

Caring for Plants in Summer Heat

BY JESSIE ATCHISON

It's here: hot summer weather. Like many people, many plants don't enjoy hot temperatures and, much like an overheated left fielder, they need some extra care in order to keep them in top condition through the hottest part of the season. Follow these tips to give plants a fighting chance when temperatures rise.

Annuals

Annuals are important parts of any landscape, providing high impact color that can be changed from year to year or even season to season. However, while many annuals have tropical origins and perform well almost effortlessly in the heat, others need some extra attention during periods of high temperatures.

First, remember that good maintenance early in the season helps plants make it through the summer. Give plants plenty of water after planting to help them get established, and fertilize and water regularly throughout the spring and early summer. Good maintenance practices result in bigger, healthier plants that have a better chance of standing up to heat. Before installing anything, assess the planting site and choose plants accordingly: think about the amount of sunlight the plants will receive (sun or shade), the type of watering system you'll use (overhead watering, drip irrigation, etc.) and whether your climate is usually dry or humid in the summer. Mulch plants during installation; a layer of mulch 2-4 inches deep will help plants retain moisture and help the roots stay cool later in the summer. (If you didn't mulch when the plants

were installed, you can still apply mulch later in the season.)

When temperatures start to soar, there are several steps you can take to keep plants healthy. Plants will require additional water because they will dry out more quickly. Avoid overhead watering in high heat and humidity if possible, because it can lead to disease problems. Water during the morning so plants have a chance to dry out. "Deadhead" plants when necessary, removing old blooms to keep the plants looking nice. Cosmos, ageratum and African marigolds are just a few of the plants that can benefit from this practice. (Some varieties, like Wave spreading petunias and Fiesta double impatiens, do not require deadheading, saving time and labor. Ask your grower to recommend varieties like these that will save time and make things easier on maintenance crews.) If plants start to look "tired," i.e., if they don't flower as profusely or if they stop flowering altogether, pinch back 1 inch of growth. Plants like heliotropes, asters, marigolds and traditional petunias will benefit from pinching, re-blooming fuller and more freely.

Perennials, Trees & Shrubs

Perennials, trees and shrubs, like annuals, require a little extra care during the heat to keep them healthy. Mulch perennials when you plant them, whether it's spring or fall, to reduce water loss during hot, dry periods. Some perennials like

salvia or achillea (yarrow) can be cut back when they've finished blooming; they may not rebloom, but the foliage will look much better and provide a better show in the landscape throughout the rest of the summer. Provide extra water to perennials during dry spells. While newly established trees and shrubs should be watered on a regular basis throughout the summer months, well-established plants only need to be watered during long dry periods.

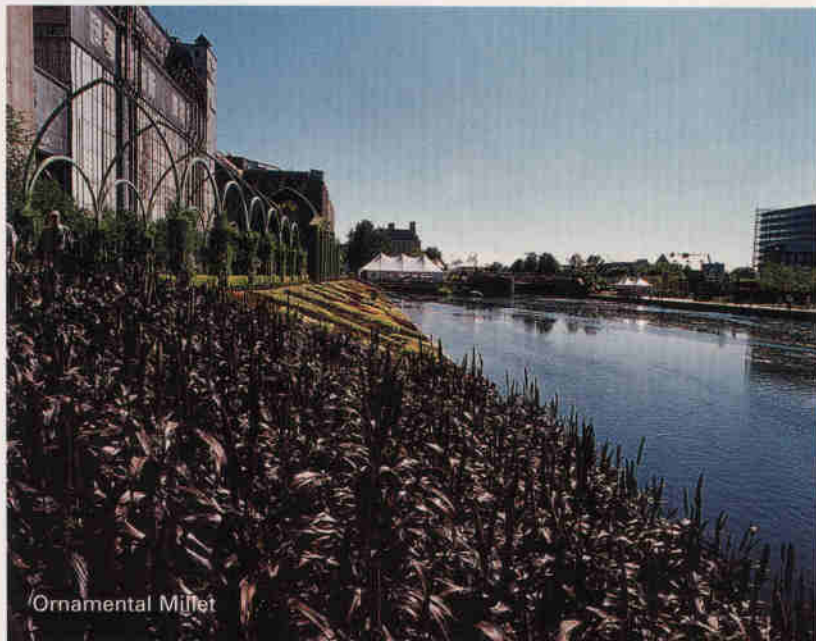
The easiest way to triumph over high temperatures is to choose the right varieties from the start. If your climate is hot and humid, try varieties like Wave petunias, which don't require deadheading or pinching and will flower throughout the summer, Butterfly pentas or AngelMist angelonia. For hot, dry climates, annuals like Landmark lantana and Fairytale portulaca perform well in full sun, love the heat and are drought-tolerant. Non-flowering annuals are an easy way to provide color during summer months, and they're simple to care for because you don't have to



Angelonia AngelMist Deep Plum



Spreading Pettinia



Ornamental Millet

worry about deadheading. Magilla perilla can be planted in full sun to full shade gets huge fast (up to 3 feet tall!) and provides colorful foliage in shades of plum, green, cream and hot pink throughout the summer. Purple Majesty ornamental millet, an award-winning variety, reaches up to 5 feet tall and turns a deep mahogany-purple in full sun, with fluffy seed plumes that attract birds. Silver Falls dichondra is an excellent groundcover for hot, dry areas and can be planted in full sun to partial shade.

