

Summer Gardening

Kentucky GROW



The goals of this module are:

To learn how to maintain healthy gardens and landscaped areas during the months of July and August.

What you need:

- Weeding tools – hoes, trowels, or Japanese weeding knives
- Sprinklers, soaker hoses, buckets, or watering cans
- Mulch, to fill in any bare spots
- Kneeling pads for those able to kneel
- Pruning tools, such as pruners, loppers, and hedge shears
- Harvesting tools, such as baskets, buckets, ladders, hand-held pruners, and aprons
- Paper bags and twine if drying herbs foliage or seeds
- Fertilizer for annual plants
- Appropriate fungicides and herbicides if necessary, and the devices needed to apply them. Be sure to have the necessary safety equipment on hand.
- Bean, kale, and mustard green seeds for later harvest
- Stakes and twine for tall flowers
- Bird netting or other mechanical devices to keep birds away from ripening fruit

Time needed:

There are always maintenance tasks in the summertime, especially with diverse plantings that include flowers, vegetables, woody ornamentals, and fruit trees. This module is very flexible, as some tasks take 5 minutes and some a few hours.

How to prepare:

The area should be scouted ahead of time, and areas in need of the most attention should be noted. The appropriate tools and supplies can then be on hand when participants are present. People tend to give up on gardens during the hottest parts of the summer, so some cajoling might be necessary to get people to participate in the mundane but necessary chores of weeding and watering. Facilitators might wish to keep the “work” portions of the program short and spend the rest of the time on less taxing activities: a tomato tasting, flower arranging, making a craft with herbs, or a flower photography session.

The program:

Summertime is a wonderful season in the home landscape, as the bulk of the work has been done earlier in the year. Now is the time to harvest and enjoy your plants, but as temperatures remain high and rainfall decreases, it's also the time to pay close attention to watering. Pests and diseases also can get a foothold on thirsty and stressed plants. All types of plants need help in these areas, but each "specialty" has its own specific tasks.

Herbs

- Established herbs, especially the gray-leaved herbs such as lavender and artemisia, can typically stand extremely dry weather. However, any new transplants will need supplemental water if there is less than one inch of rainfall per week.
- Keep fertilizing annual herbs such as dill and borage, but take care not to overdo it. Over-fertilized herbs do not have good flavor, and mint becomes more susceptible to fungal diseases. Start reducing the fertilizer on perennial herbs.
- Herbs are rarely bothered by insects or disease, but if treatment with chemicals becomes necessary, carefully check the label for use on food-bearing plants.
- Keep on harvesting herbs, but do not remove more than one-third of the foliage of perennial herbs. The best time to cut plants is in the morning after the dew has dried but before the sun gets too hot. Use immediately, or dry them for later use. Dry them indoors in a dark garage or shed, or place them on a cookie sheet in the oven at 150 degrees until dry, usually in 3 to 4 hours. When using a microwave oven, place the leaves on a paper plate or towel and set the control on high for 1 to 3 minutes. Turn the stems over or mix the leaves every 30 seconds until done.
- If hanging indoors to dry, cover with a brown paper bag (punch some holes for air circulation) to keep the dust off. Herbs that dry well hanging in bunches include sage, savory, mint, oregano, marjoram, basil, lemon balm, dill, and horehound. Herbs to dry in trays include chervil, lovage, lemon verbena, parsley, thyme, and rosemary. To preserve the flavor, leave leaves and seeds whole until they are used. Store in airtight jars in a cool, dark cupboard.
- If seeds are to be harvested (coriander, cumin, caraway, dill, and fennel), cut the whole plant and place it, seed head down, in a paper bag. Tie the neck of the bag shut and hang the whole thing up until all the seeds have dropped out.

Vegetables

- Weed. This is a critical time, as any mature weeds will be forming seed heads. Catching weeds before they go to seed will result in much less weeding later. Border areas might need more attention at this time, and bare spots might need to be re-mulched.
- Keep on harvesting. Some vegetables such as cucumbers, eggplant, and some tomatoes, will continue to produce only if the ripe fruit is removed. If you desire colored peppers, leave green peppers on the plant until they turn red, orange, or yellow. Do not let ripe produce rot in the garden plot.
- Sow another row of bush beans. Repeat every two weeks until mid-August.
- Many crops would be unsuccessful without the help of bees. Wait until late in the day to spray insecticides to avoid harming them.
- Bulbs of garlic begin to mature at this time, as indicated by the yellowing foliage. Bend over any leaf stalks that have not already fallen.
- Plant seeds for a fall crop of kale and mustard greens.
- Keep watering, especially during fruit set.
- Pull up and compost any plants that are finished bearing. Reseed the space with another generation of vegetables, plant a cover crop, or mulch heavily to keep weeds down.
- Inspect plants for disease and harmful insects. Remove and destroy badly damaged plants. Use fungicides and insecticides only as a last resort, and check the labels for the time after spraying that the vegetables are safe to eat. Avoid working in a vegetable garden when leaves are wet, to avoid the spread of bacterial blights.
- Fertilize tomato plants with ammonium nitrate (5 Tbs/ 10 feet of row) two weeks after first picking. Place the fertilizer about 6 inches from the base of the plant, then scratch it into the soil and water.



Flowers

- Weed. This is a critical time, as any mature weeds will be forming seed heads. Catching weeds before they go to seed will result in much less weeding later.
- Water any perennials planted in the spring. These newly planted flowers will need extra care until at least their second year in the garden. Water established gardens if needed (watch to see if the plants are not recovering quickly once evening sets in. Any plants still drooping need water). Water deeply.
- Break up any hardened soil surfaces with a fork or other aerating device. Mulch to prevent crusting.
- Stake any tall flowers.

