

Commercial Horticulture Happenings

This summer's heat has caused heat stress not only with people but plants as well. I have spoken with an unusually high number of people this year that have heat stress related problems with their plants. Everyone knows the daytime temperatures are high, but the high nighttime temperatures affect the plants as well. There is not much we can do about the heat, but there are a few things that we can do to help with the stress.

Mulching is a cultural practice that will help not only with weed control but with heat stress as well. Mulching will keep the roots cooler in the summer and prevent the soil from drying out as fast. Many materials can be used for mulch, but I do want to caution you about mulching materials. If hay is used as mulch you need to know what herbicides were used in the hayfield before the hay was cut. Some herbicides used in the hay may damage the plants in the garden. Black plastic mulch can be a good thing early or late in the year, but when the temperatures get over 85°F, the bed will stay too hot and white plastic should be used. When the temperatures get hot, the plants should be large enough to shade the black plastic from the sun. If the crop planted in the spring is finished and you are replanting in the same black plastic bed later in the summer, it is possible to paint the black plastic by mixing 1 gallon of white paint with 4 or 5 gallons of water.

Of course irrigation will help heat stressed plants as well. Diseases are encouraged when plant's leaves stay wet. Therefore, watering the roots with drip irrigation and not the leaves with overhead sprinklers is a very good practice. With the heat we have had this summer, plants dry out fast. No matter how much rain you receive on one day, eventually the plants will need another rain. A properly installed irrigation system will ensure moisture when needed. Management of the irrigation is a concern as well. I have visited with several producers this summer that had drip irrigation but were not using it correctly and the plants were staying too dry.

I cover Cleburne, Clay, Randolph, Talladega, Coosa, Tallapoosa Chambers, Lee, Russell, Macon, Montgomery, Elmore, and Autauga counties. If you farm in any of these counties and would like to receive e-mails when educational meetings are held, please send me an e-mail at eastwil@aces.edu and I'll add you to my list. If you farm in other counties, I do not mind adding you to my e-mail list, but the best thing is to contact your commercial horticulture agent to be added to their list. If you do not know who your commercial horticulture agent is, just call your county extension office. If you know of topics you would like to be discussed at future meetings, just let me know. Commercial horticulture includes fruit and vegetable production, nursery and greenhouse production, cut flower production, Christmas tree production, and golf course and athletic turf. If you are looking for information on any of these topics, just call your county extension office.

Chip East
Regional Extension Agent
Commercial Horticulture
Office 256-354-5976
Cell 256-846-0314
e-mail eastwil@aces.edu