

Heat Stress Relief for Plants



When temperatures skyrocket to the 90's, plants may show signs of heat stress. Leaves may drop, wilt or curl, then turn yellow/crispy brown. Vegetables may bolt or drop blossoms, and have a hard time producing.

1. *First check the soil.* The soil surface may look dry but be moist near the roots. In containers, gently push a finger into the soil to your second knuckle. If the soil is dry to the touch, water. In planting beds, check the soil at a depth of 3-4 inches. Slip a trowel into the soil and gently pull it out to check moisture levels. Over-watering can be just as harmful as under-watering.
2. *Slow, deep watering* will ensure that water soaks down to the root ball. Soaker hoses and drip irrigation systems set for early morning work well. Try a tree watering bag which slowly releases water for 5-8 hours.
3. *3-4 inches of organic mulch* help reduce moisture loss and regulate soil temperature. Remember to keep mulch a few inches away from the trunk/stalk.
4. *Cover veggies with shade cloth.* You may still see bolting, but some shade will buy you time before plant quality is compromised.
5. Several plants will wilt during the hottest part of the day, no matter how wet the soil is. *Mist with a hose* mid-day or in the afternoon for a few minutes. The mist reduces ambient air temperature and helps refresh foliage without over-watering.
6. Wilted lawns will show footprints in the grass that don't rebound. The easiest thing is to *let the grass go dormant* until the rains resume.
7. New transplants are the most susceptible plants to heat stress. Keep them in the shade and *wait for a cooler day for planting.* Water with a transplant shock reducer.
8. *Cut back on fertilizing* during dry hot days. Fertilizer salts can dehydrate plant roots, plus, the extra stimulus to put on growth will require even more water. If you need to fertilize, use an organic slow-release fertilizer and water in well.
9. Take this time to *assess your garden's heat stress tolerance.* Choose the right plants for the right. Choose the right plants for the right become established (at least 2 years) to be able to survive with minimal water for periods of time.