- Reduce or stop fertilizing perennial flowers completely. Perennial flowers need to slow down any new growth in order to begin hardening off for winter. Keep fertilizing annual flowers.
- Grasshoppers can be a problem. Handpick and destroy them, or trap them with a solution of one part molasses to ten parts water. Bury a jar in the soil up to the rim and fill with the molasses solution. Grasshoppers will dive in and drown.
- Keep on with the deadheading and deadleafing. Cut back anything that is finished flowering and looks “tired,” gangly, or is outgrowing its space.
- Order plants for fall planting.
- Stop pinching or pruning any fall-blooming flowers.
- Keep planting to a minimum. Divide bearded iris, oriental poppies, and peonies if needed. Keep the new plants shaded and moist.

Shrubs and Trees

- Prune out any dead or broken branches, and do the last shearing of shaped shrubs for the year. Shearing in the fall promotes tender new growth that might not have the time to harden for the winter.
- Do not fertilize shrubs and trees at this time. Fertilizers might actually harm them during hot, dry weather.
- Watch closely for pest and disease problems so that they can be stopped before getting out of control. They can be more damaging to water-stressed plants.
- Water any trees and shrubs planted earlier, paying special attention to shrubs planted under building overhangs. Water with about 5 to 7 gallons per tree once a week. As always, water deeply and slowly so the roots grow deep below the surface. An easy method is to drill holes in the bottom of a 5-gallon bucket, and then place the bucket close to the tree. Fill with water once a week. Rake up and destroy any diseased leaves. If a diseased tree has been cut down, remove the wood from your property to reduce the possibility of spreading disease to other trees.
- Deadhead flowering shrubs to promote continued flowering.

Fruit Trees

- Do not allow rotting fruit to remain on or under the trees.
- If birds eating the fruit is a problem, cover small trees with bird netting. Scare away the birds with hanging pie tins, mylar tape, rubber snakes or plastic owls, or other mechanical devices. These work the best if they are set out before the birds become a problem and if the devices are moved frequently.
- Keep weeds away from the trees, and keep any grass growing under the trees short. A better idea is to mulch under the trees, as it not only conserves moisture and keeps down weeds, but it makes the use of string trimmers unnecessary. It is very easy to damage the bark of fruit trees with string trimmers.
- Examine apple and pear trees for fire blight at least once a week until early August. If you catch it early, prune out the infected parts 6 to 8 inches below the lowest point of visible infection. Otherwise, let the infection run its course and make a note to prune in the winter.

- Apples or pears showing entrance and exit wounds should be removed and destroyed immediately.
- Every two weeks, continue with fungicide sprays for fruit rots, scab, and sooty blotch on apples and pears. Also, spray every two weeks for codling moth, leafhoppers, and pear psylla.
- Prune weak watersprouts in the center of peach, nectarine, apricot, plum, and cherry trees to reduce the incidence of Cytospora canker.

Accommodations for this program:

If working with ground level gardens, the aisles may be soft, uneven dirt. Thought should be given as to how the gardener will have access to the plot for watering, maintenance, and harvest. As with all Kentucky GROW programs, providing needed accommodations is an individualized process. Below are some ideas to get you started, but the best route to take is to listen to the person, as he or she will usually have the best ideas of all!



Ensure that all materials are placed at an accessible height and reach. Consider providing smaller portions of mixes and mulches rather than large, heavy bags. Adaptive gardening tools can be beneficial to help increase reach and efficiency for gardeners. Many wheelchairs and walkers have room for totes or garden bags to carry maintenance tools. See examples of Kentucky GROW tools to find the best tools to meet the needs of the individual and maximizes his or her abilities.



For those who have cognitive impairments, consider working as a team for this module. Break tasks down into steps. This can be a helpful strategy for many kinds of learners. Use photos or pictures to demonstrate each step. Provide options as not everyone will necessarily enjoy all aspects of garden maintenance. One person may want to water plants while another enjoys dead-heading flowers.



For those with learning disabilities, provide the information in a variety of methods. Some individuals learn best by hearing the instructions, others will prefer to see the step by step procedure in writing with pictures or photos, or have the instructions on tape. Written instructions will also be helpful for those with hearing impairments.



For individuals with visual impairments, review placement of the needed materials. Don't move items without informing the person. Ensure that the area is well lit. A magnifying glass can make materials easier to see. Provide any written instructions in large print and other alternative formats as requested. Use contrasting colors on garden markers. Consider how all the senses respond in the garden and include plantings that are aromatic and are interesting to the touch.

Where to go from here:

“Disease and Insect Control Programs for Home Grown Fruit in Kentucky Including Organic Alternatives,” University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, ID-21, 1997.

“Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky,” University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, ID-128, 2001.

“Organic Gardening and Pest Control,” University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, HO-72, 1995.

“Pruning Landscape Shrubs,” University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, HO-59, 2002.

“Pruning Landscape Trees,” University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, HO-45, 2001.

“How Dry Seasons Affect Landscape Plants”” University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, ID-189, 1999.

“Harvesting and Drying Herbs”, online at <http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/mod03/03900063.html>

The Complete Book of Herbs, by Lesley Bremness, Penguin Studio Press, 1994.

Diseases of Fruit Trees of the East, by Alan Jones and Turner Sutton, Michigan State University Extension, NCR 45, 1996.

Vegetables: Rodale Organic Gardening Basics, Rodale Press, 2000.

Water, A Practical Guide to Using and Conserving Water in the Garden, by Susan McClure, Workman Publishing, 2000.

The Well-Tended Perennial Garden, by Tracy DiSabato-Aust, Timber Press, 1998.

Vegetable Gardening for Dummies, by Charlie Nardozzi, Hungry Minds, 1999.

This material is available in alternate formats. Contact Kentucky GROW for more information.