

4 Ways To Help Your Plants Survive A Heatwave

Plants need sunshine to grow, but when the temperatures are too hot, your plants feel the impact. They can wilt, wither, and eventually die from too much heat.

The best way to prepare your plants is to incorporate protection into your garden plan. You can look for local plant varieties that are proven in your area's weather.

On your hottest days, you'll still need to take extra precautions, but picking the right kinds will give your plants a better chance.

You should also plan your garden for heat. [Sun map](#) your plot so you know what areas get the most sun. Use taller plants to offer shade to smaller ones. Add trees to your master plan, and use the shade they offer wisely as you plan.

Even if you haven't planned for hot days, there are steps you can take to protect your plants from a heatwave. These will help ensure you don't lose your harvest.

Water



The roots of plants take up water and it's delivered to the rest of the plant through a variety of veins.

It takes energy for the plant to get the water where it needs to go.

During the hottest part of the day, plants are expending energy simply staying alive in the heat.

They don't have the energy they need to efficiently move water through their veins.

Mid-day watering may reach the roots, but it's not likely to travel up the plant to where it's most needed.

So when you water, make sure it's in the early morning or evening when the temperatures are a bit lower. This way your watering efforts aren't wasted.

Since the roots have to get the water, drip irrigation systems help deliver the water where it's needed. When you water from above, it's harder for the roots to get as much water. They're competing with the other plants or weeds in the area, and with evaporation from the sun.

You're also more likely to cause runoff when you water with a traditional hose or sprinkler. The dry ground takes time to absorb the water. If you apply too much water too quickly, it'll get the top soil wet and then runoff.

Drip irrigation allows you to slowly water the top soil, and the soil the roots are actually growing in. You want to get that water about 18 inches into the ground. That way the roots can continue to use it once you've stopped watering.

During the hottest days, you don't want to overwater your plants. Moist soil and hot days offer the perfect environment for a variety of fungi and other plant problems. Overwatering encourages their growth.

Plan on soaking your garden once a week, and always test the soil for moisture before watering. Wilted leaves aren't always a sign that more water is needed. Sometimes, plants wilt in the sun just because of the heat. If your wilted plants look better in the cool evening, they aren't in need of water.

If you find certain plants do need more water, you don't need to water everything to save that plant. Just spot water, allowing the water to penetrate the ground into the roots. Applying water correctly will help your plants survive in the heat.

Soil & Mulch

Now that we've tackled water, let's talk about soil and mulch. Some soil holds water better than others. If you have a sandy garden, you'll probably need to water more often.

Take steps like applying compost to [improve your soil](#), so keep your [compost pile](#) going strong to give your plants what they need.

No matter the state of your soil, a good layer of [mulch](#) will help hold in water. It'll also help prevent weeds from growing. That'll mean fewer plants will be competing for water.

You can use a variety of materials to mulch your garden. By using what you have on hand, you can keep your costs really low. Gardeners have used a thick layer of newspaper, straw, wood shavings, dried grass clippings, or cardboard to mulch plants.

If you use a light colored mulch, you'll also help keep the sun's rays from heating the soil too much. A lower temperature in the soil means your plants are more likely to survive.

MIND YOUR MULCH

How to Apply Mulch



Not So Close!

Watch where you spread your mulch. Getting too close to some plants and buildings can cause them major damage. Need these mulch buffer zones.



Wise Watering¹



TIME TO BE PICKY²

Will one of these 13 common mulches work in your garden beds? The answer could affect your garden's success.

Material	Resists Compaction	Attractive	Resists Wind	Readily Available	Fights Weeds/Disease	Low Fire Risk
Compost	●	●	●	●	●	●
Leaves	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cocoa Bean Mulch	●	●	●	●	●	●
Grass Clippings	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pine Needles	●	●	●	●	●	●
Wood Chips	●	●	●	●	●	●
Shredded Bark	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sawdust	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hay/Straw	●	●	●	●	●	●
Landscape Fabric	●	●	●	●	●	●
Black Plastic	●	●	●	●	●	●
Gravel	●	●	●	●	●	●
Manure	●	●	●	●	●	●

COOKED JUST RIGHT

Making your own mulch is the form of compost? Aim for these results:
pH: 5.5-8.0
Moisture: 35-55%
Texture: the COARSER the better to suppress weeds and prevent wind erosion.

Where to Mulch³

- Around new trees
- Garden beds
- Crop fields
- Trails
- Driveways
- Play areas
- Natural areas

UNDER COVER⁴



Mulch Calculator

Not a numbers person? Use our calculator to determine your mulch needs in cubic feet.

Step 1: How big is your garden area?
width here: x length here: =
radius here: x 3.14 x height here: =
base here: x height here: =

Step 2: How deep do you want your mulch?
Enter your answer here:

Step 3: Calculate your needs.
← Step 1 Answer x ← Step 2 Answer =
This is how many cubic feet of mulch you need!

Troubleshooting

Mulch Toxicity

Spot It: The soil is too acidic (pH below 5.5) or sulfur is wafting from your garden beds.
Fix It: Test your pH—soil mulch will be between 5.5 and 6.5. To prevent, turn your mulch twice monthly for good aeration.

Slime Molds

Spot It: Discolored patches of fungus in colors like orange and yellow emerge after a summer rain? You've probably got slime mold.
Fix It: Scrape it and toss it. No harm done.

Artillery Fungus

Spot It: Small orange or creamy brown cups are firing spores masses gun-like style on your plants, car or home siding.
Fix It: Use only pure bark mulch or cover existing mulch with pine needles.

