Border Talk was hosted by the LGH in May, which served both to educate interested local residents and raise funds for the maintenance of the bed this coming year. This includes purchasing and planting replacements as needed (due to rabbit pressure, disease, and drought). One of the keys to having an impactful native plant border is to make sure that any exposed mulch has a

plant in it instead - to suppress weeds, create habitat and provide food and add to the beauty of the grounds.

The LGH Project Garden is open from mid-April through mid-October, on the first and third Wednesdays of the month. A variety of interesting gardening tasks (and educational opportunities), free parking, accessibility via public transportation, a mix of sun and shade, and a welcoming and appreciative Loring Greenough House team makes for a fun and enjoyable gardening experience for all. We hope you will come and join us as we work to preserve the beauty of these historic and well-loved gardens in the heart of Jamaica Plain!



EARLY BIRD PRICING ENDS TUESDAY!



The MMGA's **Massachusetts Gardening Symposium** is an all-day, in-person event featuring presentations on sustainable, regenerative horticulture.

If you've been thinking about signing up for this year's Symposium but woulda-coulda-shoulda ... now is a good time to get it done. Two reasons:

- **Early Bird pricing ends Tuesday, August 5.** Granted the savings vs. General Price aren't huge, but it's more than enough to cover gas to and from our Waltham venue ... or a dozen tickets in this year's fun raffle ... or a ready-to-plant native from one of our vendors.
- **Over 85% of seats are already sold**, so there's a good chance we'll fill up early. Don't miss out!

REMEMBER: Novices to experts, all gardeners are welcome!

2025 Massachusetts Gardening Symposium

Saturday, September 27, 2025, 9:00 AM-4:00 PM

Bentley University – LaCava Conference Center, Waltham, MA
Conveniently located 3.5 miles off Route 95/128

[CLICK HERE](#) to learn more and register

SYMPOSIUM SPEAKERS



LECTURE TOPICS

- **“Beauty, Integrity, and Resilience: Can a Garden Have Everything?” (Burrell)** – LEARN HOW to meet your aesthetic goals with a mixture of native and favorite non-native plants ... while providing the structure and resources necessary to support biodiversity.
- **“EcoBeneficial Landscape Strategies for the Climate Crisis” (Eierman)** – LEARN HOW the plants you choose and the landscape practices you use can help reduce the impact of climate change in your own garden and improve the environment.
- **“Native Groundcovers for Northeast Gardens”(Himmelman)** – LEARN HOW you can replace traditional mulch with a tapestry of foliage and flowers that is more visually appealing and ecologically valuable.
- **“Herbs: Heroes of the Garden” (Shimizu)** – LEARN HOW herbs are chemical factories with countless uses from a former curator of the National Herb Garden at the US National Arboretum, Washington, DC.

For more information, visit our [web page](#). Registration includes presentations, lunch, a book signing, Garden Marketplace, and ample time to visit with friends.

Early Bird savings end on August 5 - Just 4 days away!

Registration closes September 17 or once space is full.

[Sign up now](#) to save \$ and lock in your seat!

NEED HELP?

[Click here](#) for the answers to our most Frequently Asked Questions or email SympInfo@MassMasterGardeners.org

Featured How-To ***Create a Healthy Flower Arrangement***

Author Christine Paxhia, SPMG, left corporate America and became a Master Gardener in 2012. She is co-project manager of the historic Fletcher Steel Spalding Garden in Milton, Massachusetts. A member of the Milton Garden Club, Christine is a Garden Club of America Photography Judge, and soon to be Floral Design Judge. She is a member of the Massachusetts Master Gardeners Speakers Bureau, giving talks on peonies and lilacs, favorite plants that fill her home gardens. Christine is also a home-based florist, specializing in weddings and special events.

When I create a flower arrangement, I strive to make it last as long as possible so that it can be enjoyed for a week or more. An enduring flower arrangement starts with the purchase of fresh healthy flowers. Be sure to look for brown spots on the petals and make sure that the blooms are tight and are not going to be dropping their petals during transit.



It is also important to start with a clean, sterilized vase. Dirty vases or containers harbor bacteria which will help to sicken your flowers and even kill them. Running your vases through the dishwasher helps to sterilize them and

remove bacteria. When choosing a vase to arrange in, try to select one that is not so big that you need to have more flowers than you purchased. A rule for arrangements is that the height should not be more than 1 ½ times the height of the container. Add fresh cool water and remember to add a packet of flower food.

