

## Heat Stresses Plants Too

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With temperatures soaring and humidity unbearable, it makes me want to run right back into the air conditioning and pour a refreshing drink. We can do that, but unfortunately our plants cannot. Plants respond in all sorts of ways to too much sun or heat, so you may mistake it for disease if you don't know what to look for.

Due to my busy schedule as an extension agent, I waited to plant my garden until June and now I am paying the price. I look around my garden and I see wilting, discoloration, weeds, and even dead plants. It didn't help that I went on a work trip and didn't ask my husband to water the plants. I was hoping for summer rains that didn't come.

It's easy to know when most plants need water because they will wilt. Potted plants and new plantings need some extra love during the summer. It's even better if the water comes from a rain barrel. In addition to watering more often, you can mulch around the plant to help conserve moisture and keep the plants cooler. Mulch will also keep weeds down.

It's best to water your plants (and turf) early in the morning. This takes advantage of the cooler morning temperatures, extending the soil moisture conditions. Early morning watering will also reduce the chances of fungal diseases.

Did you know that when temperatures get into the 90s, some plants wilt even when they have enough water? When you overwater them, it can cause them to get root rot. It's best to check the soil unless you know they are thirsty.

Many plants, including trees, will drop their leaves when they are heat stressed. This is especially true during times of drought. Other plants will drop their flowers. This is common with vegetables like tomatoes and peppers.

The most unusual looking symptoms of heat or drought stress are sunburn and leaf scorch. Sunburn can occur when a plant is not in the right place, such as when a plant that needs partial or full shade is planted in full sun. By planting the right plant in the right place, you increase the success of that plant. Symptoms of sunburn can appear as white, brown, yellow patches on leaves or fruit.

Sunburn can also occur with nursery plants that are kept in the shade then planted in the sun or in hotter conditions. I have some leatherleaf ferns under a tree that got sunburned right after planting them but the new leaves look fine.

Heat or drought stress can also look like the leaves are scorched. It is due to the tree, shrub, or plant's inability to take up enough water to support it during the hot summer months. Poor root growth on one side of a tree can cause "flagging" where a whole branch dies. A friend of mine recently had drought stress on a potted blueberry bush and the leaves turned red and dead-looking practically over the course of a day, but the stem was still green.

The summers seem to be getting hotter and drier and some attribute that to climate change. One of the ways gardeners can combat climate change is to follow Florida-friendly landscaping principles. Several of the principles are described in this article.

To learn more about climate change and what you can do in your garden, attend the free class called "Climate Change = Garden Change." It will be presented by Master Gardener Susan Nugent at the UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County office (2800 NE 39th Ave, Gainesville) on Wednesday, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016, from 6:00- 7:00 pm. Register by calling 352-337-6209 (voice mail).