

The Garden Plot, July 2007

By Robin Mittenthal, University Apartments Community Gardens Committee

The month from mid-July to mid-August is one of the hottest parts of the year in Wisconsin. Heat-loving crops like basil, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, and squash will be growing fast, and if you put in your first tomatoes in May, you might already be harvesting fruit from them. Though it is tempting to water these crops often, they are drought-tolerant and too much water is bad for them (water every 10-12 days if it has not rained; you have watered well enough if the soil feels moist but not muddy at a depth of 8 cm/3 in). You might also be tempted to plant more of these heat-loving crops now, but don't do it. They will start to grow just fine, but with our short summer, they will not have the 60 to 85 long, hot days they need to begin producing fruit.

Other crops like broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, peas, radishes, and many greens do not do well at all in the heat of this season. If you have already planted these crops, water them as described above once a week. Though they do not like the heat, the first week of August *is* a good time to transplant broccoli, cabbage, or cauliflower plants that you have purchased at a garden store or farmers' market. These plants will mature some time between late September and the middle of November, and they can survive cold and even frost (temperatures below 0 C/32 F). Some varieties of lettuce will be fine now if you water them often enough (twice a week is good), but you could also try tasty, heat-tolerant greens like amaranth, chervil, corn salad (mâche), mustard, komatsuna, orache, purslane, and tatsoi.

If you are growing flowers, remove old blossoms as they start to wilt. For many plants, this will encourage the formation of new flowers. Cutting flowers for your table also encourages new growth. In general, this is a time of year when some of the crops you planted at the beginning of the season may actually be dead or dying. This can be sad, but it's completely normal. Pull the old plants out, prepare the space again, and plant new, different crops appropriate to the season. The idea of following one crop with another is described in my garden manual under the heading "garden plans" (the manual is available for free at <http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org/tips/gardenmanual.shtml>).

You will have noticed that the weeds keep growing. Keep pulling them out, making sure to dig out the roots with a tool if necessary. If you don't pull out the weeds, they will compete with the plants you want for light, air and water. Even more importantly, they will make seeds that will make your weed problem worse next year.

You may also be having trouble with pests. If mice and other rodents are eating your carrots or other root crops, it may help to mound up soil around these plants as they grow. If rodents are eating your tomatoes, it may help to pick your tomatoes earlier – if you pick them when they have just begun to turn orange, and leave them in a warm, sunny place in your house, they will ripen well. Depending on what crops you grow, you could also be having problems with insect pests. The most common of these are illustrated and described in my garden manual, along with a few suggestions for things you can do to control them.

If you need more information about gardening, e-mail me at [mittenth@gmail.com](mailto:mittenth@gmail.com).

Happy gardening!