

September is one of the loveliest months in the garden. Ornamental grasses blow softly in the breeze, swallow tail butterflies light upon Black-eyed Susan blooms and birds collect seeds from the seed heads of spent coneflowers. In September gardens seem to revitalize from long, hot summers. They once again burst with color and interest.

One of the best things about a fall garden is that the plants that make the greatest shows are some of those that are easiest to grow and tend to. To create a beautiful fall garden, combine ornamental grasses with sedums, coneflowers, repeat blooming daylilies, and coreopsis. You might also consider matching the soft grays of lamb's ear with the coppery leaves of coral bells and soft blues of catmint.

The Albemarle County Service Authority has two demonstration gardens at its building at 168 Spotnap Road. These gardens were designed to show the beauty that can be created using drought tolerant plantings, and they are at their fullest glory in August and September. They are open to the public and all are invited to come and explore.

These gardens were created following the seven principles of xeriscape. These principles are: plan and design, improve the soil, irrigate efficiently, limit turf areas, choose appropriate plant material, mulch and maintain properly. The intent was to reduce the amount of turf on site by replacing it with well-chosen, drought tolerant species. Soils were amended with organic matter, and shredded hardwood mulch retains moisture and helps hold the slopes in place. The only maintenance necessary is occasional weeding and pruning back of spent blooms.

In the Service Authority's full sun garden, the soft tassels of 'Karl Foerster' calamagrostis are offset by the coarsely textured blooms of Echinacea. Low mounds of tickseed, thick with lemon yellow blossoms nestle next to the spiky leaves and yellow blooms of 'Happy Returns' daylilies. Succulent 'Autumn Joy' sedums bursting with rose and mauve flowers neighbor Black-eyed Susan with their dark seed heads and vibrant golden petals. Spiderwort, with its purple blooms and lance-like leaves are softened by the silvery leaves of the neighboring 'Morning Light' miscanthus.

At the other end of the building is a part-sun/part-shade garden. Here, softly textured catmints and lamb's ears grow next to pointed red hot poker and papery-leaved coral bells. All are snuggled against a natural stone wall and in the shade of crape myrtles and crabapples. Virburnum, hydrangea and daphne provide additional interest.

Come for a visit and get inspired, because just when gardeners are growing weary from summer heat and garden labor, the flush of colors and textures of this time of year can rejuvenate the soul and draw us back outdoors. Fall gardens provide

an essential link between the summer garden and autumn's changing colors. And, most wonderfully of all, these gardens can be created utilizing drought tolerant, low maintenance plantings, not only providing beauty, but minimizing the efforts we have to put forth to enjoy them.