Think of yourself as the personal trainer for your flowers. There are some easy conditioning methods that will prolong their life in a vase (without even breaking into a sweat). With proper conditioning, a floral arrangement can last more than a week. Begin by opening the packet of flower food and emptying the contents into a vase or bucket of water. Remove the foliage of your flowers leaving the top leaf only. Then give the stem a fresh cut, and then place into the vase. Foliage should never be submerged in your vase. By leaving the top leaf, the flower will draw the water up to hydrate. This is especially true for roses.

Every type of flower has its own special conditioning method. Here are a few examples:

- Hydrangeas are extremely fussy. They require a lot of water, as their name suggests (Hydra meaning water). To condition hydrangeas (the macrophylla type) start by removing all of the foliage and submerging the head in water for one hour. After an hour, shake off the excess water, cut the stem and place in a vase or bucket to further drink. If after you have put together your centerpiece, and your hydrangea wilts, you can remove it and put it back into the water, head first. This method should only be used on the macrophylla type and not the arborescens. If you are cutting hydrangeas from your garden, you can use this method. Always cut in the early morning before the heat of the day dries them out.
- Roses like to be conditioned in warm water. If you do not want the flower to open up too quickly, you can use cooler water. Remove the foliage, cut the stem and place in your vase.



- Some flowers such as anemone and ranunculus do better by dipping the stem in boiling water for 10 seconds before placing it in the vase.



- One of my favorite conditioning methods involves tulips. Tulips like a shot of vodka or gin in the water to prolong their life. I always wondered who was the first garden club lady to discover this?



Each flower has its own preference when conditioning. I just named a few. One thing that is consistent for all types of flowers is to keep the foliage out of the vase. This will help prolong the life of your blooms. And remember to change the water after a few days, and remove dead blooms.

Monthly Native Plant ***Agastache foeniculum***

Agastache foeniculum, commonly known as anise hyssop, is a standout in the perennial garden, beloved by bees, butterflies, and birds alike. With its long-lasting blooms and fragrant foliage, this upright perennial adds both beauty and ecological value to sunny borders and pollinator-friendly plantings.

A member of the mint family, anise hyssop is native to prairies and open woodlands of the Upper Midwest and Great Plains. While considered introduced in New England, it adapts well to the region's conditions. It thrives in full sun and well-drained soils and tolerates a wide range of soil types, though good drainage is essential to prevent root rot. Once established, it is both heat- and drought-tolerant.



Plants grow in clumps, reaching two to four feet in height. Unlike many other mint family members, anise hyssop is not as aggressive and does not spread by underground runners. Instead, it may self-seed to form attractive thickets. The soft, heart-shaped green leaves have a licorice scent and are edible, often used in herbal teas. The aromatic foliage also acts as a natural deterrent to deer and rabbits.

Starting in July and continuing into fall, anise hyssop produces spikes of purple, bottlebrush-like flowers that are highly attractive to a wide variety of pollinators, including native bees, honeybees, butterflies, moths, and skippers. Even hummingbirds make occasional visits. After blooming, the seed heads offer a valuable food source for birds and contribute structure and visual interest through the winter months.

Several cultivars are available for gardeners seeking specific traits. While not native, 'Blue Fortune' is a popular sterile hybrid with an extended bloom period and no self-seeding. 'Black Adder' features deeper purple flower spikes, while 'Little Adder' offers a compact form, growing just 18 inches tall, ideal for smaller gardens or container plantings.



Whether used in naturalistic plantings, herb gardens, or pollinator borders, anise hyssop is an easy-care, multi-season perennial that delivers beauty and biodiversity.

Monthly Tip

Summer Divisions, A Time for Everything...

Dividing plants is not what one generally thinks about in the late summer, but it's the best time for the plants featured here. August is the best time to dig up and divide irises (bearded iris and Siberian iris) and peonies. It's also a great time to divide daylilies.

