

# **July Garden Tips**

**By Donna Hagar, Somervell County Master Gardener**

After enduring several days of 100° heat, the idea of suggesting you get out in your gardens seems to fall a little flat! But as we all know, a gardener's work is never done. So don those wide brimmed gardening hats, fix a tall glass of cool, refreshing lemonade and let's get to it.

## **Vegetables**

Many of our spring season vegetables are spent and need to come out. Be sure to compost the plant material as you pull up those not strong enough to hold on until fall. Mix in organic material into the beds, keep moisture available and cover with a good layer of mulch. This will prevent weeds from taking over and get your beds in tiptop shape for your fall gardens. The heat with the moisture will enable the organic material to compost into soil-building humus.

Many plants may be able to survive through the dry, heat, with supplemental water, plenty of mulch and tender loving care and make it through until fall. Many tomatoes will stop setting fruit with the higher temperatures but return to full production come fall. If your tomatoes are leggy, consider tip layering to make new plants. Here's how from Skip Richter:

“You want to take a section of vine, remove the leaves from it, and then dig a little hole in the ground and bury that tip section of vine. It doesn't have to be very deep, just a few inches deep is enough.

Place the vine in the trench and cover it with soil. Then water that spot. Tomatoes love to root along the vine and, within a couple of weeks, you'll start to have roots already growing into the ground. And this new daughter plant or baby plant is ready to go.

At that point you just cut it loose from the mother plant, and then remove the mother plant along with all the mites and diseased leaves and everything, and this is your new star, rooted and ready to go for fall.”

Believe it or not, our attentions do need to start turning toward our fall gardens. By the end of July into early August, we should be planting beans, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, peas, potatoes, and winter squash. When planting these veggies in the intense heat of the summer, be sure to provide some sort of shade cloth cover for the tender seedlings as they emerge and to protect them primarily from the intense west sun. Keep shade protection in place until the plants are well mature, and of course, keep them moist and mulched well.

## **Perennials and Annuals**

Moisture and mulch are again the best bet for keeping your beds in top color. Dead head spent blooms of flowering annuals. A good shearing of tough perennials such as Autumn Sage (*Salvia greggii*), zexmenia and copper canyon daisies will enable them to put out a flush of new growth for a good fall showing. Remove heat stressed dead and dying leaves and stems to keep plants looking their best.

## **Trees, Shrubs and Vines**

Even the most established plants will benefit from a good thorough soaking every couple of weeks in the absence of rain. Newly (less than a year) planted trees, shrubs and vines, will need a little more attention as their root systems are not fully developed. Be sure to monitor the

moisture level and provide supplemental water as needed. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy and of course, maintain the ever important layer of mulch to keep the soil temperature down as well as weeds at bay.

### **Lawns and Groundcovers**

Provide lawns and groundcovers with a good soaking on a weekly basis. Control fire ants in the lawn with mound treatments as opposed to baits, as the ants are foraging less. Be on the lookout for grubworms in the lawns – dead patches of grass that pulls up easily from the roots. Serious infestations (5 or more grubs per square foot of lawn) can be controlled with granular insecticides.

And lastly, don't forget our flying friends, birds and butterflies. Provide water in the birdbaths and puddlers and keep them cleaned regularly.

Resources:

Texas Gardener Magazine

Doug Welsh's Texas Gardener Almanac

<http://gardeningwithskip.tamu.edu>