

Taking Care of the Garden

By: Sarah Adams

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The weather so far this year has been crazy!! While I will take this cooler and more rainy weather over last year's miserable weather anytime, it does present its challenges. High winds, hail, and driving rain can wreak havoc on our newly planted spring gardens. As long as our flower gardens are planted in well-drained soil they will likely recover just fine although they may look a bit worse for the wear. Just give the flowers some time and they will be beautiful soon.

Our vegetable gardens are a little bit trickier. Hail, strong winds, and driving rain can cause significant damage to plants, especially young and tender ones. If your garden was affected by the severe weather, here are some steps you can take to assess the damage and help your plants recover:

1. Check for physical damage to the plants. Look for broken stems, torn leaves, and bruised or damaged fruits or vegetables. Also check to be sure that the plants are not sitting in water. It is ok for the soil to be very wet but the plant should not be sitting in standing water. If it is in a container, carefully hold the plant while tipping the container so that the water can pour out but the plant stays put. Try removing the excess water with a trowel and add dry soil to the bed so that the moisture can be wicked up. If a plant is in distress, then it will not be productive.

2. Evaluate the severity of the damage. If the damage is minor, maybe just one branch was affected or a few leaves were damaged, then the plants may recover on their own. If a main stem has been broken, you may not have time to wait for the vegetable plant to recover. It may be best to replace that plant with a new transplant. Remember that tomato plants will fail to set fruit in hotter temperatures, so we would like our tomato plants to be more mature at this point in the growing season. Transplants will grow more quickly this time of year because the conditions are warmer and they have not suffered the distress of the weather conditions; so, any new transplants will catch up quickly.

3. Keep an eye on the plants over the next week or so and remember plants are strong. Once you have decided whether to keep or replace your vegetable plants, then just continue maintaining good gardening practices.

Good gardening practices for vegetable gardens are the key to productive and beautiful vegetable gardens. Water on a regular schedule. Water deeply and avoid getting water on the leaves, which can promote fungal diseases. Vegetable plants need regular fertilization to grow and produce well. Mulch helps to retain moisture and is

particularly helpful in the hot days of our summer. Mulch also helps to suppress weeds, and regulate soil temperature.

Regularly monitoring your garden for pests and diseases is a gardening practice that is often ignored or not done until it is too late. Regularly inspect your plants for signs of pests or diseases. Catching problems early is the most effective way to prevent them from spreading and causing more damage. Inspect the undersides of the plant's leaves to see if there are eggs laid. If you find some, check to make sure that they are from an undesirable bug, and then wipe them off of the leaf. This easy, nontoxic method will save you heartache and misery later on in the growing season.

Also, remember to harvest your vegetables regularly to promote continued production and prevent over-ripening or rotting. By following these best vegetable gardening practices, you can help ensure a successful and bountiful harvest.

BCMGA continues to offer several free education programs in May. We are presenting our BCMGA Saturday Seminar from 9:00-12:00 on May 27 in the Taylor County Extension Office Conference Room, and the topic is Pests in the Garden. If you have any questions, call the Taylor County Extension Office at 325-672-6048 or email us at mgardeners@yahoo.com. We hope you will like us on Facebook and visit bcmgtx.org for all Big Country Master Gardener information and events. We are here to help you!