Irises bloom in May and by August they are past their prime. The tips of the leaves may be a bit brown and floppy or the edges may look ragged. Now is the time to carefully dig up the rhizomes and see how they are doing. Are the rhizomes, the thick fleshy part of the root system, firm and white? If they are not, break off the area that is soft. Does it have a hole or is there a plump pinky-beige caterpillar in the rhizome? That would be the larval stage of an Iris Borer (*Macronoctua onusta*), a type of cutworm. If there is evidence of an iris borer, break off or cut off any of the affected area and throw it in the rubbish; never place it in the compost. If using a knife or secateurs to cut the rhizomes, clean the knife/secateurs in a 10% bleach with water solution. This can help cut down on the spread of disease and bacterial growth.



If the rhizome is firm, you may want to break off or cut the rhizome that has a fan of leaves. You might be able to divide and make many new plants out of a large clump of bearded iris. After the rhizome is cut or broken off, it can be placed in a shady area overnight while the fresh, fleshy area dries up. This is done so that there is not a fresh damp place for bacteria to enter the rhizome. The next day, after checking for any iris borer pupa, the rhizomes can be planted. It is best to trim the fan of leaves down to about 3"-4". This cuts down on the area the root system has to maintain and prevents the leaves acting like a sail and rocking in the wind.



Siberian iris are rarely affected by iris borer but it can happen. Always check the root system when dividing. If your Siberian iris has leaves only on the edges and a circle with dead leaves in the center, it is time to divide. Siberian iris root systems are a tight mass of roots and often need different tools to divide it. A Hori-Hori knife or an old bread knife with a serrated edge can be of help in getting through the roots. In older, well established plants, after digging up the clump, people have been known to use a hack saw to divide the tough mass of roots. Make sure to cut away any of the older dead parts before replanting at the same depth as it was planted.



Peonies can be cut back in late August if showing signs of Botrytis Blight or Grey Mold. This mold can over winter in the soil and grow in compost. Any plants that show the telltale signs of brown to burgundy to black areas on the leaves and stems should have the foliage cut down to the ground, and the stems and leaves should be put in the rubbish. Any knives, secateurs or scissors used in cutting the botrytis infected plants need to be sterilized with a 10% bleach to water solution and dried with a clean towel before cutting the next plant. All peonies should be cut back each year.

Peonies can be divided at this time of the year. After cutting back the foliage, dig up the large fleshy tubers. Look for little pink “eyes,” a bullet-shaped growth close to where the surface was. Each eye will be a new shoot next spring. Make divisions to include at least 2 eyes per new plant. When replanting the newly divided peony root, make sure the new “eyes” are planted no more than 1” below the surface of the soil. If planted too deep the peonies will not flower. Remember that too much mulch can add to the depth that the peony is planted. With peonies, mulch sparingly. That being said, peonies will take time after dividing to get back up to blooming strength. Remember- first year it sleeps, second year it creeps, third year it leaps.



Daylilies are one of the plants that can be dug and divided at nearly any time of year. At this time of year, while it is still fresh in your mind, remember the color and size. Dig them up, divide them, and label them. Daylilies, too, can be cut back to a few inches of foliage while they focus on root development.

As with anything that is being planted or divided in the summer, be sure to water well while the plants are establishing themselves.

Checking on the health of your plants and making more plants in the late summer; what could be better for a gardener?

Special Summer Tip (Re)-learning Plant Diagnostics via Basil

Author Gretel Anspach is a Trustee of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, a Lifetime Master Gardener with the Massachusetts Master Gardener Association, and a retired systems engineer from Raytheon. She won the MMGA Lifetime Achievement Award in 2016. Gretel established and

maintains a 10,000 square foot food production garden that has provided fresh produce to the Marlboro and Maynard Food Pantries since 2011. Her primary interest and focus are always in the science behind horticulture.

I grow about 240 basil plants and I have a problem with some of them.

While most of my basil is green and robust, in one in about 10, the leaves look chlorotic (yellow) and kinda puny. The photo on the right shows healthy and chlorotic plants at the same scale.

What's going on?



- The ailing ones are mixed in with the healthy ones, so I don't think it's the soil, or the mulch (leaf mulch). Mulch or compost from iffy sources can have pesticide residues, but this is a good source and only specific plants are affected.
- I didn't add pesticides myself or any chemicals except fertilizer (5-3-3), 2.6 pounds per 80 sq ft. If it were fertilizer overdose, the plants should have recovered or died over time.



