

County: Harlan

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Revitalize your summer garden with a little TLC

Summer's heat and dry weather can take a toll on your flower garden. But with a little extra care, it is possible to bring it back to life for a few more weeks of vibrant color and texture.

With both annuals and perennials, making sure they get plenty of water is always important, but even more so in late summer. Annuals, in particular, will start to decline without an adequate supply of water to keep the ground moist. The general rule of thumb for watering your plants is one inch of water per week. Plants growing in pots may need water as often as every day throughout the summer, depending on the type of plant and the size of the container. Once the top few inches of container soil is dry, add enough water so that a little drains through the hole in the bottom of the pot. If rain doesn't supply enough water, you'll want to apply the necessary water in one application rather than in several small applications. Remember, the best time to water your plants is in the morning or early evening, preferably before 7 p.m.

During periods of drought, many annuals such as Wave petunias may appear to die. However, if you cut them back, water them regularly and apply fertilizer, they will often recover.

Another thing you can do to help your summer flower garden rebound is to remove spent, or old, flowers. This process is called deadheading. Deadheading helps encourage new growth that will produce new flowers.

Late summer is also the time to pull out the flowers that have seen their better days and plant new ones that are more suitable for fall. However, if you wait till the frost finishes off your summer garden, it will be too late to replant for fall.

Annual flowers that give a good show in the fall include pansies, ornamental cabbage and kale, and snapdragons. Perennials, such as anemones, asters and showy sedums, also give a good show in the fall but need to be transplanted the previous spring to provide their best show.

As you renovate your summer garden, be careful when applying fertilizer around perennial plants. Fertilizer applied after August may stimulate new growth at a time when the plants would normally begin to prepare for dormancy. And that can mean more winter injury.

Of course, all of this may be moot if you haven't carefully tended your summer garden throughout the growing season. If you've kept your garden well watered and periodically added fertilizer, your chances for a late summer and fall show of color are greater.

For more gardening information contact the Harlan County Cooperative Extension Service at 573-4464.

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