

Summer Gardening



by Noni Young

The Melbourne summer is renowned for dry hot days with fresh north winds. These are the elements that can really take their toll on the plants in your garden. During the hotter months of the year it is best to move any pots containing delicate plants to protected areas of the garden. For the rest, here are two things to think about to prepare your garden for summer.

Mulching

Perhaps the simplest and most important thing you can do for your garden to protect it in summer is to ensure that the garden beds are well mulched.

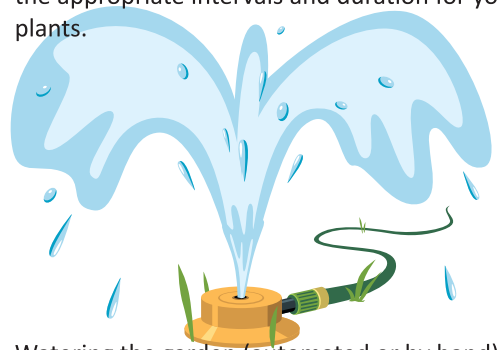
A good layer of mulch provides many benefits for your garden. These include: suppressing unwanted weeds; retaining important moisture in the soil; reducing the need for watering; maintaining an even soil temperature; and improving soil quality such as nutrient levels, pH and reducing compaction

There are many types of materials that can be used for mulch. When choosing the right one for your garden you should consider the aesthetics as well as quality and price. For example a straw mulch such as pea straw or sugar cane looks best on a cottage style garden or a vegetable patch and pebbles suit a modern architectural look. A mulch of fine compost is suited to gardens planted with the more traditional exotic plants that will benefit from the high nutrient level of this material and it looks more soil than mulch. The bark based mulches now come in a variety of colours and the black mulch has been popular as it provides a fantastic foil to foliage and flower colours.

Watering

Personally I think there is nothing more relaxing than hand watering a garden. However, for those of you that would prefer to waive this summer chore then a well designed and professionally installed automated watering system is the answer. The best and most efficient system is a drip system on garden beds (lawns require overhead sprinklers) with a rain sensor that overrides the system when the garden is watered naturally.

If you have an existing watering system in your garden, now is the time for some annual maintenance. Check that there are no blockages, the controller has fresh batteries, filters are cleared and the system is set to run at the appropriate intervals and duration for your plants.



Watering the garden (automated or by hand) is best done in the early morning before the heat of the day. Water at the base of each plant rather than the foliage. This ensures that the water gets to the roots where it is needed and will reduce the likelihood of moisture loving diseases on the foliage such as mildew and mould.

Happy gardening!

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