- I examined the leaves for signs of insect damage – some, but no more than the healthy-looking ones. There are also no spots or stains that might be evidence of disease.
- I'm growing downy mildew resistant (DMR) basil, but I keep hearing reports about the fungus mutating so I figured that could be it. The top of the leaf could plausibly have DM, but there is no fuzzy purple on the back. Further reading¹ points out that purple spores disperse during the day and are often not visible by evening (when I collected the leaves). It suggests "putting yellow leaves upside down on wet paper towel in a ziplock bag in dark overnight." I did – no purple fuzz. Another night. Still no purple fuzz.



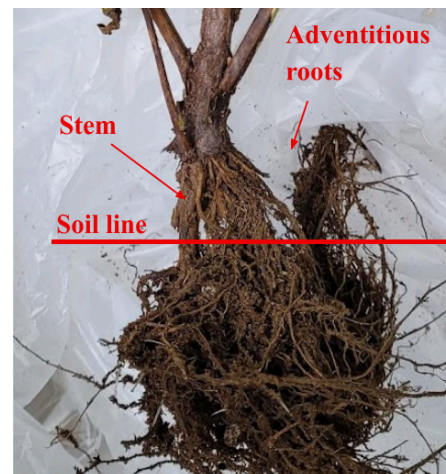
At this point I'm out of ideas. I dug up 5 of the plants, stuffed them together in a pot and drove them out to the Plant Diagnostics Lab in Amherst, part of UMass Amherst. The first thing they did is what I should have done – look at the whole plant, not just the leaves.

Looking at the whole plant, the first odd thing is the presence of adventitious roots, which basil don't normally create. These are roots coming off the stem well above the normal soil line. Focusing just below them, one can see a portion of stem that's dead or nearly dead – the adventitious roots are circumventing this section of stem.



What probably happened is this:

- When the plant was a seedling, a cutworm or some fungus gnat larvae partially cut through the seedling's stem. They probably destroyed all the phloem (which carries sugars around the plant) and left at least some of the xylem (which carries water and nutrients up from the roots).
- The plant survived because the upper part was still getting some water and nutrients. The roots survived using ATP (energy



packets) it had received before the phloem was severed (or maybe there was a little phloem left).

- The plant grew adventitious roots to bridge the nearly-severed stem. This was enough for the plant to survive but not thrive. And therefore puny growth with chlorotic leaves.

What I need to learn from this is not to focus too hard on where the symptoms show up. All the plant parts work together, so sickly leaves may be a problem with the leaves, or it may be a problem with a completely different part of the plant. Something to remember the next time I see something weird in the garden. Now what's going on with my cucumber leaves?

[1] <https://basil.agpestmonitor.org/identification/>

Credits

Featured Articles & Columns

- Featured Garden: Shoma Haque, CMG
- Featured How-To: Christina Paxhia, SPMG
- Monthly Native Plant: Hadley Berkowitz, PMG
- Monthly Gardening Tip: Kathi Gariepy, LMG
- Special Summer Tip: Gretel Anspach, LMG

Photos (in order of appearance)

- Wildflowers, by Lynne Larson, PMG
- Loring Greenough House (4 pics), by Shoma Haque, CMG
- Flower arrangements (vase, 3 videos), by Christina Paxhia, SPMG
- Agastache Foeniculum (first pic), by Penn State University
- Agastache Foeniculum (second pic, with bird), by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia
- Agastache Foeniculum (third pic), by University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Iris (5 pics), by Kathi Gariepy, LMG
- Peony roots, by Penn State Extension
- Basil pictures, by Gretel Anspach, LMG
- Marlborough Food Pantry Garden, by Gretel Anspach, LMG

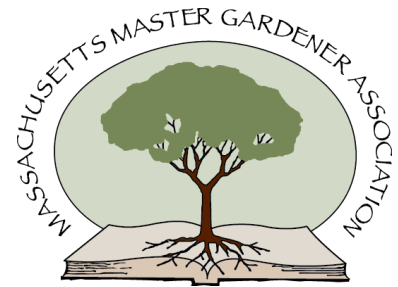
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Who We Are

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is an independent non-profit organization whose mission is to share research-based horticultural knowledge and experience with the public. We meet that goal through Master Gardener Certification, outreach, education, volunteering, and public gardening programs for the advancement of best practices in sustainable, regenerative horticulture.



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