



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

As we move into summer many of us across the state are already experiencing drought conditions. Some areas have implemented water restrictions. If you're fortunate enough to have received some of the rainfall that has moved through some of the state recently, we hope you captured some of it in rain barrels for use in your landscape.

Rain Barrels

- If you use rain barrels to catch rainwater, be sure you don't create a drowning hazard. Screen wire over the rain barrel provides a safety measure, keeps mosquitoes at bay and filters larger stuff out of the runoff from the house at the same time. Anything that holds water can become a rain barrel. Common items include livestock watering tanks, plastic trash cans and aboveground swimming pools.
- Ration out your rain barrel water with priority to expensive plants planted less than two years ago. Try to get the root zone wet. Place a small dike around plants to keep extra water from running away. Or put a small hole in a bucket or jug so the water trickles out slow enough that it doesn't run away.

Gray Water

- By North Carolina law, bathwater, dishwater, washing machine water and all other household water (except water from toilets), is known as gray water, is sewage and legally can only be disposed of through a proper system. North Carolina Cooperative Extension Centers across the state receive questions about the use of gray water on landscapes. Again, the law is that gray water is to be disposed of through a proper system. However, some municipalities suggest using gray water during a drought. If you intend to use it, make sure you understand the safety ramifications. Never use gray water on anything that may be eaten and do not spray gray water, allow it to puddle or run off property. Do not

use water that has come in contact with soiled diapers, meat, poultry or anyone with an infectious disease. Never use toilet water, also known as black water; it must go to a treatment facility.

Other Ways to Deal with Drought

- Mow your lawn higher. You should always mow tall fescue at 3 inches. Mow it higher during a drought. This will allow the roots to develop slightly deeper, which makes more water available. Sometimes higher mowing can save water. At the very least, it looks better if the lawn starts to shrivel and wilt.
- Mulch plants so the soil doesn't dry out as quickly.
- If you have regularly fertilized trees and shrubs in years past they will be slightly more tolerant of dry conditions. However, don't fertilize them now.

Damage from April Freeze

- It is time to give up on things that haven't produced new growth since the April 7 freeze. Crape myrtles and figs are the most common plants that were killed to the ground. By now you can tell what is alive and what isn't. If there are only one or two new leaves on a large trunk, you most likely have extensive stem damage down lower. You probably need to cut this back to living wood and allow it to regenerate. The root system should already be putting up sprouts.

Spittlebugs

- We are getting a lot of questions on spittlebugs particularly on Leyland cypress. These small insects suck the sap out of the plant. Even if there are 100 or more, there still aren't enough to do much damage, so ignoring them is a good option. If you determine that a spray is required, use anything that kills spittlebugs including cyfluthrin, bifethrin or lambda-cyhalothrin.

What to Plant and Prune Now

- The dry weather discourages gardeners from planting annuals. You could take advantage of the next good rainstorm to plant okra, if you haven't already. Pumpkins can still go in the ground. Southern peas planted in late June will come in after the weevil. Again, getting the seed in the ground right before a rain would be ideal. They can tolerate fairly dry conditions.
- Plant late tomatoes this month in the piedmont.

- Prune peaches and plums. Normally a light pruning is done to allow more sunlight to the fruit. With no fruit, you can prune with an eye toward next year. Remove anything that you would normally take off during a dormant pruning. If you have no fruit on blueberries or apples, you can prune these plants also. Remove water sprouts on the apples.
- Most farmers' markets are open now. Here are a couple of hints on freshness: fresh green beans will stick to a t-shirt. A fresh white color on the stem end of a tomato means it was recently picked. Examining the stem on most vegetables will help determine freshness. Most products will lose moisture over time, so select plump products over wilted ones. Older varieties of cantaloupe have a great smell but newer varieties can have just as much flavor with less smell. Smell isn't always as good of a clue as it used to be. However, there shouldn't be a bad smell to the stem end. A bad smell denotes bacteria and means the melon is about to spoil.

New Resources Available

- North Carolina Cooperative Extension in Forsyth County has recently published a new color brochure on recommended tree varieties for the piedmont region. "Planting for Our Future" is free by calling (336) 703-2850 or by e-mailing dorothy_stobbs@ncsu.edu. Please mention that you read about this brochure in Extension's Successful Gardener e-tips. This new brochure will provide ideas for trees to plant this fall. The project was funded by a grant to the Treasure Tree program of Forsyth County.

North Carolina Cooperative Extension

- Learn about educational programs near you. Visit www.ces.ncsu.edu.

Until next month, Happy Successful Gardening!

