



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Gardening in the Summer Heat (August 9, 2025)

By Anne Skinner, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

Although we've had a relatively mild summer, with only fifteen days over 100 degrees, August heat can still be brutal in our gardens. Prolonged heat and warmer nighttime temperatures create significant stress for our plants. Hopefully, the slightly cooler weather will continue, but be prepared—traditionally, the month of August has temperatures staying in the 100 + degrees for days. September can be gruesome, so the following tips for watching for water stress can help us keep our landscape from shriveling. Remember: Plants are like people, we need hydration!

The symptoms of too little or too much water can look very similar. **An acute water deficit** occurs when water loss from the leaves increases. This can happen during extreme heat or windy conditions or when the water supply decreases suddenly. Many plants will wilt at the hottest part of the day but recover overnight if the problem does not persist.



A **chronic water deficit** causes slow growth or stops growth altogether. Leaf color may change, and deciduous trees may drop their leaves prematurely. Prolonged water stress causes shoot and branch dieback. Chronically water-stressed plants have less resistance to pests, leading to injury from insects or diseases. Leafy plants have a permanent wilting point, beyond which they cannot be revived.

Container plants and plants in small areas lined by concrete have a reduced volume of soil. This limits the water available in the root zone. Environmental factors, such as high light intensity, wind, temperature, and relative humidity, determine the evaporative potential of the plant's location. Plants should be checked daily for their water status. A quick and simple method is a moisture meter. The probes are pushed into the soil and register from dry to moist. The meter can be found at home improvement stores or garden centers. They are especially handy with potted plants. The soil on the top may feel dry to the touch, but the meter will detect if the pot is not draining and the roots are sitting in water. If the plant is in waterlogged soil, the roots cannot take up oxygen, nutrients, or water, and the plant will die.



Spread mulch on the ground around trees and shrubs to keep moisture in and heat away from the roots. Mulch needs to be kept away from the crown of the plant to avoid fungal diseases. If the plant is on a drip irrigation system, the emitters need to be checked regularly for clogging, displacement by lawn equipment, damage from gophers, or inadequate size for the plant. As the plant or tree grows, it will require additional water.

Using a hose timer will save water when you use a sprinkler to water a stressed plant. An alternative is using the kitchen timer to avoid forgetting that the hose is running and wasting water. Fall is the best time to plant many perennial plants, but they will need extra water to get established when the temperature is still high.

Brown spots in the lawn? First, check the sprinkler timer and system--power outages can require resetting the timer. Next, run the system manually to check that the sprinkler heads are not damaged or clogged, the amount of water being applied, and the coverage of each sprinkler head. A can test--setting tuna cans out on the lawn, running the sprinkler for 20 minutes, then measuring the water in each can--is a quick check of sprinkler output and coverage.

Continue to mow the lawn with the mower set high. The taller grass blades shade the roots of the plant, hold in moisture, and keep the sun from reaching weed seeds in the soil. Irrigate the lawn deeply--not daily, small amounts. Shallow irrigation encourages weeds, especially crabgrass, which thrives in summer heat.

Is summer the time to fertilize? Check the label on the fertilizer for the optimal temperature for application. Usually, this is less than 85 degrees; otherwise, the fertilizer can burn the plant. It will also encourage new plant growth, which is more stressful for a plant coping with the heat. Wait until the weather cools in the fall!

When fall arrives, people and plants will find relief from the heat, and we won't have to limit our garden time to early mornings!

Are you interested in becoming a Master Gardener? Our next class will begin in January 2026 and run through May 2026, with weekly classes. For more information, visit: <https://ucanr.edu/site/tulare-kings-master-gardeners/become-master-gardener>. If interested, please fill out a survey: <https://surveys.ucanr.edu/survey.cfm?surveynumber=10225>.

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

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

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