

## Looking after your Garden in Summer

For your garden to thrive in our hot summers they need protection from high temperatures and wind which increase evaporation, dry soils and cause plant stress.

The following tips can help you to enjoy your garden over summer.

Most soils in the Salisbury area are clay soil which are mineral rich and retains water well.

Improve water holding capacity by increasing the organic matter content; dig in compost when initially preparing the beds and protect by mulching. If it's too late in the season to establish a new bed then spread a thin layer of compost (2cm) on top and mulch over that.

Over summer, apply mulch in progressively thicker layers as the heat increases.

It's time to start mulching when night time temperatures are over 15°C regularly. Early on a thin (1 cm) mulch of lawn clippings, leaves, straw or bark chips. Later in summer increase to 2 cm thick. Keep mulch away from stems so they don't rot. Before applying mulch, water the soil, then water the mulch when it's done so moisture doesn't transfer up to it. Keeping mulch moist over summer will break down and feed the soil. For the vegetable garden useful mulches include bedding straw (available from garden suppliers); sugar cane mulch and pea straw. Please note that pea straw can make a good habitat for pests- earwigs, millipede, slaters and slugs. Make traps for these pests to capture then dispose of.

Another way to offer protection for more delicate plants (especially during heat waves) is to reduce sunlight to plants. Pots may be small enough to move to a more sheltered location. Add extra protection by covering plants with 50 – 70 % shade cloth-white or coloured. Make a structure to support the cloth so that it is at least 5 cm above the plants, allowing bees and beneficial predators to still fly around.

Reduce plant stress by giving plants a regular supply of water during summer. Wasting water and washing away fertiliser can be prevented by checking the soil moisture before watering. You can do this by placing your index finger (or a trowel) in the soil down to its second knuckle. If it is moist (soil will look dark and stick to your finger) then no need to water yet. Another way to check is by looking at the leaves. Plants will often wilt during the day and recover in the evening when the temperature drops. If they don't recover water them (though don't let this happen to the extreme or they may die) When the signs are there that plants need water, water to thoroughly moisten the soil bringing water to the roots. Water the soil not the leaves.

Plants with roots 1 metre deep usually have access to double the amount of water that plants with roots ½ metre down do. When you plant them as seedlings you can train for less frequent watering by getting them to form deep roots by giving them a *thorough soaking once a week*. For established gardens you still want encourage roots to grow deeply to seek water, as this will form stronger plants that are able to withstand wind and heat stress. Check the soil and look for signs of stress in the plant, and when they need water apply it slowly and thoroughly to draw to the roots. When you think this is enough water, you can check that the water has gone deep enough (root level) by putting a spade in the soil.

Some of your plants may tolerate drier conditions than others so different parts of the garden may need less water.

Pots also need to be watched (likely needing more frequent watering) and watered thoroughly so the soil doesn't dry out. Test the soil in the same way as you would the ground (before watering and after) to check that the soil is thoroughly moist. Watering plants enough and not wasting water will require you to regularly check your garden.

Summer mornings and evenings are lovely times to both enjoy and also help the garden thrive. Seeing it thrive will also entice you outside !

