

What to Do in July 2021

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July 2

Perennials: Finish pinching back mums and other late summer and fall blooming perennials this week. For the rest of the summer, let them fill out and set buds. Clean up faded, browning foliage and deadhead (cut off) spent flowers that do not provide seed for birds or have ornamental seed pods that will last for winter interest.

Flowers: Last call to plant marigold, nasturtium, zinnia, and other fast maturing flowers to have a pop of new color in the fall. Choose varieties that mature in approximately 50 to 70 days.

Fruits and Vegetables: When garlic has 4 or 5 leaves remaining, it's time to harvest. Remove the withered outer leaves and hang or dry the bulbs in one layer in a shady, protected place. An airy shed or garage is ideal. When fully dried, trim off the roots. The tops may be trimmed or left intact for braiding. For fruit crops such as cherries, raspberries, and strawberries, if you don't have enough to share with the birds, protect the ripening fruit until harvest. You can cover small plants with netting. Larger plants may need to be caged.

Trees and Shrubs: If needed, wrap up the bulk of the work of shaping the hedge now (both deciduous and evergreen). You can take a few snips here or there to neaten up plants later, while avoiding heavy pruning late in the season. Practicing healthy pruning practices and not pruning late in the season can reduce the development of weak tender growth that is attractive to pests and may not fully harden off before freezing weather.

Lawns: You can readjust the mower blade to the highest setting to cut the grass at a height of 3½ to 4 inches. This way, the grass crowns and roots are better protected from heat. (If you always cut at this height, the taller grass blades can support better root growth that helps to maintain plant health.)

Houseplants: Keep an eye on the moisture level of the potting mix in vacationing plants outside this summer. Containers can heat up the mix and dry it out quickly. You might need to water more than once a day. Frequent watering leads to nutrient leaching in containers, so make sure to continue fertilize as needed according to label directions.

General: A hose that's been baking in the sun will deliver scalding water to plants if you don't let the water run for a few minutes. Check the water temperature with your hand before watering anything.

July 9

Perennials: Order seeds of biennials such as English daisy, forget-me not, foxglove, cultivated mullein and sweet William to plant in late summer. These hardy annuals and biennials can germinate in fall to overwinter or sprout very early in spring to get a head start on the season.

Flowers: Check the supports for tall plants and flowering vines. These can become heavy and floppy this time of year, and in need of extra stability.

Fruits and Vegetables: Blossom end rot, a scourge of tomatoes, peppers, and some other crops, occurs from uneven soil moisture levels, whether supplied by rain or irrigation. Water the soil around the plants when the top inch of soil begins to dry and maintain a layer of mulch of an inch or two in depth. Mulch will help moderate soil temperature and reduce evaporation. Keep leaves dry to help prevent disease. Sow seeds of summer squash now for a delicious fall harvest. Keep fruit plantings well-weeded.

Trees and Shrubs: Remember to continue watering newly planted trees and shrubs deeply and at least once a week. Apply an inch of water weekly, inclusive of rainfall. Deadhead roses regularly, cutting just above a set of leaves with the largest number of leaflets on the stem (many have 5, some have 7, 9 or more). This is where new flowering stems will emerge. Prune climbing and rambling roses after they bloom.

Lawns: Grass growth slows down considerably or stops in hot weather. This month and next, the lawn won't effectively take up fertilizer. Wait until the weather begins to cool and steady rain returns in early fall to fertilize if needed, usually around Labor Day. A well-established lawn may be recycling enough nutrients that additional fertilizer may not be necessary.

Houseplants: After a flush of growth, prune or pinch back houseplants to keep them looking full. Keep an eye out for aphids, mealybugs, mites, scale insects and other pests. If you find them, contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

General: Mulching isn't only a springtime project. Restore mulch in areas that are looking skimpy to conserve moisture, discourage weeds and improve the overall look of the garden.

July 15

Perennials: Continue to deadhead (cut off) spent blooms and give the plants a "haircut" if needed to keep them neat looking and to encourage new growth. Scope out places where you can leave pest and disease-free stems and leaves through winter to provide habitat for pollinators and other beneficials.

Flowers: By mid-July, flowers in my planters and window boxes are leggy, tired – and some of them, dead. Consider adding heat-loving plants such as lantana and pentas. Deadhead plants that are worth saving, cut back trailing vines and leggy plants such as petunias, and fertilize everything as needed, according to label directions.

Fruits and Vegetables: Begin to start transplants of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and other late maturing crops indoors or a protected spot now for a fall harvest. Once apples have reached full size but have not yet begun to color, monitor for apple maggot by hanging one red sphere trap with a sticky coating per each 100 fruit. This may catch enough flies to reduce damage to a tolerable level if you have only a few trees. Keep the traps clean for best results. Contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

Trees and Shrubs: Continue to take softwood cuttings of butterfly bush, hydrangea, lilac, rose-of-Sharon, rugosa rose, viburnum, weigela and other shrubs.

Lawns: My lawn is tiny and I'm able to weed much of it by hand. If that's an option for you, remove weeds before they flower so they don't make new seeds.

Houseplants: Typically, it's too hot to do any transplanting, but houseplants are an exception. If the plants are bursting at the seams, move them to a pot no more than 2 inches larger in diameter (most houseplants don't like it too roomy), and settle them in with plenty of water.

General: Birds need water, especially during summer's dog days. Consider installing a birdbath in one of the garden beds. DIY versions can be made cheaply with clay pots and a big saucer. Browse online for inspiration.

July 26

Perennials: Most plants need an inch of water per week inclusive of rainfall. Make sure the garden isn't thirsty. If you have applied mulch, this will help retain moisture. Order bulbs now, rather than in the fall, so you're not shut out of popular choices, and you might even get an early bird discount.

Flowers: Take stem cuttings of disease and pest-free begonia, coleus, geranium, impatiens, plectranthus, sweet potato vine and tender varieties of hyssop and sage to root in pots. Set them in a protected place and keep the pots moist but not soggy. Bring the plants indoors to a bright spot for some flowers in early fall and to overwinter those that are tender perennials.

Fruits and Vegetables: Continue to sow seeds of broccoli, Asian cabbages, collards and kale for planting in late August or early September when the weather begins to cool. Check out possible spaces in garden beds where early crops will be finished to plant fall arugula, fast-growing Asian cabbages and other greens, lettuce and radishes. Provide an inch of water weekly, inclusive of rainfall. If you will be away, ask a friend or neighbor to water the garden and keep up with the harvest for personal use or donate to a local food pantry.

Trees and Shrubs: You can still take softwood cuttings now of deciduous azalea, shrubby dogwood, hydrangea, lilac, rose-of-Sharon, rugosa rose, viburnum, weigela and other shrubs to propagate plants cheaply.

Lawns: Don't worry if the lawn looks a little brown during dry periods if you allowed it to go dormant to conserve water. It's not dead, and it will green up again after several good rainy days. In the meantime, remove any weeds you see to stop them from becoming established in the lawn.

Houseplants: When you go on vacation, don't leave it to chance that container plants, planters and/or window boxes will get enough rainfall. Ask a friend or neighbor to water them for you and offer to do the same for them.

General: Drought, heat stress and scorch are common plant problems this time of year. If this occurs even though you water regularly, consider making plans to move a plant to a shadier location where it may be happier. Broadleaved evergreens are best transplanted in early spring, and young plants have a better chance of survival than large established shrubs. Some deciduous plants and needled evergreens may be transplanted in early fall. Contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.