

# Gardening in the Heat

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It's been a hot dry summer and with weather like this, gardening is not a lot of fun. Here are some of the ways that I deal with the heat. First, I work when it's cooler. Early in the morning, before the sun gets intense, I water my tomatoes and any potted plants that aren't dripped; deadhead my daylilies, sundrops, and evening primroses; and remove dead water lily pads and water lilies from the pond using pole pruners. I work mostly in the gardens along the west side of the house which are in the shade in the morning. If I need to spend more time on the east side gardens, I do that in the evening when that side is in the shade.

When my garden looks tired, I use the spray nozzle on the hose to wash off the dust, pollen, and ash from the Arizona fires. I like the "gentle shower" setting. I do this early in the morning (before 7 am) so the sun can dry the leaves. Typically you water in the morning to keep grass molds like brown patch or leaf molds like powdery mildew from forming. As hot and dry as it's been this summer, mold is probably not an issue, but it's good to get into the habit of watering in the morning. I don't spray water every day, usually just once a week if the leaves need it. I have organic mulch and the water soaks into it and makes the air cooler for a while as it dries. Also, in the morning there's less wind so this is another reason to water early. Speaking of mulch – it helps keep the soil cooler and retains moisture better. Choose what the plant prefers, that is, gravel for desert and Mediterranean plants and organic for mountain or bosque plants.

The question of how often and how long to water comes up whenever you mention you like to garden. I wrote a whole column on this earlier because it's such a complex topic with so many variables. For me with decomposed granite for soil, when the temperatures get over 90 degrees in the heat of the day, I water approximately three times a week for 30 minutes. That's probably more than my xeric plants need and less than the daylilies want. I know my Austrian pine would like me to water less often but for at least an hour; however, my daylilies want more frequent watering. I run my meadow (buffalo/blue grama) irrigation spray zones starting at 6 am for about 20 minutes each once a week. The daylily beds on bubbler type drip run three times a week for 30 minutes each starting at 7 am. And the remainder of the landscape (drip emitters) runs three times a week for 30 minutes each starting at 9 am. I try to run the zones in the morning when I can see if there is a problem. Irrigation always seems to have geysers, or broken, blown off, or non-working emitters. If you're not in the garden when your irrigation runs, you'll never catch these. The way to identify a dripper that's not working or not flowing freely is by plant symptoms. A drooping or browning plant says "please check my dripper"!

Beginning in August assuming the monsoons arrive I'll cut my irrigation back to twice a week. I can also manually turn off the controller for a cycle. You need at least ½ inch of rain to skip a cycle so if the rain is less than ½ inch continue the automatic cycle.

If you have some plants that are really unhappy in the heat, try using some plants that love it instead like: prairie zinnia, ornamental oreganos, sundrops, yarrow, black foot daisy, prairie skullcap, gaillardia (*aristata* is the hardiest), turpentine bush, evening primrose (many varieties, but my favorite is Comanche campfire), *gaura* or whirling butterfly, 'elfin pink' penstemon, globe mallow, Mexican hat, giant four o'clock, perky sue, and artemesias.

And don't fertilize plants when it's really hot. Many of plants go into a dormant or semi-dormant state to survive. You want to fertilize plants when they're active and growing like spring for leaves and fall for roots. And organic fertilizers are slower acting.

Summer isn't a good time to buy new plants – it takes too much water to get them established, but fall is just around the corner and for any plants adapted to zone 7 or less this is the best time to get them established.