

Summer in the Garden

It's time to rest! Take a break from working outside. It really is very difficult to work under these conditions. This is a great time to plan and prepare for the fall garden and approach the heat with the respect it deserves.

1. If you need to work in the garden, go out between 7:00 a.m. and finish by 10:00a.m., or wait until after 6:00 p.m. to tackle a project. Wear a hat and sunscreen.
2. This is the time to plant a cover crop that will improve nitrogen and organic matter in the soils. My favorite is Lab lab, a legume that is nearly 20 percent protein. For this reason, it is used by ranchers, who normally plant it in late September/early October to feed deer. You will have to go to a ranch store to purchase Lab lab and will find that the smallest size bag is big enough to cover several home gardens, so share with friends. An alternative is to plant one of the Southern peas, like black-eyed peas, however, studies show that as a summer crop it does not set nitrogen in our area, but it will improve your soils by providing valuable organic matter in August when you turn it under about three weeks before planting.
3. Some crops can stand our heat, especially if you provide a bit of protection by planting them under shade cloth. Reducing the sun's rays by 30 to 50% will provide a place for Swiss chard (a great substitute for lettuce). You can also extend the time of harvest for crops already planted, like tomato and peppers, by using shade cloth over them.
4. Very soon you can begin seedlings for the Fall Garden. In mid June, plant seeds of eggplant, celery, and bell pepper. These should be started in a spot where you can keep out of direct sun and water is handy. Planting in seedling trays, or even old take-out food boxes works well. (Punch holes in bottom for good drainage.) Remember, watering is critical with young plants. You will also want to feed with a mild liquid fertilizer during this stage. Before planting in the fall garden, you will harden-off the plants by exposing them to sunlight gradually for longer and longer periods, beginning with about one hour in early morning. Takes about a week to harden off young seedlings.
5. In July you can plant seeds of broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, tomato and parsley. Then in August, plant beans, cantaloupe and honeydew, cucumber, carrots, parsnips and root parsley, leeks, hot peppers, and squash. After August 20, plant watermelon and corn.

By using shade to its full advantage and keeping plants and yourself well hydrated, we can survive the heat in the south Texas garden together.

For those who follow our Grow'n Growers Farmers Market, we will have asparagus, watermelon, a variety of squash, Swiss chard, kale, green beans, mustard, tomato, several kinds of pepper, eggplant, fare fresh eggs, grass fed beef, a large variety of herbs and edible flowers, along with goat milk soap, organic chocolate, along with juice and fruit drinks. Remember, every crop is grown locally and without synthetic chemicals. We are open every Saturday, 8:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. under the canopy at Firemen's Park.

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