



Spring weather can take a toll on our gardens.

A normal amount of rain is a wonderful thing to a gardener! Each time Mother Nature relieves us of dragging out the hose or filling the watering can it's another little bonus. Hot sunny days make us rejoice. If the days are too hot we're happy about a storm and a cold front. But sometimes our Northern springs can throw too many curves our way. It can be disheartening for anyone but when you're intimately acquainted with your landscape plants, the roller coaster of weather brings extra worries.

Bear in mind that most of our landscapes and gardens are populated by plants that tend to power through bad winters, unpredictable springs, and unusual summers. Older varieties proved their worth long ago. Newer ones go through a string of plant trials in climates similar to ours. Plant breeders constantly work to make our flowers, shrubs, and trees hardier and more disease resistant but there are a few things you can do to ensure less heartbreak in the garden.

Prevention is first

Tender buds can suffer when the weather takes a strange turn. Take note of nighttime temperatures. This is particularly important for **annual flowers** that go outside before Memorial Day. If the temperature is going to drop below 40°, either bring containers indoors or cover them. No gardener should be without a few old sheets to use outdoors.

Tropical plants outdoors should be brought inside if nighttime temperatures are going to dip below 60°.

Perennials, shrubs, roses, and trees rarely suffer long term damage from a sudden frost, but short term, they may lose buds and therefore flowers this season. If your plant is ornamental and small enough use sheets to cover them during a hard frost. Leaves are capable of recovering quite nicely, and a new flush will come out after some die off, but flower buds are more tender than leaf buds.

Avoid using plastic as any moisture trapped inside will freeze. Your fabric needs to be breathable.

Keeping a clean garden is essential. Making sure old leaves and fruits are raked up and disposed of is especially important during periods of rainy weather. Otherwise, it can be a perfect situation for fungus and bacteria to take hold. Weather extremes will stress plants and that is when a disease can strike.

If your **container gardens** are getting heavy with rain-soaked soil that doesn't dry out, move them to a dry spot with good air circulation. Even a spot under cover will help such as a porch or garage.

Pests may be enjoying our weather! Slugs will be very happy to come to the surface and feast instead of going further underground seeking moisture. Wet leaves left around plants are a perfect place for slugs to leave their eggs. Sprinkle Epson Salts or a slug repellent around plants to keep slugs at bay.

Pruning during specified times for your plants such as hydrangeas, rhododendrons, and lilacs will help to keep the airflow around branches sufficient to maintain health.

If very rainy periods produce areas of **washing out** in your garden time and again, consider making a few simple trenches filled with stones to divert water away from the area where water enters the bed. You'll find that this is well worth it over the long haul.

Mulch around plants is wonderful for many reasons. We usually think of it as a way to help keep moisture in the ground but it also helps control washing out and soil splatter.

Check your plants for signs of disease. Spots, decay, or discoloration on leaves can be an indication that fungus is beginning to take hold. If this is the case, remove the damaged leaves and use a fungicide such as Neem oil or Serenade.

Keep an eye on **tomatoes**. Wet weather can bring **tomato blight**

Powdery Mildew is sure to rear its ugly head in wet weather. This fungus appears as a white coating on plant leaves. Some plants are particularly prone to it such as lilacs and garden phlox. Newer varieties suffer much less. Neem oil and Serenade can be used for this as well.

Plants that are falling over due to rainy weather will benefit from being staked. You may see this happen to some flowering shrubs and large, bushy perennials.

Fungicides should be used when a problem arises, but can also be used proactively before damage begins. Sunny and warm weather always returns during the season and your rainy day woes will be over!