

in the garden



Summertime gardening

Words: Sandra Batley

With the weather warming up, it's time to get out into the garden and start preparing for the summer season.



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Summer is the season for entertaining outside or relaxing with a book under the shade of a tree. It's also one of the busiest times of the year in the garden. Keeping vegetables, fruit trees and plants healthy and happy through their growing season is vital. Simply follow our summer gardening care tips and watch your garden flourish.

Edibles

Now is the time to plant and harvest lots of delicious herbs, fruits and vegetables. Eaten fresh or picked to be frozen, pickled or preserved for future enjoyment, any of the following sun-loving edibles can be planted during the summer months: basil, capsicum, beetroot, lettuce, peas, radish, parsnip, onions, zucchini, kumara, carrots, cauliflower, beans, melons, cucumbers, →

1. Swathes of mixed perennials create a rich tapestry of colour during the summer months. Photo courtesy of the Auckland Botanic Gardens.

2. Hemerocallis (day lilies), roses and geraniums make a vibrant impact. They also make great cut flowers for the table. Photo courtesy of the Auckland Botanic Gardens.



silverbeet, sweetcorn and potatoes.

There is nothing tastier and fresher than produce grown in your own backyard. To grow healthy, delicious fruit and vegetables it's vital to keep them watered during the hot summer months. Regular deep watering is far better than light infrequent watering. The morning is the best time to water. Add a thick layer of mulch over the soil to feed, protect and conserve water. If you need to, install an irrigation system to monitor and manage the water requirements of your crops.

Fertilising is also very important to ensure continued healthy growth. Feed with organic fertilisers such as well-rotted compost and animal manure or liquid blood and bone. This is better in the long term for the health of the soil than applying general or synthetic fertilisers.

Keep fruit trees well watered and mulch liberally around the base of the tree. Feed your citrus trees generously with lots of compost or a good general citrus fertiliser in late summer. Put nets over the trees to discourage birds eating your berries and fruit before you do. Apricots should be pruned around February. Prune plum trees straight after fruiting once your tree has begun to bear fruit.

Flower power

During the summer months, many plants come into their own, providing an abundance of colour and scent in the garden. Roses are simply stunning at this time of the year. It's important to keep up with regular dead-heading, which will encourage repeat flowering. Also keep an eye out for pests and diseases and spray accordingly.

Perennials and other annuals should also be

watered and groomed regularly to keep them looking their best. Some benefit from a light prune after flowering to encourage new growth for the next flowering period. Now is also a good time to take cuttings of your favourite plants.

You can also sow any of the following to cheer up your patio or garden with some instant colour come autumn: *Alyssum maritimum* (sweet alice), *Papaver nudicaule* (Iceland poppy), *Myosotis* (forget-me-not), *Digitalis purpurea* (foxglove), *Primula x polyantha* (polyanthus), *Antirrhinum majus* (snap dragon), *delphinium* (larkspur), *Lobelia erinus*, *Alcea rosea* (hollyhock), *petunia* and *salvia* for warmer districts.

Lawn care

The hot summer sun can be punishing on lawns. Keep the lawn long to protect the roots and give deep soakings of water every four to seven days to encourage roots to go deeper. Mow weekly and ensure the clippings are removed. Set the blade higher than usual so as not to "scalp" the lawn. In areas where water is really scarce, don't water at all. If your lawn has weeds popping up, hand weeding down to the root can help you regain control.

Going away?

If you are going away during summer, ask a neighbour to water the garden for you or, if you can, set up an automated irrigation system. Harvest all the vegetables you can before you go so they don't drop and rot and go to waste. Pots can be mulched and given a good soak and moved to a shadier part of the garden to help reduce heat stress. ■

Drought-tolerant plants

Where water is in short supply, choose plants that can survive prolonged dry periods and heat while setting the theme for your garden.

Mediterranean style: Aromatic and colourful plantings of cistus, bougainvillea, lavenders and olives — these plants just crave the hot sun.

Go native: The wonderful thing about native plants is you can create a low-maintenance garden that looks great and requires little watering. They work well, especially in coastal areas where full dense planting can be achieved, yet without the need for additional watering after establishing.

Succulents: These plants are drought-tolerant and have a distinctive striking architectural form. They are generally identified by their foliage colour. They are happy surrounded by rocks and gravel in coastal gardens or contemporary courtyards. Consider *Aloe plicatilis*, *Dracaena draco* (dragon tree), *Aloe banksii*, *Nolina recurvata* (pony tail palm), *Butia capitata* (jelly palm) and gazania hybrids.

Traditional garden: This style can also be created in dry areas using annuals, perennials and shrubs that require little or no extra water. Gazania, arcotis, lavender, portulaca, petunia, convolvulus, euphorbia, rudbeckia and nepeta.



3. A mix of green foliage plants provides year-round interest, while red phormium and the burgundy-coloured native groundcover *Acaena inermis* 'Purpurea' add a bold accent of red. Photo courtesy of the Auckland Botanic Gardens.

4. Evergreen succulents and palms give year-round structure in this garden, while the tropical vireyas add a splash of colour. Photography by Lyn Cairney, Fusion Landscape Design.

5. A mix of kitchen herbs and flowering plants grow happily together in this edible garden. Photo courtesy of the Auckland Botanic Gardens.



Water-saving tips in the garden

By following these simple tips your plants and lawn areas will be green and healthy and you'll save water, too.

Check soil moisture before watering: If your soil is moist 10cm below the surface, you don't need to water. Over-watering encourages fungus, root rot, rusts, mildew and black spot.

Water when it's cool and calm: Wind and sun can quickly steal water meant for your garden through evaporation. Water in the cool of the morning or evening is best.

Aim low and slow: Water close to the ground at a rate the soil can absorb. Watering by hand or well-designed irrigation system is best. Moveable sprinklers are the least effective for saving water.

Soak, don't sprinkle: Less frequent deep soakings (once or twice a week) are better than frequent light sprinklings of water.

Using a sprinkler? Time 30 minutes: Established plants need only 30 minutes watering once or twice a week in dry weather.

Use a timer and moisture meter with your sprinkler: A timer attached to your hose allows you to deliver a controlled amount of water to your garden. A moisture meter will prevent over-watering by overriding your timer when the soil is moist.

Control your hose with a trigger: A trigger device lets you stop and start the water flow from your hose instantly. You can direct water where you need it without wasting a drop.

Mulch: Mulch is a thick cover of organic material laid over garden beds. Mulch helps to protect and insulate the soil, improve soil structure, conserve moisture and help prevent weeds.