

My Garden Burned Up Now What Should I Do?

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The news reported this morning that it is official; we have just lived through the hottest 3 months (June, July and August 2011) in recorded history. We are on track to beat the record of most days over 100 degrees. The heat, combined with drought conditions, dry winds and watering restrictions have caused epidemic damage to local landscapes. Unfortunately, crunchy lawns, dead shrubs, stressed trees and shriveled annuals and perennials are the norm rather than the exception. So, what is a gardener to do? Proper planting bed preparation such as incorporating 3 inches of compost and expanded shale, if needed, topped off by 3 inches of mulch to help retain moisture and keep the soil cooler is an important first step. Once or twice a week irrigation (a total of about one inch) to encourage an deep root system is also helpful. Drip irrigation is the ideal choice because it applies the water where it needs to go and also conserves the valuable resource. These steps play a vital role in the health and survival of future landscapes but plant selection may be the key to success. Whether we like it or not, there will be replanting involved in the recovery process.

It is important to choose replacement plants wisely to increase the chances that the new plants will fare much better in the event we suffer though another heat wave like the summer of 2011. There are many fine lists out there of plants that are either native or well adapted to our unique zone 7b climate. Some of them include the Texas Superstars®, <http://texassuperstar.com/plants/index.html>, The Dallas Arboretum Flameproof®, <http://www.dallasplanttrials.org/awards1.htm>, Earth-Kind® roses, <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/roses/cultivars/>, and Plants for Texas, <http://plantsfortexas.com/plantlist.html>.

What follows is a list of plants I have noticed that have done very well in spite of the awful conditions this summer. These observations are from my personal garden and from the garden center where I work as a Live Nursery Specialist for a major big box store.

One of the most difficult areas of the garden to landscape is a dry shade bed under the canopy of large trees. The following plants have done very well in my garden and in the store in spite of the heat and my infrequent and sometimes irregular watering schedule. Turks cap (*Malvaviscus*), the pink and red varieties, inland sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), Purple Heart (*Setcreasea pallida*), cast iron plant (*Aspidistra elatior*), asparagus fern (*Asparagus densiflorus 'springeri'*) and Dwarf Mexican petunia (*Ruellia brittoniana 'Katie'*). In shade that has more regular irrigation I have had good luck with purple shamrock (*Oxalis triangularis*).

In full sun the following annuals have performed admirable: Sweet Potato vine (*Ipomoea 'Margarita'*), ice plant (*Delosperma cooperi*), angelonia (*angustifolia*), moss rose (*portulaca*), purslane, Million Bells (*calibrachoa*), blue daze (*Evolvulus glomeratus*), petunia 'Pretty Much Picasso', petunia 'Raspberry Blast', The Cora™ series vinca and the Profusion series zinnia. Perennials that have done very well include rosemary, red yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*), Gold Star Esparenza (*Tecoma stans 'Gold Star'*), lantana, salvia greggii (all colors), phlox 'John Fannick', black foot daisy (*Melampodium leucanthum*),

hardy plumbago (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*), passion vine (*Passiflora incarnata*), Mexican Bush sage (*Salvia leucantha*), purple coneflower (Echinacea), Dwarf Firebush (*Hamelia patens*), Pink Scullcap (*Scutellaria*), Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*), zexmenia (*Zexmenia hispida*), Mexican Feather Grass and Dwarf Fountain grass,.

Shrubs that have continued to look good all summer include: Silverado sage, cotoneaster, oleander, Southern Wax Myrtle, Italian Cypress, barberries, boxwoods, most junipers, most hollies and the Knock-Out rose 'rainbow'. Rainbow was the only rose in my garden that did not take a break from blooming even in the worst heat.

In the larger plant category you simply cannot beat the Crape myrtle (most sizes and colors) and the desert willow for the drought tolerance and ability to bloom in spite of the terrible heat.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of plants that should be considered for your landscape. There are many more great plants from which to choose. I encourage readers to take the time to look into the web sites listed above and drive around local neighborhoods to look at what survived and what did not fare so well. Make notes about the plants you see and ask for them at your local nurseries.

Always remember that a plant that is native or well adapted and drought tolerant as a mature specimen will still need irrigation for the first year in order to establish a root system that will survive heat and dry conditions.

As gardeners we will not be defeated by Mother Nature. We will replant and our landscapes will be better for our efforts and more resistant to the fickle winds that blow our way. As I wrap this up, today we have officially broken the all time record for most days in a year over 100 degrees. Fall cannot get here soon enough for me! Fall is also the best season to plant your landscape because new plants can take advantage of the cooler temperatures and rain (hopefully) to establish themselves before they are required to face another heat wave. So get out there and start gardening again!