

September 2021 Gardener's Corner

by Cate White, SJ County Master Gardener

Growing a Fragrance Garden

September and October are some of the best months for planting in our area. If you are looking for some new and interesting plants to add to your yard, consider growing some herbs. Growing herbs can be enjoyable and satisfying. There are an almost infinite variety of plants to choose from, each with its own unique qualities. Most of us are familiar with the culinary herbs, such as parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme, basil, oregano, marjoram, tarragon and chives. These were covered in an earlier column. There are also medicinal herbs, including feverfew and Echinacea, which can be rewarding to grow regardless of whether you use them for medicinal purposes or not. Both of these examples have attractive flowers, and Echinacea in particular has been hybridized to bloom in many exciting colors.



Collection of Fragrant Herbs
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Another way to enjoy growing herbs is to create a fragrance garden by planting some sweet smelling herbs. I grow a number of fragrant herbs, and enjoy wandering through the yard, running my fingers along their leaves activating their scents. Here I will describe some of my favorites.

A good foundation for any fragrance garden is lavender. English lavenders and their hybrids have the strongest and most pleasing scents. These have been discussed in an earlier column. The hybrids "Provence" and "Grosso" grow quite large, while "Hidecoat", "Munstead" and "Lady lavender" are smaller and more compact.

Certain sage plants are also good as foundation or background plantings in a fragrance garden. For scent, two of the best are *Salvia Elegans*, or Pineapple Sage, and *Salvia Clevelandii*, or Cleveland Sage. Pineapple Sage, true to its name, has a pleasing fruity pineapple smell. It can grow up to 3 feet wide and four feet tall, with scarlet tubular blooms in the fall that attract hummingbirds. When it dies back in winter, it should be cut down to a foot or less from the ground. Cleveland Sage is native to southern California and is drought tolerant. Its bracing, heady fragrance will remind you of the California hills. It can grow quite large and leggy and should be cut back by about half after blooming in the early summer. The variety "Winifred Gilman" is more compact.

Lemon Verbena is large herb whose leaves give off a sweet lemony perfume scent. It is deciduous and should be pruned back to about 2/3 its size in winter. In our area, it appreciates some protection from the hot afternoon sun.



Lemon Verbena
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Mints are lower growing and spreading plants. They are best grown in a contained area to prevent aggressive spreading and offer a variety of sweet scents. In addition to the standard peppermint and spearmint, there is chocolate mint, apple mint, pineapple mint and many others with distinct fragrances. Lemon Balm, a mint relative, has a subtle lemon scent, and is very attractive to bees when it blooms.

Another group of medium sized highly scented plants are the scented geraniums. These are actually Pelargoniums with scented leaves, including nutmeg, apple, lemon and lime. Rose scented geraniums smell like of roses, while the fuzzy leaved peppermint geranium (*P. tomentosum*) smells strongly of peppermint. Unlike most of these plants, *P. tomentosum* is trailing and needs some shade to do well.



Rose Geranium
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For low growing scented herbs, try some varieties of Thyme. Lemon Thyme is a favorite of mine and is good in cooking as well as supplying a pleasant lemon fragrance. There is also lime scented Thyme, and even Caraway Thyme.

As herbs, all these plants are relatively easy to grow, are mostly pest free and have low to moderate water needs. They will need cutting back in the summer or fall. For information on the cultural needs of specific plants, refer to *The Sunset Garden Book*. While most of these plants (with the exception of the lavenders and sages) have small and rather nondescript flowers, they do have the added bonus of being great for making pleasantly flavored teas, or even to give interest to a pitcher of plain cold water. This Fall while contemplating some new plants, try a few fragrant herbs to add a new dimension to your garden!

September Garden Checklist

- Continue monitoring and adjusting your irrigation system according to weather conditions.
- Keep controlling for mosquitoes, ants and yellow jackets. Use *Bacillus Thuringiensis Israelensis* to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in ponds, fountains or birdbaths. Use baits for ants and yellow jackets.
- Watch for aphids, white flies, caterpillars and spider mites, and control using methods such as spraying with water, insecticidal soap or neem oil. Bt is effective on caterpillars including Tomato worms.
- Prune evergreens and summer flowering shrubs. Remove any fruit mummies (shrunken dried out fruit) from fruit trees.
- Start planting flowering winter annuals, cool season vegetables, perennials, trees and foundation shrubs beginning in mid-September. Divide and replant overgrown perennials such as daylilies, coreopsis and yarrow.
- Continue to harvest and enjoy your summer vegetables, removing plants that have stopped producing or have become sickly.