

Summer tips for your yard and garden

Summer presents its own set of garden maintenance tasks. To make matters interesting, it may be hot, dry, wet, cool, cloudy or sunny. There may be insect or disease infestations, or not.

Regardless of what this summer may throw your direction, keeping up with these summer garden maintenance tasks will help you get the most out of your garden.

To reduce evaporation, water your vegetable and flower gardens in the early morning. Water the soil rather than leaves to reduce disease. Water deeply and infrequently to encourage root growth; water at least to 6 inches down.

Plants are the best indicator of when they need water – they wilt. Watch your plants. If they begin to droop, it's time to get out the hose.

Plants in sandy soil will need to be watered more often than those in clay soil, which retains water than better sandy soil. If you are watering by hand, water close to the soil under the plant. Use drip systems and soaker hoses for the most efficient watering. They get the water right to the plant's roots and avoid excess evaporation.

Mulch around your plants. You can use straw, compost or decomposed steer manure. The mulch blankets the ground, shielding the soil from the sun. This keeps the soil cooler, so your plant roots are happier. Mulch slows down evaporation.

Spreading a 2-inch-deep layer of mulch over your soil is one of the best things you can do for your garden.

Keep your garden weeded. Many pesky weeds love summer heat and can quickly take the jump from tiny to gigantic. Weeds compete with desired plants for water and nutrients. Many weeds also encourage insect pests and diseases to pop up in your garden.

Weeds are easiest to pull when they're young and small. They also come out of the ground easiest when the soil is moist. Another



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reason to get them while they're young: You can stop weeds from producing seeds.

A single dandelion plant can produce 2,000 seeds in a year. A weed such as lamb's quarters can produce 150,000 seeds in a year. That's a lot of future weeding you can save yourself from doing!

If you want a green lawn, water frequently during periods of heat and drought stress. Irrigate a quarter inch, four to six times per week from June through August. Measure your water use by placing an empty tuna can where your irrigation water lands.

Mow your grass high to encourage strong root growth and heat tolerance. Taller grass provides more shade, keeping weeds from germinating and competing with your grass.

Start by sharpening your mower blades. Dull blades will tear and shred your grass instead of giving it a clean cut, making the grass more susceptible to losing moisture. Mower blades typically stay sharp through 10 hours of mowing.

Set your blades higher in the summer months, and cut the heights according to grass type. Warm-season grasses should be cut to 2-3 inches tall, while cool-season grasses should be mowed at 3-4 inches.

As a general rule, try not to cut more than 1/2 of the grass blade each time you mow. When you mow, be sure to grasscycle or leave the clippings on the lawn. They will decompose and help feed your grass.

Removing spent flowers helps plants put more energy into flowering again. Annuals and repeat flowering shrubs and perennials will offer more color, more often during the

season if you deadhead.

In the vegetable garden, keep repeat fruiting plants (like tomatoes, beans, cucumbers, okra and others) picked cleanly as the fruit ripens.

Allowing fruit to become over-mature slows production, and may spell the end of the season for these plants.

Mid-summer is a good time to address fertilization in the landscape and garden. Plants, like people, need to not only drink water but also eat for nourishment! By mid-summer, your garden soil may be getting depleted of nutrients.

Give plants a mid-season feeding by side-dressing with compost or aged manure or give them a drink of liquid fish emulsion fertilizer or manure tea when you water.

Feed hungry garden veggies like greens, tomatoes, peppers and others that may have been planted a month ago or more.

Scouting for insect pests (the unwanted visitors) frequently will help you keep ahead of any population explosions of garden destroyers. Be sure to check the undersides of the leaves, where most pests like to hide and lay their eggs.

Many bugs like to sleep in, so you can often catch them in the morning when they are still groggy. Knock them into a bucket of soapy water to their sudsy demise.

Finally, take care of yourself as well. Work outside during the cooler hours of the day to survive the heat and make sure you drink plenty of water.

If you'll be doing a lot of weeding, put down a padded cushion to kneel on or bring a small stool along. There is a lot to keep up with but it is well worth it when you get to proudly enjoy the fruits and vegetables of your labor!

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