

THE

Rambling Gardeners

A MONTHLY GARDEN & HOMESTEAD LETTER

ISSUE No. 09

SEPTEMBER 2026



The garden heading into fall — still green, still growing, loofah still plotting a takeover.

HOWDY FROM THE HOMESTEAD

Well, here we are — fall. Seems like it wasn't that long ago we were putting the first seeds in the ground, and now we're talking football season and pumpkins on the porch. Don't let the calendar fool you, though: Raleigh is still flirting with 100 degrees this week, so the garden hasn't gotten the memo. The peppers are coming in by the basketful every three weeks, the bees are finally finding the fall flow, and the loofah has grown into something out of a horror flick. Come grow with us.

THIS MONTH IN THE GARDEN

BEDS & SOIL

Tarped the old tomato bed to let the sun bake out the blight that hit the tomatoes and potatoes this year. Cut the strawberry bed back and left the trimmings on top to compost down over winter.

BEEES & FLOCK

No honey harvest this year — the whole goal is getting the hive through its first winter, so we're feeding heavy and watching the fall goldenrod flow finally bring nectar in. The chicken yard grew volunteer basil, sunflowers, and a tomato plant.

HARVEST & PRESERVING

Pulled a huge watermelon, the cantaloupes and honeydew, and pepper hauls off just seven plants. Dehydrated, froze, pickled, and jellied our way through the pepper mountain.

KITCHEN & PANTRY

Pickled banana peppers, pepper jelly with cream cheese, vacuum-sealed jalapenos for popper season, and an elderberry jam that came out as syrup — pancakes win either way.





WHAT WE'RE GROWING NOW



The tomatillos — our first try at them — are growing great despite some pest pressure. Second-round sweet corn is silking and came on strong the last couple weeks, sweet potatoes look like the best crop we've grown in the raised beds, and the peanuts, Kentucky Blue beans, and zinnias are all still going. The pepper plants are as loaded as they've been all summer, and the monster loofah keeps swallowing more of the garden every week.



PLANTED THIS MONTH

- Potatoes (round two)
- Beets
- Carrots
- Cilantro (round two)
- Radishes
- Mum seedlings
- Lettuce (fall bed)
- Cucumbers (round two)

TIP OF THE MONTH: FREEZE ELDERBERRIES BEFORE YOU DE-STEM

Toss whole elderberry clusters in the freezer for a couple hours and the berries turn into little marbles that roll right off the stems. Then float them in a bowl of water — ripe berries sink, stems and unripe green ones float to the top.



COMING UP NEXT MONTH



OVERWINTER A JALAPENO

Pepper plants are perennials — we're potting one up to carry through winter.

WINTER TOMATO EXPERIMENT

Potting up a tomato to grow inside under the lights, just to see if we can.

LETTUCE UNDER THE HOOPS

The fall lettuce bed gets hoops so a heavy frost can't touch it.

Sweet potatoes come out in about two months, the second-round sweet corn should give us a couple dozen ears, and the old melon bed comes out to make room for a pergola — a little zen corner with a bench, maybe even a fountain.

LESSONS LEARNED

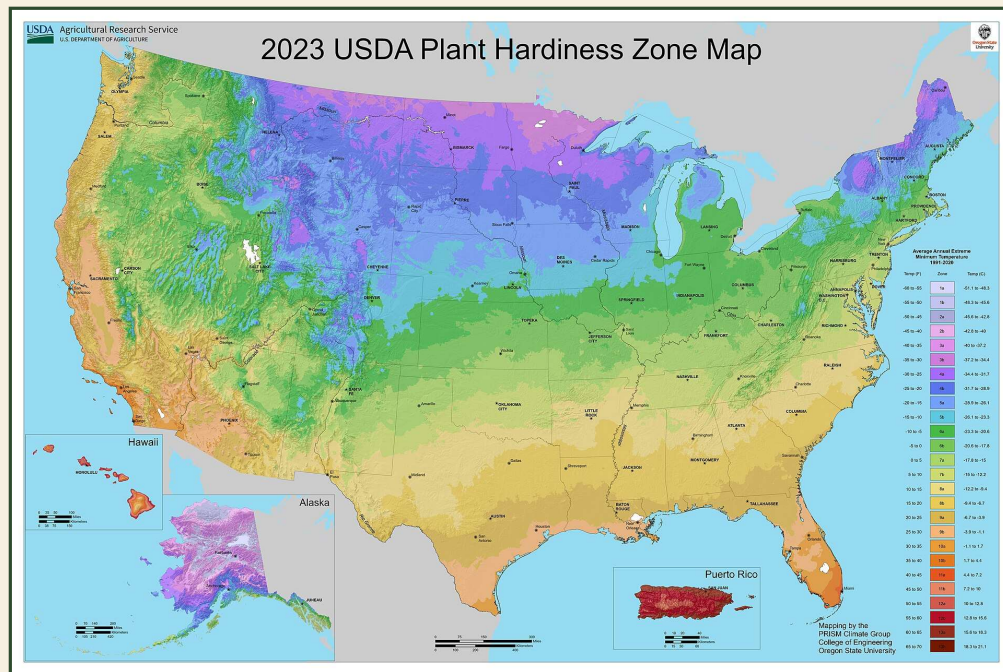
The bread-maker elderberry jam never set — not enough pectin — so we've got elderberry syrup instead, and honestly it's great on pancakes. Bigger lesson: all that chicken-run nitrogen grows lush green plants that won't flower, which explains the honeysuckle. Next year the loofah gets planted along the run to shade the girls instead of eating the garden.

FROM THE KITCHEN · Pawpaw Ridge's Refrigerator Pickled Banana Peppers

Bring 1 cup vinegar, 1 cup water, 2 tablespoons sugar, and 1 smashed garlic clove to a boil. Slice banana peppers into 1/8-inch rings, drop them in the boiling brine, and let them soak about 8 minutes. Pack into clean jars, top with brine, and crunch them down so they're packed tight. Straight to the fridge — no canner needed. Good for about 3 months, if they last that long.



KNOW YOUR ZONE



USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map · The Rambling Gardeners · SEPTEMBER 2026



SEPTEMBER PLANTING — BY ZONE



ZONE 5

INDOORS: Season's winding down — start herbs like parsley on a sunny sill.

OUTSIDE: Spinach, lettuce, and radishes the first week; plant garlic late in the month and sow cover crops as beds empty.

ZONE 6

INDOORS: Pot up herbs to bring in before frost.

OUTSIDE: Spinach, lettuce, radishes, and kale transplants early; garlic and cover crops toward the end of the month.

ZONE 7

OUTSIDE: Lettuce, spinach, radishes, turnips, kale, and collards all month; get carrots in early. Prep garlic beds for an October planting.

ZONE 8

OUTSIDE: Broccoli and cabbage transplants, carrots, beets, lettuce, and radishes now; spinach once the heat finally breaks. Still time for a fast second round of cucumbers early in the month.

Not sure which zone you're in?

Look it up by ZIP code at planthardiness.ars.usda.gov

COME GROW WITH US

New videos every week on YouTube — The Rambling Gardeners

Zone 8a · Raleigh, North Carolina