It’s not a dry heat anymore…
By Laura Murphy

August can be a miserable month for gardeners and plants alike. The weather forecast seems to be stuck, each day the same as the day before. Temperatures are high but it is the increase in humidity which makes it so uncomfortable. “But it’s a dry heat” does not apply to August. Here are some specific tips to help your garden make it through.

**Planting Palms**

As with July, this is not the best month to be planting much except palms. If you have been thinking about planting one, now is a good time. For newly planted palms, water every day for the first two weeks. Then reduce to every other day for three or four weeks. After that, water every five or six days. You want to keep the soil moist but not soggy until new growth appears.

Once established, water palms to a depth of three or four feet every ten to twelve days during the hot weather. Palms have special nutrient needs so make sure you purchase a fertilizer specifically for them. Trim away any dead fronds but be careful about pruning any with green still on them. Over pruning will eventually weaken and kill your palm.

**Watering**

Continue watering on your summer schedule. Make sure you are watering long and slow enough to allow the water to penetrate to the root zone. As a reminder, for annuals and perennials this is 6-18”, for shrubs 24” and for trees 36”. Then make sure that before you water again the root zone has dried out.

The best time of day to water your plants is in the early morning. The cooler temperatures allow more water to penetrate the soil and less of it evaporates. This also gives your plants the moisture they need to cool themselves during the day.

If you notice plants that look wilted in the late afternoon, they may still be getting enough water. Sometimes our sun and heat are so strong that no amount of water in the soil can prevent it. If you notice wilted leaves early in the morning though, this is a sure sign that the plant is thirsty.

**Pruning**

Do not prune this month; the force of the sun is way too much. Exposing areas of the plant which have previously been shaded will result in sunburn. This creates wounds that allow insects and
diseases to penetrate. Some plants such as bougainvillea and oleander are very hardy and can be lightly trimmed to keep tidy if necessary.

This summer has been especially hot and many plants have varying amounts of dead areas called die back. It is best to wait until September to prune these out. When cooler weather arrives sometimes areas that look dead will sprout new growth.

If winds have broken branches, go ahead and prune these quickly. If doing so exposes new wood, cover these areas with shade cloth to prevent sun damage. Remove when the weather cools and by next year the skin will be toughened up enough that it won’t sunburn.

Fertilizing

Wait until late September or October to do any fertilizing. Many people mistakenly believe the yellowed leaves they see mean they need to apply fertilizer. In August the main causes for this are too much sun or too much water. Both conditions are a stress to the plant and you never want to fertilize a stressed plant.

Citrus

This has been a rough summer on citrus and we are getting a lot of questions about the yellowing leaves. Citrus does need full sun to do well but every summer some leaves will sunburn, especially on the south and west side of the tree. This year it is more pronounced than usual due to the unusually high temperatures. As long as the entire tree is not affected and you are watering properly, do not worry. The tree will produce new leaves in the affected area when the daytime temperatures decrease.

What is proper watering for summer? If your tree has been in the ground for less than one year, water every three days to a depth of three feet. For established trees water every four to seven days to a depth of three feet throughout the entire diameter of the canopy.

With our heat and higher humidity it is easy to get discouraged as gardeners. It is not comfortable to be outside working and most of our plants do not look their best. Try and remember that cooler weather is almost here. In the meantime, now is a good time to study gardening books and plan for the fall planting season – it is just around the corner!

Laura Murphy is a Lake Havasu City Master Gardener. For more information, contact the Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners by calling their Hot Line at 505-4105. Visit us at Home Garden Day, the first Tuesday of each month from 11-1 at the Library.