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. Al 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
- 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.

IV. About you, in your broad brimmed hat and UnderArmour

- 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 Boltonia butterfly bush (Buddleia) Cardinal flower (*Lobelia* spp.) *Clematis* species (bush *C. heracleifolia,* vine C. viticella, etc.) coneflowers (Rudbeckia) culver's root (*Veronicastrum*) goldenrod (Solidago) grasses hardy *Hibiscus* (H. moscheutos) Japanese anemone Japanese wax bell (*Kirengeshoma*) obedient plant (*Physostegia*) Pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis*)

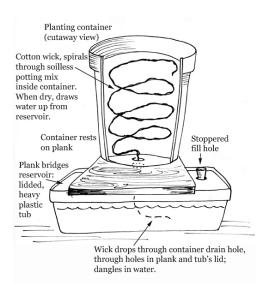
perennial ageratum (Eupatorium/ Conoclinum coelestinum) plumbago (*Ceratostigma*) Stokes aster (Stokesia) tall Phlox tall stonecrop (Sedum) toadlily (*Tricyrtis*) turtlehead (Chelone) beautyberry (Callicarpa species) blue mist spirea/bluebeard shrub (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*) rose of sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*) seven son shrub (*Heptacodium* miconioides) *Viburnums* with great fruit: *V*. trilobum, V. sargentii

VI. Annuals that look their best after July 4

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

There is more to help you with hot weather gardening at 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

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