

Garden Club Horticultural Hints July 2021

It's a great summer to be outside!

Water deeply, early, and low. July got off to an extraordinarily wet start but, on average, July is New England's driest month. When you water, really soak your plants – *just* your plants and not the garden as a whole. You want the roots to have water available down where the heat of the day doesn't penetrate.

Watering down to that depth will encourage your plants to stretch down their roots. It really happens like that: plants can 'learn' to grow a certain way through training, and getting water down deep works remarkably well.

When you water mid-day, you'll allow the water to evaporate rather than getting to your plants. Watering low (meaning right down at ground level) ensures the water doesn't have much chance to evaporate. If you can't water early, water late - when the sun is setting. To prevent spreading plant diseases, keep the water off the leaves as much as possible.



You can divert water from downspouts to help water plants deeply (above); you should also water as close to ground level to get water where it's needed (below, right)



Weed like your plants' lives depend on it. They do - your plants will be competing with weeds for water, sunlight and nutrients in July, and the weeds are, too often, better at grabbing available resources. Your flowers and vegetables win the fight only when the weeds lie, gasping for breath, in the aisles or in a bucket.



Leave the lawn alone. Your grass wants to go dormant in the heat of summer; don't fight Mother Nature. Trying to keep it lush and green by excessive watering or fertilizing serves only to create a cycle of chemical (and water) dependency that is both expensive and, ultimately, not all that successful.

Grass is a tough perennial. It will turn green with cooler weather. If you have a lawn service, tell them to leave the lawn long (3 inches), and don't add fertilizer or other chemicals to 'keep the lawn green'.





Compost tip. Growing plants consume the nutrients in the soil, so replace them naturally by using good compost as a mulch. You'll get two jobs done (mulching and fertilizing) in one. And, unlike chemical fertilizers, compost will improve the soil health at the same time.



This bolted lettuce is putting its energy into making seeds. The leaves are bitter

Help stop evaporation. Heat-treated straw, seaweed from the beach (first washed in fresh water), and other mulches that will allow the water to pass through and prevent the sun from evaporating the water out of the top inches of the soil. Saving water at the root level is very important when the soil has heated up—like after a few days of 90+ temperatures.

Don't bury your plants in mulch – an inch or two is all you need. And, keep the mulch away from the plant's stem.



Remove the spring (cool weather) plants that can't take July's heat. They'll neither look nor taste good after the 90+ degree days anyway. In the vegetable garden, that means things like spinach and lettuce; elsewhere, it also means those early pansies, nasturtiums, and their short-lived brethren.

It's not too late for vegetables. We still have more than 60 days of growing season remaining, and the soil is at its warmest this month. From seed, you can plant beans, corn, lettuce, spinach, and beets, and have an excellent harvest from mid-August to (absent an early frost) October. If you can find tomato and pepper plants that are not 'leggy' (tall and spindly), you can also still enjoy those vegetables this summer.



Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for July and throughout the year, please visit www.BettyOnGardening.com