

Dealing with Rain in the Vegetable Garden

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(Article published in Gainesville Sun on May 28, 2016)

If you are a vegetable gardener, rain can be a blessing and a curse. Heavy rains coupled with hot, humid conditions can wreak havoc to the garden, causing plant diseases, soil erosion, and flooding. This article will give you some tips about what you can do before and after heavy rains.

If you know that there will be a heavy rain, you can protect the garden in a few ways. You can cover up some of the more delicate or finicky plants using plant cloches and covers. Cloches are bell-shaped glass or plastic domes that fit over your plant. You can find them in garden centers and online. You can also make your own out of gallon milk or water containers. Remember to remove them immediately after the storm, so that the hot air captured inside doesn't kill them.

You should stake, support, and tie any plant that could use some extra support. Strong winds often accompany heavy rains. Secure your plants to your trellises and provide extra stakes and ties. Strengthen delicate plants by placing cages over them and adding extra soil around the base of the stem.

Clean up your plants. Minimize the amount of leaves and fruit touching the soil surface since it promotes diseases. Mulch, such as black plastic or pine straw, will reduce contact with the soil. Make sure that you don't mulch close to the stem. Trim off the bottom 12 inches of your indeterminate tomato plants to increase air flow and reduce diseases. Harvest any fruit or vegetables that you can.

If your garden is at a lower level than your yard, you can create a barrier to deflect the water and prevent flooding. You can stake down bales of hay to move the water past the garden.

If the storm has past, make a trip to the garden to survey your plants. Look for any leaf or stem damage. Remove the damage and stake up any leaning plants. If the stem broke, it may not recover. Below the stems, look for any soil erosion and cover any exposed roots immediately.

Monitor your plants for any fungal or bacterial disease. Diseases thrive in wet, humid conditions, especially powdery mildew and fruit rot. If you see disease in the garden, treat it immediately because it can spread quickly. If possible, remove affected leaves or fruit. If you don't know what the disease is, contact your local extension office to help identify it.

Other pests also increase after wet weather. Slugs and snails love hiding in damp areas, so remove any boards, stones, or other damp hiding spot. Empty any buckets, wheelbarrows, or pot saucers that have collected water since they are a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Ensure that screens are in place on the openings of any rain barrels.

Weeds may seem to materialize overnight after the rain. Mulch can prevent weeds and reduce soil erosion.

During or after the storm, look for areas that may not drain well. If plants are in standing water for too long, it can lead to root rot. If you have poor drainage, you may want to install plastic drainage pipes or plant in raised beds.

If the soil is saturated, avoid walking close to the plants because that can cause soil compaction or damage the roots. This is not usually a problem if you have raised beds.

Heavy rains can wash nutrients out of the soil, so you may want to add some compost, organic fertilizer, or soluble liquid fertilizer. Heavy rains can increase blossom end rot in tomatoes, which is a physiological disorder due to improper movement of calcium. Avoid excess nitrogen and remove affected fruit.

With a properly planned garden, many issues with rain can be avoided. Some maintenance before and after can help keep your vegetable garden thriving. For more information on this and other vegetable topics, go to <http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

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