Hot Weather Watering Tips

June in the garden is hot with 91.7°F being the average high temperature. As a result of the consistently hot weather, gardeners need to pay close attention to watering.

During the summer, soil moisture becomes extremely important and essential for good plant growth. Because frequent watering is oftentimes costly and time consuming, it pays to conserve the moisture around our landscape plants. This is best done by mulching. Mulch will retain valuable moisture needed for plant growth, and improve overall gardening success.

The amount of mulch to apply will depend on the texture and density of the mulch. Many wood and bark mulches are composed of fine particles and should not be more than two to three inches deep after settling. Excessive amounts of fine-textured mulches around shallow-rooted plants can suffocate their roots causing yellowing and poor growth. Course-textured mulches such as pine needles and pine bark nuggets, which allow good air movement through them, can be maintained as deep as 4 inches.

Mulches composed solely of shredded leaves, small leaves (oak leaves), or grass clippings should never exceed a 2-inch depth. These materials have flat surfaces and tend to mat together, restricting the water and air supply to plant roots.

To conserve moisture in lawns, raise the height of your mower by ½ inch. A higher cut decreases the amount of moisture stress and allows the grass to develop a deeper root system.

Never water strictly by the calendar. Since a plant's water needs are influenced by the weather, the optimal way to water is to look at your plant and learn to recognize when your plant needs water.

Lawns should be irrigated when approximately 50% of the grass shows drought signs. Signs include the leaf blades folding in half lengthwise, the grass taking on a blue-gray tint and footprints remaining visible on the grass long after being made.

Water thoroughly and deeply when you do water. Light, frequent waterings on established lawns is inefficient and encourages a shallow, weak root system. If you have the typical Florida sandy soil, we know that ¾ of an inch of water will
wet the top 8-12 inches of the soil. Since most grass roots are in this zone, apply ½ to ¾ of an inch of water every time you water.

And don’t forget your container plants. Most container plants, having made their spring flush of growth, are in a very vulnerable stage. Any moisture stress now can result in wilted, dying shoots and stunted plants. The premature shedding of flowers or fruit is also one of the first plant responses if the root ball is allowed to dry out. Plants will sacrifice flowers and fruit under conditions of moisture stress, in order to survive.

Water your containers thoroughly when you do water, but avoid keeping the potting mixture constantly saturated. The practice of keeping the medium too wet is as damaging to plant roots as allowing it to become excessively dry. Saturated soil contains little oxygen which plant roots require.

**Tip of the Week:** Figs begin ripening later in June. Figs need large quantities of water in the fruiting season but will not tolerate excessively wet soil. A well-drained soil is required. When fruits begin to mature, the plant needs water about two to three times weekly for optimum fruiting. If rains do not provide enough water, provide water through a slow-delivery irrigation method. Heavy mulches will aid soil moisture retention.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names in articles is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.