



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Helpful Garden Tips for July 2024 (July 6, 2024)

by Peyton Ellas, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

July is historically our hottest and driest month. Keep things easy this month on both you and the garden. Work in the mornings, stay hydrated, and ease off the pruning and fertilizing. July is a great month to plan for autumn and do whatever preparation you can to create a more water-efficient, California-style garden.

PLANTING: Avoid planting most ornamental plants in July. Instead, use your water to keep the vegetable garden, orchard, and existing plants (especially trees) healthy. You can keep planting heat-loving annuals. Edibles to plant include tomato, basil, and artichoke from well-developed seedlings. From seed, plant corn, winter and summer squash, radish, peas, bulb and green onion. July is a great month to start seeds for fall-harvested vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, chard, kale, and cabbage. Make sure you have a way to keep those tender seedlings well-watered. Seed starting in summer also requires more management of insect pests like snails, slugs and earwigs. You can start seeds in containers for later transplanting, but make sure you have a place with adequate light to avoid weak plants. Brush your hands lightly over seedlings to help keep them stout and sturdy or set up a little fan nearby so they get a breeze which has a similar effect.



MAINTAINING: Monitor and test your irrigation system at least once during summer, especially if you will be gone more than a few days. It's tempting to overwater, but not only is it a waste, but many diseases and insect problems are encouraged by too much moisture in hot months. Let the first inch or more of soil dry out between watering. If a heatwave is predicted, provide extra water for your ornamental garden a day or two in advance so there is a reserve in the soil. Your goal is for the water to penetrate to just below plant's root zone where the soil is cooler, and then let the top few inches dry out a little. You don't have to keep the ground wet during a heat wave, just store up a little water in the soil.

Lawn diseases and pest insects are almost guaranteed in over-watered summer lawns. Water does not cool turf grass; it only replaces what the plant transpires during the day. Plants don't sweat the way mammals do. Use a moisture monitor or poke your fingers down into the crown of your lawn to see if it's lacking moisture. Fescue lawns can suffer heat stress, sunburn, and warm-season diseases, and all of them may look like you need to water more.



If lawn removal is your goal, July is an excellent month for solarization or mechanically removing the sod and allowing the summer heat and lack of moisture to kill any remaining bits. Remember to cover your bare soil with mulch, cardboard or weed cloth until fall planting time to avoid opportunistic weeds becoming the lawn replacement! Nature does not like bare soil. Bare soil is also susceptible to wind erosion, which robs your garden of its best topsoil, tiny grains of dust at a time.

Continue dead-heading roses and daylilies. Remove spent flower heads and the entire flowering stem from hydrangea, leaving only a few buds per stem for next year. Prune spent berry canes to the ground after harvesting. Trellis new canes as they emerge. Lightly prune bougainvillea to promote more flowers. Wait until the weather cools for major pruning unless it's for safety. You can lightly prune in the cool morning or evening hours, but not if a heat wave is predicted in the next few days.

Do not fertilize anything (including lawns) during July with high-nitrogen products. Allow plants that want to go partially or fully summer dormant to do so to extend their lives and keep them healthy. This includes many of our best climate-adapted plants: California native species like Cleveland sage, blue eyed grass, and bush lupin, and Mediterranean species like lavender.

Monitor and control weeds, rodents and insect pests. For insects, hose off plants as a first treatment. Insecticidal soap sprayed in the evening is the second treatment. We are all busy and would rather do a one-time-and-done style of pest management, but gardening is like caring for other living beings: steady observation and small corrections are the key to a garden full of beneficial wildlife, happy plants, and happy humans.

CONSERVING: Native bees and wasps are active in the summer months. Most of these tiny insects are hardly noticed because European honeybees are also active. Leave flowering ("bolting") plants like radish, onion, and carrots for beneficial insects, and if you can, leave a little bare dirt here and there for ground-nesting solitary bees. Reduce or eliminate strong, non-specific insecticides to avoid harming beneficial insects.

Adding a top dressing of compost is never wrong but you can wait until fall to add more mulch, especially if you already have a thick layer. Take care of the millions of creatures living in your garden's soil to have healthier plants. A garden in balance needs few chemicals and is less work, more pleasure.

Happy Gardening!

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 North parking lot

July 25 - Hanford Thursday Night Farmers' Market, 219 W Lacey Blvd, Hanford, 5:30 pm

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

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

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