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Garden Column
Garden Olio
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The many great gardens of the world, of literature and poetry, of painting and music, of religion and architecture, all make the point as clear as possible: The soul cannot thrive in the absence of a garden. Thomas More.

Olio means mixture. If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need. Within any library the subjects are a mix of art, science, and human experience. The most beautiful gardens are a mix of different colors and textures. This is the last garden column of 2015 and it's a garden olio, a mix of garden thoughts.

Gardening at this time of the year evokes dual feelings. Spring anticipation has changed to autumn ennui. Perennials are dying back; vines and leaves are turning brown or white with powdery mildew. It's a time to gather the rewards after a summer of planting, hoeing, and watering. It's also time to think about next year.

Too much garden? Down size your unmanageable garden(s) to a manageable size that fits a container. Many colorful or delicious plants can be placed in the same container and the container can be an inexpensive piece of "junk". Gardeners in the country may have an unused stock tank or old buckets with holes in the bottom; as utilitarian as expensive pots. A broken down wheel barrow is perfect for many shallow rooted annuals and a spent child's wagon or charcoal grill serves the same purpose. Old toilets and bath tubs destined for the landfill become unusual gardens. Do you have a rusted out pickup in a wood lot? Fill up the back end with soil and plant away. Your gardening friends will think you're a very creative person.

Now is the time of the year to deal with a dual conundrum. Too many plants in one area, too few in another. Dig up the crowded plants and plant them in the bare spots or compost them. Many perennials can still be planted at this late date. Dig up a large block of soil containing the roots, cut back the plant tops and water frequently. Plants may appear dead but they usually green up next spring.

Additionally, Bloomers still has several varieties of potted plants that can be planted now. When the plant is "tapped" out of the pot, the roots may be pot bound. Bust up the soil and trim off any dead or brown roots. Then plant and water immediately.

Water all trees you planted this summer. Bloomers still has a nice selection of trees that can be planted now. If bare rooted, trim off any injured roots and apply an inch of water a week. More if the temperatures are warm. If the tree is thin-barked such as maple, basswood or apple, wrap the trunk with tape to prevent winter and rabbit injury.

Now is also a good time to start thinking about the more "unusual" perennial flowers and vegetables you may grow next year. These are not rare plants but plants that are somewhat uncommon; or ask the people at Bloomers for their suggestions.

Yellow-flowered false indigo. The more common purple-flowered false indigo is a colorful and bold plant in the legume family but the yellow variety makes for a stunning display and does well in full sunshine.

A plant that looks like it belongs in the jungle goes by several names such as ragwort, desdemona, golden groundsel or leopard plant. This is in the same genus (*Ligularia dentata*) as

“rocket plant” but looks nothing like it. Ragwort is a big leafed plant with rich yellow blooms that superficially resemble asters. Once established it becomes the center of attention. Some references state it grows best in partial shade but it seems to do very well in full sunlight. Like it’s cousin, rocket plant, it has tendencies to wilt during hot, dry weather so it should be watered during these periods of stress.

Lobelia cardinalis or cardinal plant or cardinal flower has striking red blossoms. The brilliant red spires of the plant can bloom for a month or longer. It occurs naturally in marshes and wooded stream banks. It requires a moist, rich soil but responds magnificently to cultivation. A real plus is it’s attractive to hummingbirds that also pollinate the plant. The plant grows best in partial shade and may require replanting every few years but it’s worth the effort.

Next year try some of the more “unusual” vegetables such as wasabi arugula. A caveat, if you have Norwegian taste buds this plant is not for you. However, for the more adventuresome wasabi arugula is a great seasoning herb that is excellent freshly chopped and sprinkled over any dish where you want a wasabi kick. The tops are also an excellent salad green. Plant it from seed at the same time you plant lettuce in the spring.

How many gardeners have tried growing fennel? There are two types of fennel, bulbing and leaf fennel. Bulbing fennel has a swollen base of the plant known as the “bulb” that is eaten as a steamed or roasted vegetable. The plants should be started indoors from seed about six weeks before the last frost date. The seedlings can then be transplanted and in about two months the bulbs should be as large as your hand and ready to harvest. The bulbs should be harvested before the plants begin to flower. After flowering they become tough and lose flavor. The bulbs can be refrigerated for several weeks.

Lastly, yards can look ghastly in the fall with brown grass and green weeds, especially after a dry summer. The fall is a good time to improve the lawn and get rid of weeds. Dandelions usually succumb to a single application of weedkiller. Most contain 2,4-D. Creeping charlie is a tougher weed to control. Once upon a time borax was considered an “organic” method of controlling creeping charlie. Bad idea. Borax is not organic and when applied to the soil will permanently ruin the soil in that spot and grass will not grow there again. Rather, use an herbicide registered for creeping charlie or ground ivy.

For spot treatments Roundup is still a good solution. This herbicide eventually breaks down in the soil (within a few days) and grass can be safely planted. Other “organic” weed control solutions have included applying salt to the weed. Again, bad idea. Grass will not grow in that spot for a very long time, some references say years. Another method was to apply boiling water to the offending weed. Doesn’t work. The top is boiled, maybe, but the root escapes and the plant regrows.

Have a wonderful fall and winter.