Typically, July brings heat, humidity and frequent showers. This is the time to garden early in the day, stay hydrated, wear sunscreen and pace yourself.

**Right Plant, Right Place**
It’s not too late to plant summer annuals for added color in your landscape. Try sun-loving pentas, zinnias, verbena, coneflowers, shrimp plant, and ornamental peppers. Vines such as black-eyed Susan vine, hyacinth bean, trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) and trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*) can be planted now in full sun or partial shade. Bulbs or tubers for sunny areas include society garlic, butterfly lily, and gladiolus. Vegetables to plant in full sun are watermelon, peppers, okra and eggplant. Heat-loving tropicaIs to choose from are yellowbells, hibiscus, allamanda, and mandevilla. All are fast growing and provide great color. Ground covers to plant in shade or partial sun are mondo grass, Christmas fern, Southern woods fern, and holly fern. Try juniper, ornamental peanut, or Asiatic jasmine in sunny areas.

**Water**
Plants, especially newly-planted ones can die very quickly in this heat if they are not watered regularly. Water new plants every day until they are established, concentrating the application of water directly to the rootball. Watering early in the day decreases evaporation. For established plants, infrequent deep watering is better than frequent, shallow watering. Consider installing a rain gauge to keep track of rainfall and a rain barrel to collect rainwater. Water new plants individually rather than irrigating your entire yard. Plants in pots may need to be watered daily during dry periods. Potted vegetables and herbs may need water as often as twice a day when it’s really hot.
Empty buckets, wheelbarrows and plant saucers after a rain to discourage mosquitoes from breeding in your yard. For bird baths, ditches and ponds, you may wish to use a product that kills mosquito larvae but doesn’t harm other wildlife.

**Fertilizer**
Fertilize annuals, vegetables and herbs monthly. Fertilize palms this month with a palm-specific product. Blueberries may be fertilized in late July with an azalea/camellia product. Also, fertilize young peach and nectarine trees this month.

**Mulch**
Mulch is more important than ever when temperatures soar. It retards moisture evaporation, cools the soil and discourages weeds. Aim for a two to three inch layer of mulch.

**Maintenance**
Be prepared for hurricane season. Check trees for weak, damaged or broken branches and prune as needed. Cut back leggy annuals by about one third to increase fullness and flower production. Remove spent flowers to encourage more blooming. When temperatures are high, cutting grass too short can stress your lawn and cause it to suffer more from drought or pest problems. You may need to just set your mower blade on its highest setting. Keep the blade sharpened. If disease or insects are found, treat the affected area only, and follow product directions carefully. To check for lawn insects such as chinch bugs, remove both ends of a tin can and sink the can about three inches into the lawn at the edge of the affected area. Fill with water and insects will float to the surface where they can be identified.

**Wildlife**
A brush pile serves two purposes. It provides shelter for birds and small mammals and reduces the amount of plant material that has to be transported to the landfill. Plant types of plants that attract birds, hummingbirds and butterflies, like firebush (*Hamelia patens*), shrimp plant and butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*). Keep wildlife water sources clean and replenish daily.

Don’t set your gardening expectations too high this month. Save the really strenuous chores for cooler months.

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