How to brace the garden to resist heat stress

K-State horticulture expert shares tips to protect plants

By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — As Kansas temperatures rise, some garden plants will need to be protected, said Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini.

“It is tempting to automatically water plants on hot afternoons, but this is not always what's best,” Domenghini said.

Vegetable gardens need about one inch of water per week, she said. During a heat wave (above 90 degrees Fahrenheit) it may be necessary to water daily, or every other day.

“Before adding water to your garden, insert your finger 1-2 inches into the soil and check for moisture. If the soil is wet, hold off watering,” Domenghini said.

To prepare plants in advance of a heat wave, consider adding several inches of straw mulch around the plants.

“This will help reduce evaporation from the soil and will regulate the soil temperature, keeping plant roots cooler,” Domenghini said. “Make sure the plants are well-watered prior to the heat wave.”

She suggests watering as early as possible in the morning to reduce evaporation. Watering early also helps to prevent plants from drying out.

“Drip irrigation is ideal, but regardless of the method, avoid watering the leaves. Keep the source of water as close to the soil as possible,” Domenghini said.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden and yard-related questions to Domenghini at cdom@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.
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Story by:
Maddy Rohr
Maddy23@ksu.edu

For more information:
Cynthia Domenghini
Cdom@ksu.edu