



## **“From the Potting Shed”**

Riverview Garden Club

July Helpful Hints

2024

Hoping that you and your garden have survived the recent heat wave! While we cannot change the weather, we can change our gardening habits to help our plants cope with extreme heat and drought.

### *Things to do in the garden this month...*

#### **Use Plenty of Mulch**

Mulch helps keep the soil moist, prevents the soil from heating up, and discourages weed growth. Mulching your garden beds is a great way to retain water and lower the soil temperature. This is a great way to combat drought and heat stress on plants. Mulch around the base of plants but leave a couple of inches around the actual stems of the plants so they don't get crown and stem rot.

#### **Start Watering Early**

In hot weather, it is recommended to water plants early in the morning. The time of day you decide to water is important. Early morning is the best time. This will ensure the plants get enough water to endure the hot day ahead. If this isn't an option, the evening is the next best time. However, it isn't the best as it leaves the leaves wet for the whole night, making the plants more susceptible to fungus and rot. Avoid watering in the heat of the day so the water is not lost to evaporation and doesn't reach the roots of the plants.

#### **Water Deeply**

In extreme heat, be sure to water the plants deep enough to keep the plants moist for as long as possible. Watering less often, but deeper, is far more effective than spraying the surface more often. Lay a drip or soaker hose

through the beds and let it slowly seep into the soil. For large trees let the hose slowly trickle out at the tree's drip line (the width of the canopy). Large trees require a lot of water, don't let them get dry and heat stressed, it's hard for them to recover. Watering deeply will encourage plants to produce deeper roots to reach more water. This will help plants cope in periods of drought.

### **Take Extra Care of New Plants**

It is not advisable to plant new plants in the heat of the day, but if you do, make sure the newly planted plants are well watered. New plants added to the garden will need more attention than already established plants.

Do not plant new plants into the garden in the midst of a heatwave. If you have a plant that needs to be planted, hold off. Keep it in its nursery pot in the shade and keep it watered until things cool down. Using watering bags around newly planted trees will help keep them watered until they establish deep roots.

Cover a newly planted plant with a shade cloth or an umbrella to keep it protected until it can establish itself.

### **Water the Ground**

To effectively water your garden, use a drip hose to direct water directly into the soil. When it is time to water aim for the soil. You want to get the water to where it needs to go, straight into the soil. Spraying the leaves, especially in the heat of the day will just evaporate. Sprinklers and irrigation should only be run in the early morning hours.

### **Create Some Shade**

To shade your plants in the garden, use shade cloth, shade sails, tarps, umbrellas, or a portable canopy. Shade cloth can be purchased from the garden center and can be placed over crops and plants. Or it can be used to block out the sun in green houses. Old sheets can be used as well.

Shade sails, tarps, umbrellas, or a portable canopy (like the ones you set up at the beach) can provide shade to heat stressed garden beds. These temporary structures will give your plants some relief from the sweltering hot afternoon sun. You can move them around as necessary.

### **Skip the Fertilizer**

Do not apply fertilizer in extreme heat. Fertilizers will cause fast growth in plants and they will require more water, which is hard to provide in the midst of a heatwave. Just let your plants be and wait out the hot dry spell.

### **Leave it Alone**

Don't prune, split, transplant or do any major garden task in the heat. Plants are not able to recover quickly. You can weed in the heat of the day, but weeds are easier to pull when the soil is moist.

### **Plant Heat Tolerant Plants**

Native plants are always a good choice. They are uniquely adapted to the conditions and require far less water and maintenance than the exotics. When in doubt, choose silver plants. Silvery foliage plants are usually water-wise choices. This includes silver mound, lamb's ear, lavender, and dusty miller. Succulents and cacti are also a great choice for hot dry conditions. Look for varieties of vegetables that are specifically bred to be heat tolerant. 'Arkansas Traveler', and 'Heat Master' are some heat-tolerant tomato varieties. 'Muir' is a heat tolerant variety of lettuce.

### **Make Use of Containers**

Choose light-colored containers, as dark colors absorb more heat. Containers are especially sensitive to heat waves. They have less soil and dry out and heat up faster. In extremely hot weather give container plants some extra attention. Move your containers into a shady area if possible. Bottom watering containers is a great way to ensure they are getting enough water. For hanging baskets, make sure you water long enough for water to start pouring out the bottom, and maybe even longer still. Hanging baskets have hardly any soil in them and can dry out quickly.

### **Use Moisture Retaining Soil**

Add coconut coir to the soil so that your soil becomes loamy and absorbs water well. If you have soil that gets a cracked crust on top, it is not moisture retaining. Even when you water that soil it will run off without absorbing. Amend your garden soil so it is nice and loamy. Add peat or coconut coir to beds so water can absorb and be slowly released into the plants. Do this in the early spring or fall.

### **Remember Your Houseplants**

To protect your houseplants from the heat, water them often, shade and add moisture. Houseplants require more water in their active growing season. Depending on the plant will depend on exactly how much. But most of our tropical houseplants like to be kept evenly moist throughout the summer. Draw the drapes if the afternoon sun gets particularly intense. This will prevent the leaves from bleaching. Then open them in the evening and morning and let them get the less intense light.

**Resource:** Laura Elsner, “Tips for Keeping Plants Alive in Hot and Dry Conditions”, [Epic Gardening](#), September 23, 2023.

***Happy Gardening and Stay Cool!***