



Summer Landscape Preparation

Protect your valuable landscape investment against the scorching sun!

As temperatures begin to rise into the triple digits, people tend to seek refuge in air-conditioned buildings. However, plants firmly rooted in the soil, must tough out the scalding heat and damaging UV rays. Here are some easy steps you can take to keep reduce stress to your landscape and keep it healthy and inviting all year long.

Adjust Your Watering Schedules - Deep, infrequent irrigations are always recommended when applying water to your landscape, but as temperatures rise the interval in-between applications may need to be increased. Make sure your plants have an adequate supply of water, but not too much. As our clay soil can hold onto moisture for a very long time, it is wise to wait until the top of the soil feels dry to the touch before turning your irrigation system back on. Refer to [Landscape Watering by the Numbers](#). For established plants, watering depends on their type. Non-desert varieties like ash, ficus, and privet will need a deep watering once each week during the summer months. Native and desert-adapted varieties such as mesquite, acacia, and oleander can almost survive on their own with occasional deep soaking once a month. If we have a wet monsoon season, watering on all types of established trees and shrubs can be greatly reduced.

Check Your Irrigation System - It's a good time to do an irrigation system check-up. Check that your timer is in working order, make sure all your drip emitters are firmly in place, look for broken sprinkler heads, check for any leaks, and plug up any drip lines that are watering a plant that no longer exists. Lawn sprinklers should be checked to see that even coverage hasn't been affected by sand or debris in the sprinkler heads.

Plant Replacement - If you decide to add new plants to your landscape this summer they will need daily watering for the first few weeks. As a general rule of thumb, once desert adapted plants have made it through the first summer, you can cut back on the water dramatically. For higher water use plants, you will still want to cut back the water once established, but not as severely. Refer to [Landscape Watering by the Numbers](#). Page 14 has a table for watering newly installed plants.

Pruning - It is wise to avoid pruning plants during the summer months. Pruning native trees such as palo verdes, ironwoods, mesquites, and acacias can be done in the month of May, although minor trimming can be done almost any time except summer. Leaves from the canopy of a plant shade inner branches; removing leafy growth will expose stems to the scorching sun. Many plants can suffer from severe sunscald if over-pruned. If your trees must be pruned for safety or access and they are sun-sensitive, consider painting their trunks with latex paint diluted 1:1 with water (any color will work). Trunks can also be wrapped loosely with burlap or cardboard for protection against the sun. When pruning, never remove more than 25% of the plant canopy in one growing season. Exceeding this amount can cause undue stress on your plants making them vulnerable too pests and diseases. Constant shear pruning of shrubs makes them more susceptible to sunscald and makes them less water efficient. To learn more about pruning, including how and when to prune, download this handy [pruning guide](#).



The mower blades were set to low and the grass has been 'scalped' and is now stressed.



An example of shear pruning

Lawn Care - When mowing the lawn, be sure to remove only 1/3 of the blade of grass at a time. Setting the mower blade lower to the ground will not only stress the grass, it will actually increase its growth rate to compensate, and you will have to mow more often. Allow lawns to grow a little taller in summer which will shade the soil and create a healthier lawn. When applying fertilizers to grass, do so in the morning and apply irrigation soon after application. Fertilizer that is not properly watered into the soil can burn the grass.

Pest Control - Do not spray garden chemicals such as insecticides when temperatures are above 90 degrees. The combination of heat and sun can cause some of these chemicals to be toxic to plants. For insect troubles, consider a strong spray of water on the plant early in the morning. A jet of water will often knock insects like mites and aphids off the plant and they cannot climb back on. If that doesn't work, try soapy water in a trigger sprayer. Mix 1 tsp liquid dish soap in a gallon of water or try non-toxic pest control options like diatomaceous earth or *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt - pronounced Bee Tee).

Apply Mulches - Mulch is a great addition to any landscape. All plants benefit by having a layer of mulch on top of the soil. A two, to three-inch layer will insulate the soil to keep tender roots cooler in our brutal summer heat and will also help retain water in the soil. Mulches can be organic such as bark or compost or inorganic like crushed granite. Make sure you keep your mulch at least two to three inches away from the trunk of the plant to avoid suffocation.

Following these simple suggestions will keep your plants healthy and your landscape looking great even in the dead of summer.

Be sure to visit the City of Chandler Water Conservation web pages for free landscape workshops, landscaping tips, rebates, frequently asked questions and more.
www.chandleraz.gov/water

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