

Plant Care During Drought

As temperatures climb, plants use most of the water they take up just to stay cool. Keep plants well watered in hot, dry weather. Water lawns, shrubs, and trees once a week with three-quarters to one inch of water or twice a week with one-half to three-quarter inches of water. Water annuals and perennials twice a week with three-quarter inches of water. Do not water established plants every other day.

Make sure plants have a three to four-inch mulch over their roots. Small mulched beds help, but beds that cover the roots at least to the edge of the branches are best. Mulches keep roots moist and cool. Roots die when they dry out. Pull the mulch back away from your house a foot or so. This can reduce the number of insects coming into the house. Some bugs like to come in to escape hot, dry weather. This can help put out the “unwelcome mat” for them. Keep the mulch pulled back from tree trunks also.

Do not dig around plants when it is hot and dry. Roots are damaged whether you see them or not. Hot, dry weather makes it hard for roots to re-grow.

Do not fertilize unless you are keeping plants well watered. Fertilizer is a salt. It requires water to be active. When we over-fertilize we can damage roots.

Reduce pruning where possible. When we prune off leaves and stems, we also cut off some of the plant’s water and food reservoirs. Prune only if necessary. Pruning also reduces the plant’s ability to grow since we are cutting off the energy producing tissues of the plants - the leaves.

Wait until fall rains begin to plant shrubs, trees and perennials. Plants will have a better chance of surviving and doing well if we wait until fall and winter to plant and transplant woody plants.

If you must plant shrubs and trees during hot weather, wet the root ball well before planting. Dig a planting hole two to five times as wide as the root ball. If the plant is root-bound, break up the root ball. Plant no deeper than the plant originally grew. Water the plant immediately after planting.

Water new plants well when the root ball begins to get dry. This will probably be two or three times a week. Direct water to the root ball since the soil can be wet while the root ball is dry. If the root ball dries out, the plant may die. Remember it may take six months to a year for these plants to get rooted in well.

Help your plants beat the heat by following these hot weather gardening guidelines.