

## Hot weather gardening tips

Keeping gardens fresh & colorful all season, despite the heat and humidity  
advice from Janet Macunovich, GardenAtoZ.com

### I. Healthy plants stand up to tough times

#### A. Watering to keep a plant healthy

1. Apply enough.
  - Recognize a dry plant
  - Check the soil for moisture down to 3-4". Cool = moist.
  - In the heat, sometimes the problem's too much water!
2. No waste: Make a bull's-eye of the desirable plant's root system
3. Self-watering systems for the new and special cases
  - Wick'd pots
  - Upended bottles, holey jugs and leaky buckets
  - "Gator" /bladder trouble
4. Consistency pays off  
Most at-risk: Extended stems, near-term flowers, embryonic fruit
5. Timing: A.M. Mid-day for cooling. But *any* time better than dry

#### B. Weeding

1. Definition of a weed: ANY plant where it's not wanted
2. Not worried while the weeds are little? Think again!
  - Young weeds like ravenous teenagers
3. Raise those skirts!
  - Worst weeds, at and within the drip line

#### C. Pests: In high summer, learning often more important than control

1. Keep an eye for deviations in plants you know.  
Learn new plants' normal look. (Find a standard for comparison.)
2. Use a good book and/or good friends to identify problems.
  - GardenAtoZ.com free Forum, you can post photos
3. Don't react to every blemish.
  - Evaluate seriousness.
4. When dealing with pests always think "what are the options?"
  - *Always* options, from physical to cultural to psychological
  - Pesticides can hurt more than help, especially when it's hot

#### D. Mulching

Keep the soil cool. Whatever can cover ground... Don't be picky!

#### E. Fertilizing

1. All that watering can leach nutrients out of the soil and the plant
2. Mid-summer = liquid organic fertilizers. (Fish emulsion, seaweed, etc.)
3. "Read" the plant: leaf color, size and condition of new growth.
  - Don't/Can't fertilize for *bloom*.

## II. Beyond the basic care: Clipping and staking

### A. Pruning

1. Sharp, quality tools: Bypass rotating-handle pruners, snips, light shears.
2. Deadhead (re-bloomers, e.g., lanceleaf coreopsis, spiderwort, catmint).
  - Observe the flowering pattern.
  - Cuts minimize seed formation.
  - Even if no re-bloom, can be worth it for less brown, neater look
2. Shear (hedges and tightly bunched species such as candytuft, pinks, sedum, catmint, lavender, threadleaf coreopsis...
  - Pays to thin after shearing, for regrowth from varying levels
3. Cut back to the ground
  - Vigorous growers such as columbine, cranesbill, iris, daisy...
  - Anything that offends: If it's brown, cut it down
  - 3 to 6 weeks to re-bloom, but not every species blooms again.
4. Dead-leaf or groom (daylily, delphinium, phlox, lambs ear...).
  - Admit the visual power of brown.
  - Healthy plant recovers quickly, may be less likely to relapse

### B. Staking *after the fall*

1. Don't bundle and tether (crucified plants are not pretty!)
2. Create a pretty framework. Concentric rings of stakes: Fountain spray.
  - Raise the center stems, and tie in to an inner ring of stakes,
  - Raise outer stems, tie in to an outer ring of stakes
  - Prop the perimeter as needed
3. Gather and cinch in all stems, then prop the perimeter, release stems
  - Ready-made stakes okay but great crutches can be homemade.

## III. Design tips

### A. Don't make a mess worse

1. Usually smarter to *plan changes* than to make them in high summer.
2. Remember that situations change and we should learn to let go.

### B. "Instant cures" are not cheating

1. Annuals from the garden center (and houseplants!): Plant the basket
2. Non-plant accessories that pick up plant shape, foliage texture / color
  - Placed to highlight best performers, not spotlight gaps and slouchers
3. New mulch: Fine texture and dark.
4. Choosing and placing additions most effectively:
  - Visit other gardens and tour the roadsides
  - Don't overlook perennial seedlings and self-sown annuals.
  - Pick a color scheme and stick to it.
  - Buying new? Small pots best, and avoid rootbound plants
  - Place new plants in clusters, avoid spottiness.
  - Use the best long-season plants on the front line.
  - Bolster a good design with shape-for-shape replacements.
  - Avoid calling attention to plants going dormant.
  - Don't sacrifice next year's perennial bloom by overcrowding.
  - Match plant to place: Respect light-, soil- and water requirements

#### IV. About *you*, in your broad brimmed hat and Under Armour

A. Early morning, shade gardens, take your work into the shade

B. Water breaks? Sure, and soak your head!

C. Recognizing symptoms of heat exhaustion

- Hot and/or cold flashes, clammy skin, disorientation, headaches, loss of physical control, poor coordination
  - Get out of heat, drink, elevate legs.
- Heat stroke - previous symptoms plus dry skin. Get to the hospital

#### V. Perennials and shrubs for late-summer bloom

Asters	perennial ageratum
Boltonia	(Eupatorium/ Conoclinium coelestinum)
butterfly bush ( <i>Buddleia</i> )	plumbago ( <i>Ceratostigma</i> )
Cardinal flower ( <i>Lobelia</i> spp.)	Stokes aster ( <i>Stokesia</i> )
<i>Clematis</i> species (bush <i>C.</i> <i>heracleifolia</i> , vine <i>C. viticella</i> , etc.)	tall <i>Phlox</i>
coneflowers ( <i>Rudbeckia</i> )	tall stonecrop ( <i>Sedum</i> )
culver's root ( <i>Veronicastrum</i> )	toadlily ( <i>Tricyrtis</i> )
goldenrod ( <i>Solidago</i> )	turtlehead ( <i>Chelone</i> )
grasses	beautyberry ( <i>Callicarpa</i> species)
hardy <i>Hibiscus</i> ( <i>H. moscheutos</i> )	blue mist spirea/bluebeard shrub ( <i>Caryopteris x clandonensis</i> )
Japanese anemone	rose of sharon ( <i>Hibiscus syriacus</i> )
Japanese wax bell ( <i>Kirengeshoma</i> )	seven son shrub ( <i>Heptacodium miconioides</i> )
obedient plant ( <i>Physostegia</i> )	<i>Viburnums</i> with great fruit: <i>V.</i> <i>trilobum</i> , <i>V. sargentii</i>
Pearly everlasting ( <i>Anaphalis</i> )	

#### VI. Annuals that look their best after July 4

<i>Cosmos</i>	salvia ( <i>S. splendens</i> , <i>S. farinacea</i> )
<i>Dahlia</i>	summer amaranth/ Joseph's coat ( <i>Amaranthus tricolor</i> )
flowering kale	

There is more to help you with hot weather gardening at  
[www.GardenAtoZ.com](http://www.GardenAtoZ.com)

On the site, search for these terms to find items such as shown here:

self watering pot  
leaky jugs  
attention to deadheads  
garden face lift  
stakes from sticks

