



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Helpful Garden Tips for August 2024 (August 10, 2024)

by Peyton Ellas, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

August can be a light work month in the garden. Continue to repair water leaks and keep up with warm-season weeds. August is also perfect for the following tasks:

PLANTING: August is a good month to plant seeds for cool season vegetables such as Asian greens, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, leek, lettuce, pea, spinach, and Swiss chard, either in the ground or in containers to transplant later. Direct-seed another crop of beans. You can plant some ornamentals, but it will be a lot easier on you and them if you wait until fall.



MAINTAINING: Citrus requires even, steady moisture during these hot months and must be watered regularly. Other plants, like many California native, Mediterranean, and desert-origin species, can manage on less water. Let your low-water-use plants, many of which are our spring-blooming sage, ceanothus, manzanita, and lupine, rest during the summer. This may mean dry leaves and some leaf drops. However, if you wisely added narrow-leaf milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*) or another California native milkweed to your garden, you may notice it in full bloom or producing seeds vigorously. Many milkweed species love summer weather. If you don't see monarch caterpillars on your milkweed, don't be discouraged. I've seen them as late as September. Don't worry about aphids, red milkweed bugs, or other insects on your milkweed; it can handle it. And you don't want to destroy monarch eggs going after pest insects.

The extreme heat we've had this summer is hard on our plants. If you see extra signs of what looks like drought stress and sunburn, it may not be a lack of soil moisture. It may be that extreme temperature, especially at night, is signaling for the plant to keep its stomata closed most of the day and night. Without open stomata, the plants cannot respire or release water into the atmosphere. It's like the circulatory system of the plants slows. This has a whole cascade of issues, but pouring more water into the soil when the roots are not taking moisture efficiently may encourage root and crown rots caused by lack of air in the soil. What to do? Shade cloth over the plants that are suffering the most. Water if the soil is dry more than a few inches down. Ideally, you've provided water to be stored in the soil before the extreme heat, and then wait until the soil is crumbly dry or barely moist to water again. Spring-planted plants may need extra TLC until their roots are established, which can be from two to five years.

Spider mites love dusty plants. If you see cobwebs but no spiders, it's time to hose off the plants. In gardens with drip irrigation, this is a big problem because overhead sprinklers aren't washing plants off. Follow your water district's water guidelines, but go ahead and wash your plants off. It's one of the best tasks during the hot summer months. Just wash them off with enough time for the water to dry before nightfall to avoid disease, especially if you will be getting any lawn wet. A wet lawn on a warm night can cause rust and other fungal diseases.

Cut back and divide your iris if you haven't already done so. Prune apricots, olives, and oleanders, but avoid pruning so much you get sunburn on newer branches, and never prune during a heat wave or when one is expected. Continue to deadhead roses and remove suckers and unwanted branches. Open rose bushes up to increase air circulation through the shrub. Continue to prune hedges. Keep your pruning tools clean and sanitized with a 10 percent bleach or vinegar solution. Remember to dry your blades before using them on your plants! Clean up fallen fruit. Support heavy, fruit-leaden tree branches. Remember to use *Bacillus thuringiensis* (BT) anywhere there will be standing water, even in plant trays, to avoid mosquito breeding.

Skip the fertilizer during the hottest part of summer, especially high-nitrogen products. Let everything rest a little, including yourself.

If you spray with post-emergent broad-spectrum herbicides, apply it when the temperature is 85 degrees Fahrenheit or less and when there is no breeze to avoid phytotoxicity and vapor drift. Using a product with surfactant is important to improve penetration on toughened summer weeds. Towards the end of the month, you can start using a pre-emergent to impede the germination of cool-season weeds. If you have only a few weeds, hoe or dig them out instead of spraying, or investigate where the water supporting the weeds is coming from and make a change in your irrigation practices if you can.

Ornamental plants can tolerate much insect damage, and those insects can be bird attractants (food). The exception is Argentine and other non-native ants; control those throughout the garden with ant bait products, switching the active ingredient every few months.



CONSERVING: If you want to remove all or part of your lawn, August is a good month to do it, especially if it is Bermuda grass. We can support a wider range of native and beneficial wildlife, including pollinators if we include more variety of shrubs and perennials, especially native, in our yards and reduce our monoculture turf. If you need a green patch in summer, consider using a ground cover like *Lippia nodiflora*. Removing lawns is a big project, so before you plant a new lawn, think about how much you actually need for recreation, rather than plant turf as a default space-taker. I love the variety of no and low-lawn yards we see these days, demonstrating there are more possibilities than desert-scape or dry creek in your front yard, more play possibilities for children and pets than turf. Lawns will always be a part of public parks and school grounds. If you're not using yours, consider reducing it and increasing habitat value.

Planning any upgrades or changes to your garden for fall? Consider creating a rain garden, seasonal creek, or swale to capture and hold onsite storm water. Gardens with a big picture approach to both drought and flooding –in other words, California's usual weather swings --are resilient and provide value to humans and wildlife every year no matter what the weather. Consider making your garden, even in the city, a connection for migrating beneficial wildlife. Can you map out a path migrating Monarchs might be able to take through your neighborhood? Is there a neighbor you can give a native milkweed to?

It's okay to leave dried flowers on native plants. Finches and other birds will thank you for the seed they can eat. If you want to attract more birds and pollinators, it's fine to be less fussy about trimming every plant and removing every brown stem. I invite you to push your own boundaries, to improve the efficiency and usefulness of the garden, and to share it a little more. It's less work too.

The days are getting shorter. Soon, it will be autumn. Meanwhile, we can remember there are some plants that love all this heat and are not looking forward to cooler weather!

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

Hanford Thursday Night Farmers' Market, 219 W Lacey Blvd, Hanford, 5:30 pm, through Sept.

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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