

Coping With Summer's Heat and Humidity

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My mother was conversing with someone from one of the northern states a few years ago when the subject of weather came up. She was asked if those of us from the deep South became accustomed to the heat and humidity. The quick response was "no, we don't get used to it, we just cope as best that we can."

Gardeners learn to cope too, or they will experience a tough summer. Really high temperatures and humidity generally arrive in July and stay with us for about 3 months. If we ever return to normal rainfall patterns - and we haven't for the past three years, we will also experience frequent afternoon thundershowers.

Make life easier this summer by limiting gardening jobs to the early morning or late afternoon hours. Many cultural practices are best performed while it is cool anyway.

Sprays containing insecticides or fungicides should be applied during early morning hours. When applied during the heat of the day, spray droplets can burn foliage and stems although a normally safe product is being used. Even pure water, if sprayed on leaves during mid-day, can burn them.

Plants are also more turgid early in the morning, having all night to take up water from the soil and recover from the previous days wilt. They are therefore less likely to be damaged from handling, pruning or other gardening activities.

With this in mind, early morning is the best time to gather cut flowers for the vase and for taking cuttings that are to be rooted. Flowers keep much longer and cuttings are more likely to root because they are not moisture stressed.

Delay mowing until late afternoon if grass is wet from rain or morning dew. It is always best to mow when the grass blades are dry. You will obtain a cleaner cut and there is less chance of clippings clumping together. There is also a disease or two that can be spread when mowing under wet conditions.

Irrigate during early morning hours. Less water is lost to evaporation when it is applied before temperatures rise. The water stays on target better because there is normally less wind early in the day. Leaves and stems dry faster with morning watering. This provides less opportunity for diseases to enter.

Harvest fruits and vegetables during early morning. They will be more plump, fresher and will keep longer. If picked in the afternoon they will have built up what is known as "field heat" by commercial producers. When picked in this stage, the quality and storage time is reduced.

Question of the Week: I have purchased and planted a honeysuckle in my yard and someone recently told me that it is an invasive plant. Is this true?

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Answer: It depends upon which honeysuckle that you have. If you purchased it at a nursery, I suspect that it is the trumpet honeysuckle, *Lonicera sempervirens*, which is native to much of the state. It is also a good plant for attracting hummingbirds.

The honeysuckle that you should avoid planting is *Lonicera japonica*, or Japanese honeysuckle. It is an exotic that can become a pest due to its aggressive growth habit.

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For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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