Matted Mulch

Spot It: Thread-like fungi are growing in dry spots.
Fix It: Water your mulch frequently. If the mats are too big, take a size calculator or rake to it!

Stinkhorn Fungi

Spot It: That's right, these mushrooms stink!
Fix It: Use pine needles, pine bark or compost instead of hardwood mulch.

Toadstools and Mushrooms

Spot It: They look edible, but they're not.
Fix It: Get these outta the garden quick, before your child or dog start munching and get sick.

Common Mulching Mistakes⁵



¹ <http://www.ornnyc.edu/extension/veg/veginfo/vegetables/mulch.htm>
² <http://www.ornnyc.edu/extension/veg/veginfo/vegetables/mulch.htm>
³ <http://www.ornnyc.edu/extension/veg/veginfo/vegetables/mulch.htm>
⁴ <http://www.ornnyc.edu/extension/veg/veginfo/vegetables/mulch.htm>
⁵ <http://www.ornnyc.edu/extension/veg/veginfo/vegetables/mulch.htm>

Pruning & Fertilizing

A heatwave is not the time for pruning or fertilizing your plants. Both of these activities cause a burst of growth. Your plant will put all of its energy into growing, and won't be as able to withstand the heat.

You also risk your plant absorbing the fertilizer too quickly, and burning as a result. So save your fertilizing (even with [natural fertilizer](#)) for a cooler day.

If you have wilted leaves, don't prune them off until the heatwave passes. The leaves offer a bit of shade to the stem of the plant, and can help protect it.

Shade

Shade offers much relief to a hot plant. Shade keeps the direct sunlight off of your plants. It'll also help them lower their temperature, and increase their defenses

For plants that are in containers, planters, or pots, move them into the shade if possible. For plants that are unmovable, you'll need to look for other ways to get them shaded.

How to Create Shadow for Your Plants

If your garden lacks natural shade from taller plants or trees, you can easily set up some temporary patches using one of these methods:

Cardboard and Stakes

Use stiff cardboard and stakes to set up shade wherever you need it. You can cut the cardboard to the size you need. Then use a heavy duty stapler to attach it to your wooden stakes.

Pound the stake in the ground around your most delicate plants, and they'll get instant shade. This set-up is

inexpensive, easily installed, and highly portable.

Lawn Chairs

If you're caught with an unexpected heatwave, you can use your patio furniture to protect your plants. Just carefully set up a lawn chair to provide protection. Because of the legs, you may not be able to use this in all garden setups.

If you don't have any lawn chairs, look around your property for items that are easily moveable and don't weigh too much. You don't want to compact your soil as you make shade. Here are some ideas that I've used in my garden:

- A laundry basket
- A cardboard box
- A plant pot

Shade Cloths

You can buy shade cloths online or in your local garden center. You can attach this to posts in your garden, or to stakes.

If you're using dark colored shade cloth, keep an eye on your soil temperatures. If the cloth is too close to the ground, you can inadvertently bake your plants.

Paper Bags

You can gently pull a paper bag over your plants. You'll want to staple or tape the end closed to keep it from flying off.

You don't want to obstruct air flow for too long however, so be sure to remove these bags as soon as the heat of the day has passed.

Wood Lattice with Bricks

If you have a piece of wood lattice and bricks, you can make shade. You'll want to make four stacks of bricks, one for each

corner of the lattice. Place these where you need it, and then set the lattice on top. This method is especially useful for newly sown seeds and low crops.

What Plants Need Shade the Most?

If you aren't able to shade your entire garden, you'll want to prioritize your plants. Some plants will bolt if they overheat, while others may wither a bit, but will bounce back.

Here are some of the plants you'll want to be extra careful with in a heatwave:

- Lettuce
- Spinach
- Kale
- Peas
- Cilantro
- Cauliflower and Broccoli
- Any cool weather crops

If your area is typically hot, you should hold off planting these heat-sensitive plants until closer to fall's cooler weather. During the hot sun, plant your heat-loving plants like tomatoes, corn, and melons. That way you take advantage of natural growing patterns that each plant needs.

Lower Sunlight 3-4 hours a day	Medium Sunlight 4-6 hours a day	High Sunlight 6-8 hours a day
 Swiss Chard	 Beets	 Peppers
 Cos Lettuce	 Carrots	 Tomatoes
 Lettuce	 Potatoes	 Water-melon
 Parsley	 Broccoli	 Okra
 Arugula	 Radishes	 Eggplant
 Asian Greens	 Turnips	 Straw-berries

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Wilted Plants

Sometimes even with your tender loving care, plants wilt. It's a reaction when the plant leaves are shedding water faster than the roots can get it up the stem. It's a natural phenomenon similar to the way humans sweat. It helps the plants protect themselves.

Smaller, or freshly transplanted plants are more likely to wilt in the sun. That's because their root system isn't as established yet.

Usually, your plants will bounce back on their own once the temperatures drop. You'll notice that they look normal in the evenings, and then wilt when the sun returns to high in the sky.

If your plants are still wilted in the evening, double check that their soil is moist. If not, give the thirsty plant a nice long drink to saturate the roots.

If watering doesn't help, you'll also want to ensure that you aren't dealing with root rot. This can cause wilting leaves as well.

Is it hot where you are?

What are your best tips for keeping your garden growing strong even in the summer heat? I know our readers would love to hear what works for you, so please share in the comment section.



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