



## Plants Stressed by Summer Heat and Drought

By Pamm Cooper, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Here at the UConn Home and Garden Education Center we have been getting questions about lawn and garden issues that have been particularly widespread in the state. Whether in the landscape or the garden, there is always something going on, good or bad, and keeping up with pests or cultural issues can be challenging. Because of the exceptional heat and drought conditions this year, both lawns and gardens are showing signs of stress.

If you have plants in pots or window boxes, keeping them watered sufficiently is only half of the problem with certain annuals. While proper watering is key, some plants grown in containers become stressed by heat as well, especially if containers are black in color. Soil will become hot unless these containers are put where they will receive some afternoon shade. Overhead watering during a hot, sunny afternoon can also cause leaves to scorch. If afternoon watering is needed, try not to get foliage wet.

Certain species of perennials, which normally do not need supplemental water, like some ox-eyed daisy cultivars, may be showing signs of stress this summer. If perennials are wilting during heat waves that are also droughty, watering once a week with 1 ½ inches of water may be necessary. Do not water the foliage, especially in the afternoon sun as disease and leaf scorch may occur.

Trees that have been recently planted usually require supplemental watering during heat and drought conditions for as many years as is equal to the inches in diameter the trunk was the year it was planted. For example, a crabapple planted with a 2-inch diameter trunk may require supplemental watering for two years after planting. After that, the root system should be able to take up enough water unless a summer like this one comes along. Water if you notice leaves starting to fold as this is a first indicator of water stress.

Lawns that did not receive any rainfall or supplemental watering may be brown and crunchy at this time. Without some irrigation or precipitation, lawns might not recover when temperatures cool and rainfall occurs. The ideal time to seed or renovate a lawn is from August 15 through

September 15, so now is a good time to think about seeding dead or thin areas. As long as drought and high heat conditions are ending and seed can be kept moist to ensure good germination, lawns can be seeded now. Do not allow seed to completely dry out.

Choose a lawn grass species that is suited to your soil and environmental conditions. There are many cool season grass cultivars that have been developed for various lawn conditions. Turf-type tall fescues are especially good for drought conditions and soils with a lower soil pH than bluegrass or rye grass can tolerate. They do need a deep soil, as most can root two or more feet deep. For poorer soils and sun conditions, fine-leaved fescues can be used. A mix of hard, Chewings and creeping red fescues is a good blend for any lawn unless the soil tends to be moist.

Some vegetables like tomatoes, squash and peppers may have suffered from blossom end rot this summer due to soils that were too acidic combined with uneven watering as fruit was developing. This condition can occur both in the ground, or in pots that had too much organic matter such as peat in the soil mix. Because of excessive temperatures and dry conditions, watering vegetables can be hard to get right, especially if plants are grown in containers. Get a soil test ([www.soiltest.uconn.edu](http://www.soiltest.uconn.edu)) to see if the pH needs to be amended for soils if blossom end rot was a problem. Tomatoes of certain varieties also may exhibit a condition called yellow shoulders. This condition is usually due to long periods of temperatures over 90 degrees.

Be alert to what is happening in your own back yard, for the sooner you discover any problems the better. Check out the fact sheets on the UConn Home & Garden Education Center's website ([www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu)) for advice on lawns, landscapes, and other gardening subjects. Here's hoping for some needed rainfall and cooler temperatures to help our plants recover from the trying summer of 2020.

To have your garden questions answered, feel free to call the UCONN Home & Garden Education Center, toll-free, at 877.486.6271, email them at [ladybug@uconn.edu](mailto:ladybug@uconn.edu), visit their web site at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension Center.



