



Preparing for Fall Bloom

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Things to remember:

- 1. Overhead watering is okay during times of heat stress.*
- 2. Prune roses and perennials now for awesome fall bloom.*
- 3. Water infrequently, but thoroughly.*
- 4. Hold off on chemical sprays during extreme heat.*

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Now is the time to begin preparing your perennial and rose beds for the fall. Some of the beneficial results you'll obtain by taking a little extra time this month include bigger blooms and more of them.

I'm perfectly aware that it has been extremely hot even for the South—our temperatures have been topping out at or above 100 for several days in a row now. Nevertheless, taking a little time over the next few weeks in the early morning or late evening will pay off come Fall.

Deadheading and Pruning

Get your loppers, shears and pruning clippers ready! We're going to prune. This is a good time to prune your hybrid tea roses back down to about 3 or 4 feet. I recommend even trimming off the new buds because they are going to be fairly small due to extreme daytime heating. It's your choice, but would you rather have good looking blooms in this heat or would you rather have awesome looking blooms in the fall? Pruning all the bushes now will ensure a good fall flush of blooms in October—perfect weather for producing those huge blooms.

I also recommend applying a slow-release fertilizer at this time for your roses and perennials. This will prepare them for the fall months to come. Once you've applied the fertilizer be sure to water it into the soil well, especially in areas seeing extreme heat. Not doing so could burn the foliage or leaves on the plants. Just make sure they are well hydrated before fertilizing and you should be fine.

Your other perennial plants and trees need to be pruned now as well, but make note of special considerations. Not all varieties should be pruned—some of those include Azaleas, which are only to be pruned immediately after blooming. If you prune Azaleas now you'll remove the buds that have established themselves on the shrubs. Wait until these guys bloom in the spring and then prune. However, for the most part, other perennial shrubs, trees and plants can be pruned. These include crepe myrtles, daisies, salvia, old garden roses, gaura, etc.

When trimming these types of plants with the exception of my hybrid tea roses I use my pruning shears. This tool resembles a large pair of scissors and typically has fairly long handles on them. The blades are usually anywhere from 6 – 12 inches long. I prefer these when trimming plants with lots of bushy growth. They can cover quite a bit of territory when used properly. When shearing or trimming your plants simply use common sense. For instance, on the Indigo Spires Salvia plants I usually cut only the top third or fourth of the plant—basically trimming only the spent blooms. This will promote additional growth for the fall months. Fertilizing

after pruning will only help promote that new, lush growth that gardeners desire.

Once you're done pruning, shearing and clipping I like to wet the plants to help lessen the injury to the plant caused by the shearing process. And with all the heat they're sure to enjoy the drink.

Heat Stress

Plants during this time of year especially in the south can experience heat stress. You can spot this in your own garden fairly easily. The leaves of the plants may be wrinkled or droopy even when you know their feet (i.e. soil) are moist. In a nutshell this is caused by the plants transpiring more moisture than can be absorbed by the plant's roots. This can be helped by misting the plants from overhead in the heat of the day, but be careful not to over water. Over watering can cause even more transpiration loss by reducing the amount of air or oxygen in the soil. Over watered plants exhibit the same symptoms of under watered plants--drooping leaves. So be mindful of the moisture content in the soil before watering with any significance. Overhead misting will reduce the air temperature around the plants and reduce the moisture transpiration rate and thus help with the heat stressed plants caused by extreme temperatures.

Some other things that I try during times of extreme outdoor heat are to reduce or eliminate the rate of fertilizer I apply to the roses and perennials. This allows them a short resting period and allows them to build up energy for the fall (at least that's what I would like to think). They deserve it and they may even perform better for you in the fall by doing taking this approach.

Above I mentioned overhead watering. I know you'll find recommendations against this in some gardening literature due to the risk of disease that comes with moisture. However, I've found that if the heat is extreme the heat in and of itself will help reduce the survival rate of various fungi thus reducing the risk of blackspot and mildews, etc. I also reduce the frequency of chemical applications for both disease and insects during this time. With extreme heating chemical sprays can damage your plants. Thus, I risk the occasional fungal disease and pest or insect during these summer months. Once the temperatures begin to dip a little I suggest picking back up with your normal spray schedule for insect and disease control.

Watering

Make sure you are watering your plants infrequently, but thoroughly during the summer months. Some people water their garden plants for just a few seconds each. This doesn't help, but only hurts by encouraging the development of shallow root systems. When watering with a hose-end applicator I like to count to at least 10 before moving on to the next plant. If you're using an automated irrigation system make sure you're watering for an extended period of time. I water my perennial beds 3 times per week during the dog days of summer for a minimum of 30 minutes. This ensures deep penetration of the water down to the deepest roots. This should make for well established plants going into the fall blooming period.

In summary, now is the time to trim or prune your garden perennial plants and rose bushes. Once this is complete give them a boost by fertilizing with

a good all-around slow release fertilizer. Continue watering well and begin your normal spray routines for insects and diseases once the outside air temperatures have cooled a bit. You may experience some black spot or other fungal diseases, but that's better than risking hurting the plants with chemicals during extreme heating. A little work now will pay off in the fall with what every gardener wants—bigger and more abundant blooms.

Happy Gardening!