

It's that time of year when our gardening activities seem to be winding down, but we're not quite ready to retire inside the house for the fall and winter. Today's column covers some true gardening confessions, announcements about September activities and suggests a few projects and ideas for you to think about and try .

First of all I thought you'd like to hear some of my gardening goofs. We planted two zucchini plants this year and so far neither is producing fruit. I think we have two boys. Next year I'm planting tons of alyssum in that part of the garden and hopefully the bees will get my zucchini producing. But don't feel too sorry for me, every other gardener I know is trying to get rid of their extras and we're gladly accepting them.

I learned this week that chocolate cosmos is so named because the flowers smell like chocolate. I thought they were named because of their delightful burgundy chocolate color. Go smell yours if they're growing in your garden, the smell is heavenly.

Next I learned from my friend and master gardener buddy Donna Paulson, who asks me to stop using her name in this column, that you need to pull up your rhubarb stems when harvesting them. The plant likes to be abused and will produce more fruit for you Donna's way. (I've always cut them off with a knife.) Thank goodness I learn something about gardening every day. Thank you Donna.

My friend Ellen Ross-Cardoso and her cousin Denise Johnson have the best pumpkin plants every year. Their secret is leaving a whole pumpkin out in the garden all winter to decompose. This feeds the seedlings that grow there in the spring and their reward is healthy vines and lots of great pumpkins each year. I'm going to grow pumpkins this way too.

Try painting tiles this fall to decorate your garden. You'll need ceramic tiles (shiny finish is best) in a light color (white or cream is good). Get "Paint n' bake" from Jo-ann Fabrics and Crafts in Central Kitsap. Be sure to get that brand, it's the easiest and most economical. The paint sells for a little over two dollars. You can use Q-tips to paint the tiles. After decorating your tiles, you'll let them dry for at least 24 hours. Then all you have to do is bake them in your oven at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Easy peasy, and quite fun. We made these tiles at the Raab Park Youth Garden this summer and made them at Poulsbo Elementary School on opening day. I'm sure you can think of many uses for your tiles. Try this creative and fun project.

Free composting classes are offered Thursday September 7 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Raab Park in Poulsbo (Caldart Avenue) and Givens Community Center (1026 Sidney Avenue) in Port Orchard. The class, sponsored by Kitsap County Solid Waste Division and the WSU Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners will cover mulch mowing, composting and worm bins. If you attend the class at Givens Community Center be sure to notice the water-wise plants in the garden. All of the plants will survive wonderfully in our northwest gardens and require very little water.

Do you have a gorgeous or unique garden or do you know someone who does? If you or they live in Central Kitsap call 360-692-6800 to find out how to nominate the garden for the 2001 Summer Splendor Garden Tour. The Silverdale Chamber of Commerce is seeking nominations.

Speaking of tours Heronswood's Autumn Garden Open House is 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday September 8 and 9. If you attend September 8, you can meet Ciscoe Morris who will present a slide presentation. Half of the dollar entrance fee benefits Kitsap Regional Library's horticultural book collection. Call 360-297-4172 for details.

Don't miss the Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale in the 4-H Cat Barn at the Fairgrounds on Saturday September 16 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The plants are always extremely tempting and the prices are ever so reasonable. You can also order your fall bulbs for pick up and planting in October. The bulbs are healthy, plump and guaranteed to bloom beautifully in the spring.

My Web Site pick for this week is gardenweb.com. It's a site of gardening information on every topic imaginable. You'll find forums, a dictionary of plants; a mystery plant contest to enter; information on roses; wildflowers and kitchen gardens; a plant and seed exchange; a calendar listing activities all over the world plus information for our specific area; and a whole lot more. Check it out; you'll be amazed by the abundance of information on this site.

You can email comments to Peg Tillery at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.