



## Closing Time

by Grace Finch

As we approach the end of this busy season, I look forward to putting the gardens I tend to rest and watching nature's transition into fall.

This summer has been the most humid one that I can remember and as a full time gardener it has been extremely difficult to work in the heat. There are ten separate gardens that I tend to, every week, and several days I am working in multiple gardens for three or four hours each. Sometimes in the peak season (June-July) I will work in three gardens in one day.

It is physically demanding work, especially in the upcoming season of fall cleanups. Closing the gardens is a staggered process; it doesn't all happen at once. I will spend the next few months cutting most flowering plants all the way down to the ground and as I do so, I picture each flower sleeping soundly, bundled beneath the earth's surface, staying warm and hibernating for winter.

It's like I'm putting them to bed or tucking them in. There's no certain lullaby that I sing, but I do envision them closing their eyes. As the rake passes over the surface one last time it's like pulling a blanket up over them for comfort.

I'm envious that they can take such a long break and often wish that I could do the same.

Although my days in the garden end in mid-December, I go to work as a secretary at a local CPA firm for the winter and therefore cannot lay dormant, like all the roots of each plant that I'm tending too. I do get the month of January off, which is a great amount of time for me to slow down and regenerate my energy.

Over the next few weeks, I will continue to prune roses, hydrangeas, black-eyed Susan's, daisies, zinnias, geraniums, phlox, hostas and much more. My absolute favorite flower is the hibiscus, mainly because of its beauty but also because it is very low maintenance.

Hibiscus flowers close at night as if, like us, they are going to sleep. They rise with the sun, opening to each new day. They can range from the size of a baseball to that of a soccer ball, and they come in many colors, including my favorite shade of bright pink. The blooms will last from July through mid-September, when the whole plant is cut all the way down.

Soon I will be digging up dahlia tubers to store inside for winter, and planting herbs in pots that will be placed indoors in a sunny window to use for the months to come.

I have already begun to dismantle many vegetable gardens. Most of the lettuce, cabbage, squash, cucumbers and eggplant have passed, so I harvest what is left and pull out the remaining plants.



Tomatoes are still growing, but many have fallen off the vine and are rotting on the ground. I love to pick cherry tomatoes for a snack while weeding the veggie garden! Sugar snap peas, snow peas and green beans also make a wonderful treat. Seeing everything grow from seed or small plants to harvest is an amazing process to be a part of.

I do not have a vegetable garden of my own because I tend to so many others and know they take almost 2 to 3 hours of maintenance each day. It takes a great deal of planning, but it can be a lot of fun and rewarding when you see your crops grow.

There's so much to look forward to with fall gardening, as I harvest carrots, potatoes, pumpkins, peppers and winter squash. I take home a few of these veggies and like to make a medley, where I cut everything up in quarter sized chunks, drizzle in olive oil and chop up rosemary and thyme to add some more flavor. I put this in the oven at 350 degrees for 30 to 40 minutes for a well-done dish. It's a satisfying meal and the aroma smells delicious. An added touch of salt and black pepper make a wonderful, hearty, fall meal.

I plant garlic for next year's crop and plant bulbs such as tulips and daffodils for spring's first bloom. I spend a lot of time dividing and transplanting things that have overgrown to create space for next year's ideas.

This transition period from summer to fall is invigorating as I muster together my last amount of energy to make it all happen. I love the abundant flowers of spring and summer, but autumn brings a whole new persona of its own. It's time to wind down, simplify, reflect on the past season and prepare for the next.

As the gardens now won't require my constant care, I can begin to focus that energy on myself, my family, friends, writing, studying, and learning more about my passion for gardening. Watching the leaves change color and feeling the cool air set in, I finish my yard cleanups, put away the tools and am reminded to utilize this next phase wisely.

Most people are going back to work or school and it's a busy time for them. Not for me though; this is my time to wind down and relax. This is my vacation.

September on Cape Cod is my favorite time. I love the cool nights that allow for a restful night's sleep, days are still warm enough for working or playing outdoors and soaking up sun on the beach, and traffic is no longer a bother.

This is an important and crucial time for me to slow down and regain energy for the upcoming holiday season.

**Photographs courtesy of Grace Finch**





Grace Finch is a native Cape Codder who has been landscaping for over 15 years and now has her own small gardening business that focuses mainly on perennial and vegetable gardens.

Grace enjoys spending her free time walking Cape Cod beaches year round with her dog Kaya and writing about nature.

Read more of Grace's thoughts by visiting her [blog](#).