Whatever you plant, remember to watch for diseases; high heat, humidity and extra moisture can lead to problems like powdery mildew, rhizoctonia or root rot. Try using sturdy plants in landscape beds and placing more delicate flowers in containers for seasonal color, because containers can be easily removed or replaced if they start to look wilted. Pay attention to the care requirements for different varieties, and plant those with similar light and water needs together. This makes it easier to develop regimens for water and fertilizer, and it makes it simpler for maintenance crews to keep plants healthy. Finally, avoid planting the same annual varieties in the same landscape beds year after year; this practice can lead to the buildup of organisms that can harm a particular type of plant, making your battle with hot weather even more difficult.

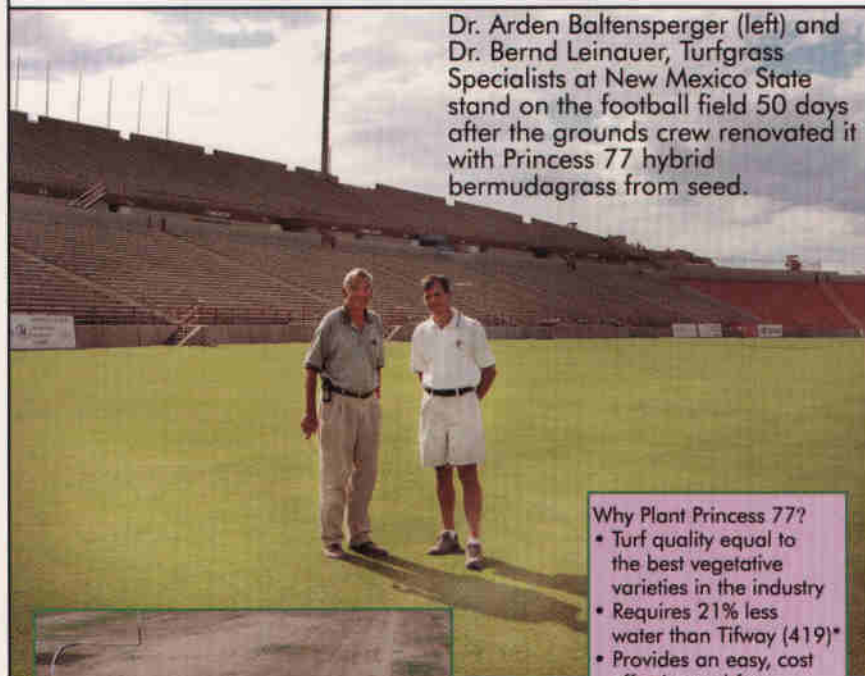
If you choose the right varieties and follow good maintenance practices, your landscape plantings will shine even during the hottest summer temperatures. **ST**

Jessie Atchison is with Ball Horticultural Co., West Chicago, IL. She can be reached at jatchiso@ballhort.com. Photos courtesy Ball Horticultural Co.



Lantana Landmark Pink Dawn

Princess 77 Helps New Mexico State Develop a Strong Field for Their Team



Dr. Arden Baltensperger (left) and Dr. Bernd Leinauer, Turfgrass Specialists at New Mexico State stand on the football field 50 days after the grounds crew renovated it with Princess 77 hybrid bermudagrass from seed.

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Removal of the existing ryegrass revealed an 85 - 90% loss of Tifway (419) on the field.

Following their first undefeated season at home, the New Mexico State University Aggies were looking to start the 2003 football season with their second consecutive home opening win. However, the players weren't the only people preparing for the upcoming season. The responsibility of having the field ready for play by the first snap of the ball fell on the shoulders of Bud Jones and the New Mexico State Grounds Crew.

Removal of the existing ryegrass revealed an 85 - 90% loss of Tifway (419) on the playing field. Renovation of the field using Princess 77 hybrid bermudagrass from seed solved the problem. 50 days later, the field was pronounced to be "at full density and in excellent condition." According to the grounds crew, Princess 77 held up "remarkably well" to the traffic of the first game.

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*Response of Bermudagrasses and Zoysiagrasses to Applied Water Using a Linear Gradient Irrigation Design, Sean Reynolds, 2000, Master's Thesis

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