



## September: The Perfect Pause

*By: Sheilah Britton - Master Gardener Volunteer*

*SaddleBrooke and SaddleBrooke Ranch Master Gardener*

September is like a sigh of relief in the desert. Temperatures begin to fall, nights take on soft breezes, and we slowly return to spending more time outdoors in the middle of the day. While we can't count on everyday being mild, the shorter daylight hours assure us that we are on our way into fall.

Whether you are returning to your garden plot or starting a new one, there are a number of things you'll want to do before you decide on the seeds, flowers, vegetables and herbs you wish to plant. September is the perfect pause between seasons to plan your fall garden.

You'll first want to choose a location where your garden will have six to eight hours of full sun, preferably morning sunlight and afternoon shade. Here in the high desert we have many microclimates so adjust the location of plants with that in mind as you plan your garden layout. That layout should include adequate space between plants that are arranged according to harvest and growth characteristics.



For gardeners, soil is the soul of your garden. In our communities, our soil has to be amended in order to produce herbs, vegetables and flowers. Begin with digging into your soil, adding air so roots will have space to grow. Add organic matter (compost) to create nutrients for your plants. Desert soil is alkaline and needs sulfur to reduce nutrient deficiency. Fertilizer containing both nitrogen and phosphorus should be applied before planting. Plow or spade all of these materials and let them settle into your garden. Once you have planted or seeded your garden, three inches of mulch is recommended to prevent evaporation.

All garden crops need irrigation, as rainfall in the fall months is limited. Determine your watering system before you plant based on your resources and needs. You'll want to keep the soil moist in the root zone, and observe the plant and soil to determine when you need to water. I find a moisture meter works well for small gardens, containers and pots for measuring moisture at the root level.

Once you've planned your garden you'll be able to confidently make the purchase of seeds and plants to populate your space. Some reliable cool-season vegetables include: broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, chard, peas, radish, and turnip. Annual flowers can be planted including marigolds, geraniums, alyssum, dianthus and stock. Oregano, parsley, thyme, sage, fennel, mint and chives can fill your herb garden. You can plant wildflower seeds for a spring bloom such as African daisies, California poppies, and desert lupine. Bulbs should be available for fall planting that might include Dutch iris, anemone, daffodils, ranunculus and tulips.

By the end of September, your garden will be able to welcome October with the promise of color, fragrance, herbs and vegetables that will comfort and feed you through the season.