

Winter is coming, dig now and plant later

If I can get the little dog from next door to keep helping me dig my garden, I'll be better prepared for fall.

Luckily there isn't a lot to dig. My cottage garden is jam-packed with small specimen trees, evergreen and flowering shrubs, roses, foliage and flowering bulbs, perennial flowers and herbs, and large pots of mixed stuff. Oh, and the water garden, and decks and all that. It's a busy looking that has extra attributes



FELDER RUSHING



Digging now for easier times later.

space.

Over the years I have pared down the areas for planting fussy annuals to just three fairly small spots, which if added together make up maybe a total of twenty-five square feet. This is where every spring I set out heat-tolerant summer flowers, herbs, and vegetables, and replace them in the autumn with winter-hardy annuals.

I try to look for value-added stuff that has extra attributes

such as being long blooming, extra pretty, pollinator friendly, good for cutting for vases, or just interesting or historic or something. Hard-to-find heirlooms or brand-new tidbits worth trying out fit in there, and all the better if some have edible parts.

This summer's squash didn't do well, and possums got my tomatoes, but peppers, zinnias, cleome, "Blackie" sweet potato and three kinds of basil are all still doing fine. But I'm thinking ahead of stuff that will be extra nice come fall. Broccoli and my favorite Tuscan Blue kale come to mind, along with violas, snapdragons, pansies, and curly parsley, all which need to be planted in the next month or so to get going great with enough time for it to mature before Autumn's first cold snaps.

So, rather than wait 'til the last minute to pull one thing and start another, I'm creating a gradual segue by working up a little dirt in between other fading and bedraggled summer flowers now, being careful to not disturb roots of growing stuff, and trying to not work up too much sweat. By digging a little here and there now, and covering it with mulch, it'll be ready to plant when my mood and finding new plants at the garden center coincide.

Which is where the neighbor's little part-Dachshund dog, a digger by nature, comes in. I appreciate the help but every time I turn

fresh dirt over, I come back to find holes big enough to hide bowling balls in, and all the dirt scattered across the walks. Can't blame the puppy; as I told the neighbors, if I was a dog, I'd dig there, too.

I guess it's getting me back for not having to deal with armadillos, squirrels, voles, or moles like so many other gardeners. But I've learned to cut pieces of chicken wire that fit over the beds; the flowers poke up through

but the dog can't. This also works for bulbs where chipmunks and squirrels are a problem. For cats I stick sharp little punji sticks in between the flowers, which so far have been deterrent enough to keep finicky felines at bay.

This is a good month to at least start getting ready to set out autumn and winter stuff. Garden centers are kinda low on plants, but the wholesale nurseries I have visited are geared up to ship fall plants out very soon.

While I'm more lazy grass-

hopper than industrious ant, and it isn't fun or pleasant digging right now, I'm already getting holes ready in between summer stuff. And in the weeks to come - and yes, it'll be September in a blink of the eye - I'll be ready.

Anybody need a flower bed dug? I know a diggy dog...

Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the "Gestalt Garden er" on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to rushingfelder@yahoo.com.

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 By Rob Lee

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