

The Upland Gardener

By Master Gardener M.L. Wells

The dog days of summer are upon us. In ancient Egypt, the rising, at dawn in late July, of Sirius, the Dog Star marked the beginning of the year. For us, as Sirius passes overhead during the day, it marks the hottest part of the year. We and our gardens wilt and production slows. What to do.

Planning and preparation go far in aiding our plants. Deep dug, humus filled - well mulched soil will hold two or three times the moisture and need less watering during hot, dry spells.

If you receive no rain or less than one inch of rain in your vegetable garden in a weeks time you should water to make up for what Mother Nature didn't provide. Water it well – no 5 minute sprinkles in the evening. Water so that it soaks down 6 – 8 inches into the root zone and is available for uptake by your plants. Avoid watering at mid day as much of the water will be lost through evaporation and evening watering can encourage mildew and mold. So the best choice for watering is mornings, which gives the plants time for their leaves to dry during the day thus reducing the possibility of foliar diseases.

If you are nimble, narrow rows will self shade by high summer, reducing the need to weed and mulch and water. Soaker hoses make better use of the water as less is lost to evaporation.

So as the dog days move along, don your wide brimmed hat, avoid the urge to sprinkle and garden wisely with less effort and stress.