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Summer Gardening Tips

June - September

By June, all of your spring cool season crops should be planted. If some were lost to frost, try another round of direct seeding or plant seedlings and starters of cool weather varieties. These will benefit from being planted in partial shade, instead of full sun like in the spring. Cover tender new plants on cold nights with row covers, burlap, or light blankets. Cool weather crops accelerate fruit and seed production during prolonged periods of heat, known as *bolting*. Since most cool season varieties are grown for edible foliage and roots, it's best to avoid bolting in most cases. For an example, cilantro does very well in cool temperatures, once the summer heat comes it bolts and the cilantro leaves are no longer very flavorful, but the seed is coriander, a great seed to harvest as a tasty kitchen spice. If you let your lettuce varieties bolt, there won't be much to eat from your crop, but it's a great way to harvest your own seeds. Remember to check how many days your varieties take to reach maturity and plant accordingly. Consider more rounds of cool season crops in late summer, as well. In Flagstaff, the last hard frost is typically the first or second week of June. The first hard frost in autumn is usually mid to late September. These are not hard dates and you should always expect fluctuations. Monitor temperatures and forecasts constantly. Some varieties of radishes, bunching or small onions, and leafy greens are ready to harvest in 50 days or less

and can withstand light frosts. These should be planted in late July or early August. Remember to use shade coverings during the hottest parts of the day.

Planting: Once nighttime temperatures consistently stay above freezing, it's time to put your warm weather crops in the ground. These are your cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, corn, and peppers. As well as any annual flowers. Continue to check how many days it takes for each crop variety to reach maturity. For instance, cherry tomatoes, 'Sun Gold' being a personal favorite, are ready for harvest in 50 - 65 days. Whereas your larger varieties, Brandywines or Beefmaster for example, take up to 80 days to reach maturity. Consider whether you want determinate or indeterminate varieties. Determinates are typically a "bush" or "compact" variety, they cease production once fruit is set on the top bud. Indeterminate plant varieties continue to push growth and seed production until killed by frost. Home gardeners generally favor indeterminate varieties as they produce fruit and seeds over the course of the growing season. However, determinate varieties are great space savers, do better in containers, and are useful for preserving, canning, and/or drying in mass quantities. During early summer, you may want to cover your tender, newly planted crops at night with row covers or light blankets. This will provide a bit of protection from the cool nights and help prevent sluggish growth.

Mid to late summer, or the monsoon season, is the best time to plant your native species, perennials, trees, and shrubs. The higher humidity and frequent precipitation greatly reduces stress on new plants and gives them time to establish a healthy root system before the onset of winter.

Fertilizing: An organic soil amendment, such as compost, should have been added as a top dressing to your perennials, trees, and shrubs in the spring. Annual crops and flowers should be planted in organically rich soil and benefit most from monthly top dressings and appropriate liquid fertilizer. Always remember the three basics of fertilizer: Nitrogen (N), Phosphorous (P), and Potassium (K). Nitrogen is extremely important for vigorous foliage growth, phosphorous for roots, fruits, and seed production, and potassium for overall growth of stems and movement of water. If you are having trouble with specific areas or species in your yard, get your soil tested. This will tell you what nutrients you may need to amend. You

can buy basic soil test kits at your local hardware store or nursery. Look for local labs that do soil testing to get more specific results.

Pruning: Once spring blooming shrubs have finished flowering they can be trimmed back. Prune down the stem or branch to just above a node that is developing new growth. Perennial species can be pruned after flowering to encourage another round. Keep in mind some native species spread via mature seed and do not benefit from a summer trim, such as lupines and milkweeds. If fruit trees have produced an overabundance of fruit, begin thinning fruits to several per branch to promote larger fruit. If you're producing a root crop, like Allium (garlic), remove the flowering part. In the example of garlic, that'd be the *scape*. This will allow the plant to focus its energy on the bulb.

Watering: For good growth and flowering before the wet season, water your gardens deeply once or twice each week. More frequently when it is hotter, drier, or windier. Observe the slope of your land and discern if you see any extensive run off of water. Building small berms with the dirt already in your garden will help you channel water more directly. Many established native plants will get by with less frequent irrigation, however, continue to observe them for wilt and water them accordingly. If the monsoon season is sparse they will require more regular irrigation in mid to late summer. Dripline irrigation is a good option for raised beds and established species. It's best to stay away from midday overhead irrigation to reduce transpiration. When monsoons arrive, cut back or eliminate regular watering. Check any irrigation lines you may have for clogs, leaks, etc. on a weekly basis.

Mulch: As the soil begins to dry out more quickly during the summer, redress a thin layer of mulch underneath your plants to retain moisture. You may need to increase mulch depth if early and mid-summer are especially hot and dry. Mulching can also be used to smother sprouting weeds. See our *Spring Gardening Tips* section for more information.

Maintenance: Keep up with the weeds before they go to seed. Thin crops and seedlings as needed. (Generally, a large tomato plant will need one square foot, while a carrot only needs about six inches.) Trim any dead or dying foliage, especially from your crops, annuals, and

perennials. Monitor for pests. Continue to monitor night time temperatures and cover your warm weather crops on cooler nights.

Harvest Time: Once your crops are ready to be harvested, pick them early and often. This stimulates more production and prevents the plants from going to seed early. Rinse them off outside, right into your gardens to make use of that extra water. Fruit that continues to ripen after being picked, such as tomatoes and cantaloupe, will actually ripen more quickly indoors where it's warmer at night. Dry and can fruits and vegetables when they are ripe and freshly picked. As the nights begin to cool down once more in late summer you can use old sheets as an emergency frost protector to extend your harvesting period. Another technique to help frost sensitive plants is to spray irrigate at nightfall. The ice that forms on the plants gives off heat as it crystalizes, providing protection to the even colder temperatures.

