



## July Gardening Tasks & Tips

July is perhaps the hottest season here at Seven Oaks Farm, home of the Home Garden Joy website. I joke that we have several seasons here in Virginia: Winter, Wind Season, Spring, Summer, Drought and Fall. July counts as “Drought Season” because there’s never enough rainfall!

Although Seven Oaks is located at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia (zone 6B or 7), it can be as hot as the Deep South or more temperate, depending on the year. It's important to learn not only your general climate, but the microclimates in your garden. A microclimate is a pocket of space in the garden that tends to be warmer or cooler than average. My vegetable garden, for example, tends to be just slightly cooler on the northern side than the southern side. A slope above the northern end seems to encourage cooler air to pool at the base of the slope, right over the northern edge of my vegetable garden. Knowing microclimates and areas where water pools or dries quickly can help you adjust your garden accordingly.

### July's Gardening Tips

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- Tackle garden chores in the very early morning or late evening hours when it is cooler!
- Pull up spent pansies and other spring flowers that are wilting from the heat. Replant the area with annuals, which often go on sale at this time of year as nurseries and garden centers try to sell out older stock.
- If you haven't already done so, prune back chrysanthemums. This will encourage them to flower later in the fall. If you leave them as is now, they will start blooming during the summer months.
- Water window boxes, planters and pots daily.
- Water in the evening to conserve water. If mildew or mold is a problem, water in the morning.
- Watch for slug damage. They leave a silver colored, slimy trail and eat plant leaves from the edges in. Leave a tiny amount of beer in a bottle with the cap off and tilt the bottle on its side. Slugs love beer. They'll slither in for a drink and get caught in the bottle.
- Another organic slug control method is diatomaceous earth. It's a natural ground up fossilized sea creature (diatom.) You sprinkle it like a powder near plants. It won't harm plants, but will cut up soft bodied insects.
- It's okay to continue feeding birds in the summer months, so keep your bird feeder stocked. It won't make them dependent on humans for food.
- Keep bird baths clean. I keep a scrub brush just for the bird bath in the garage. Every time I fill the bird bath, I give it a quick scrub and rinse.

- Clean hummingbird feeders when you replenish the nectar. Rinse thoroughly.
- Succession plant fun flowers like sunflowers so that you have a continuous bloom.
- Catalogs for fall bulbs start arriving now. Keep them on hand, and start planning your bulb purchases.
- Water the garden well, especially vegetable gardens. A soaker hose or drip irrigation waters plants where they need it the most while conserving excess water.
- Keep up with your weeding and add mulch if you need it.
- Harvest vegetables as they ripen. Learn how to blanch and freeze vegetables such as tomatoes and peppers so you can pop them into the freezer for use year-round.
- Feeling adventurous? Try canning! Buy a good canning book like the *Ball Big Book of Preserving the Harvest*, a classic. Make sure you purchase the right kind of canner. Hot water bath canners are good for pickled foods and some acidic foods. Pressure canners are a must for other vegetables to preserve them properly and prevent spoilage. When in doubt, see if your local cooperative extension office offers a class in safe home canning.
- Enjoy the garden! Don't forget to take time to smell the roses. Go outside and gaze at the stars. Watch for bats. Catch and release fireflies. Have fun in the garden!

For more gardening tips, tasks, and tricks, please visit [Home Garden Joy](http://www.homegardenjoy.com)

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