



**Dear *Extension's Successful Gardener* E-tips Subscriber:**

Mark your calendars for the Southern Ideal Home Show, September 21 through 23, at the State Fairgrounds in Raleigh. *Extension's Successful Gardener* Learning Center will be one of the show features, with Cooperative Extension horticulture agents and Master Gardeners on hand to answer your gardening questions. Visit [www.successfulgardener.org](http://www.successfulgardener.org). For show information: [www.southernshows.com](http://www.southernshows.com).

**August 2007 Gardening Tips**

**Dealing with Hot, Dry Weather**

**Fruits and Veggies**

- The dry conditions make starting fall crops very difficult. The first step is to make sure the soil is wet. Water frequently to keep the surface moist so the germinating seed doesn't dry out. You can cover the soil with an old screen door or screen window. It will shade the ground, which helps keep the seeds moist, and you can water through it. Another method is to use an old cloth. Cover the ground until the seed starts to germinate, then remove the cloth.
- Fill in empty spaces in the garden with fall crops of lettuce and other cool-season vegetables. Even beans planted in late summer can produce a crop before frost.
- In the piedmont, you should now focus on getting ready for fall crops like turnips from seed or cabbage, broccoli or collards from transplants. It would be nice to wait for a break in the weather to get them established, but you may have to go ahead if the short term forecast isn't calling for a break in the weather.
- It's time to fertilize strawberry plants. Top-dress plants with ammonium nitrate at 1 pound per 100 feet of row between August 15 and September 15. Make sure the foliage is dry at the time of application and brush any excess fertilizer off of the leaves to prevent burn.
- If you still have more vegetables coming out of the garden than you can use, check to see if there is a Plant A Row For The Hungry

program in your area. Many local food banks gladly accept garden produce.

- Allow peppers to turn red on the plant. Peppers allowed to turn red will be sweeter and higher in beta carotene. Even jalapeños, which are traditionally harvested green, will mature to tasty red peppers.

### **Lawns, Trees, Shrubs**

- Mulch trees and shrubs to keep roots cool, conserve moisture and control competing weeds and grasses. A 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch will help keep plants strong and healthy in hot, dry weather. Avoid over-mulching; more than 4 inches can be harmful to plants.
- Now is the time to prepare for fall seeding of fescue lawns. Mid-August is the time to start sowing cool-season turf grass in the mountains. In the piedmont, wait until after Labor Day. Even then, don't put out seed unless you have irrigation or the weather patterns change and we get moisture back into the soil. Once seed gets wet, it will die if it isn't watered daily, until it becomes established. With water restrictions in many parts of the state, seeding fall lawns may be a problem. Learn whether there are any local water restrictions before you spend money on seeding your lawn.
- Put down lime anytime you know you need it.

### **Insects and Other Pests**

- Fall armyworms often show up when we have dry conditions. They have already appeared in some coastal counties. They will probably arrive in the piedmont in time to eat newly seeded fescue. If you have to plant this year, keep an eye on the fescue. If it starts disappearing, check for fall armyworms by drenching the edge of the problem area with soapy water. Treat with Sevin or pyrethroids (lawn pesticides with active ingredients ending in the letters "thrin.")
- Before long it will be time for the orange striped oak worm to defoliate a few willow oaks. Any caterpillar on deciduous trees in the fall can be ignored. The leaves have already put up some energy. In a month the leaves would be falling anyway. Defoliation this time of the year isn't that critical.
- It is time for velvet ants in the landscape. Velvet ants are parasitic wasps. The females are wingless and resemble hairy ants. Female velvet ants seek out a host nest and lay their eggs on the host larva. The velvet ant larvae consume the host wasp larvae and pupate and mature into another generation of velvet ants. A velvet ant parasitizes the nests of the cicada killer wasp. Adults slip into the host wasp nest, lay their eggs, and depart. The exceptionally tough

exoskeleton of the velvet ant protects it from stings of the host wasp in case they meet in the nest. Velvet ants are not usually numerous and no control measures are usually needed. A big stick or heavy-soled shoe will take care of this insect, but normally there is no harm in letting them live. Do not handle them.

- Hot and dry weather favors spider mites. These arachnids are very small but can be damaging in large numbers. Insecticidal soap will kill spider mites if necessary.
- Treat lawns for newly hatched grubs from August through October. Young grubs are small and easy to kill now. Use a product containing trichlorfon (Proxol/Dylox).
- Be friendly to beneficial insects. Set watermelon rinds on the compost pile so that butterflies can get to the juice. They actually need some of the minerals contained in the juice. You could get the same effect for butterflies with a moist area of soil.

### **Annuals, Perennials, Shrubs**

- Dead head and cut back lanky plants in the flowerbed. When cooler, wetter weather returns you should get more flowers.
- Divide perennials such as daylilies, black-eyed Susans, peonies and irises. Keep well watered.
- Water annuals, perennials, lawns and shrubs deeply but infrequently to encourage a deep and extensive root system. Frequent, light sprinklings encourage a shallow root system that cannot support plants during the extreme heat and drought of summer.

### **Hot Weather Safety Tips for Gardeners**

- Be careful in these extreme temperatures. The same 95-degree or 100-degree temperature that you tolerate one day can give you heat exhaustion on another day. Or more likely, the same temperature you tolerated as a kid can lay you out as an older adult. A headache and an upset stomach could be warning signs of heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion can be reversed if you cool off and rest. A different medical condition happens when you stop sweating. Anytime you stop sweating, immediate action is needed. You need to find an alternative way to cool off. Shade, ice packs and cool water are some possibilities. You also need to get medical attention and it may take you the rest of the summer to get straightened out.
- Changing gardening activity to early morning or late evening is another way to avoid the heat. For sensitive individuals there will be less ozone during the morning. Do the less strenuous activities either the last thing in the morning or first thing when you get

started again in the evening. Parts of your garden are likely to be in the shade at various times during the day. Schedule activities to take advantage of the shade. For example, picking the west side of the blueberries in the morning and picking the east side late in the evening can keep you in the shade longer, assuming the blueberry plants are big enough to cast a shadow. Another example is picking part of the beans early in the morning and the rest of the row late in the day. Or weed on the west side of the house in the morning and on the east side in the afternoon.

- Mesh hats or straw hats will provide shade without causing much additional heat. Cloth hats will make you retain a little more heat but the shade may be worth it. They will also provide some evaporative cooling once you sweat through them. Or go ahead and wet them when you get started. Light colors make a difference.
- Your body requires more than just water to sweat properly. Most people know they lose sodium when they sweat. They also lose potassium, calcium, magnesium, chloride, bicarbonate, phosphate and sulfate. Sorting all this out is beyond horticultural advice but eating watermelon and cantaloupe can help. Fad diets, missed meals, certain dietary supplements and alcohol can hurt.

### Subscribe to Our Newsletter

- Subscribe to *Extension's Successful Gardener* award-winning newsletter, which is published 10 months per year. Visit [www.successfulgardener.org](http://www.successfulgardener.org) for information. The September issue will feature the shade plant Heuchera. The printed version of the newsletter provides additional gardening information and articles that are not included in these e-tips. Don't miss out!

### North Carolina Cooperative Extension

- Learn about educational programs near you. Visit [www.ces.ncsu.edu](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu).

**Until next month, Happy Successful Gardening!**

