

July, 2013

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Hale County

Master Gardeners



*Thanks to Jarus Flowers we
now have some pretty color at
the Extension office!!*





RESULTS OF "LOW TUNNEL" STRAWBERRY TRIAL IN PLAINVIEW, TEXAS

Trial Period: Oct. '12 to July '13

By: Mike Patrick

Sixty (60) strawberry plants were planted in a raised bed on October 10, 2012. The plants were of three (3) varieties: 20 Radiance, 20 Festival, 20 Chandler

The 4' X 16' raised bed was constructed of concrete blocks and the planting mix was Soil Mender "Raised Bed Mix". The soil mix was loose and had excellent drainage (which later proved to be somewhat of a problem).

The plants were staggered on both sides of two mounds as suggested. Two mounds running east to west were covered with black plastic with staggered cut outs made to plant the strawberries.

A drip system was placed under the black plastic with two watering ribbons used per row (one on each side of the plant row).

4 mil clear plastic was placed over hoops to protect the plants from freezing temperatures.

Two major problems I experienced were as follows:

- WIND - The bed is on the south side of our warehouse. It has protection on the north but is wide open to the west, south & east. The weekend after putting up the 4 mil plastic the wind blew the cover off "five" times. This continued to be a major problem ... which was solved to some degree by upgrading to 6 mil clear plastic. The 6 mil had to be replaced once during the winter due to wind damage.
- WATER - I was optimistic that the drip system would be sufficient to provide enough water over the winter months but that did not prove to be the case. The soil was so loose and the drainage so good that the water from the drip lines went straight down with little spread. Within 20 minutes ... water was coming out the bottom of the raised bed. The soil right next to the plants would be wet but just a couple of inches out it was dry. After the last freeze ... the plastic was removed and I started watering by hand with a hand held wand with much better results.

After solving the wind problem ... I was left with 7 Radiance plants, 1 Festival & 8 Chandler plants.

I picked the first strawberries on March 8th (Radiance) and the other two varieties began producing soon after. I continued to pick about every other day and would harvest between 10 to 26 strawberries per picking. Although size and shape varied by variety ... they all had a great taste. Much better than strawberries either purchased at the store or received from Bountiful Baskets Food Co-op.

Chandlers were my choice as they produced more abundant and larger fruit.

It's July 9th, and I'm still picking strawberries (about 8 to 10 per picking) and the plants have started to produce runners. I'll leave them until they pretty much stop production.

I enjoyed the experience. There's no question that I learned a lot during my first attempt at growing strawberries.



As we settle into trying to keep things alive and watching and worrying over our watering, we can take a break and recharge our enthusiasm with some practical programs that are being put on by area Extension agents. Gary Cross has brought in some excellent people and his neighboring county colleague, David Graf, is also hosting good water-wise and gardening programs.



Tuesday evening, July 9, the Swisher CEA, David Graf, led a session that was full of practical information. The picture at left shows Dr. Ron French and Micah Venhaus discussing one of the raised beds with Frank Venhaus.

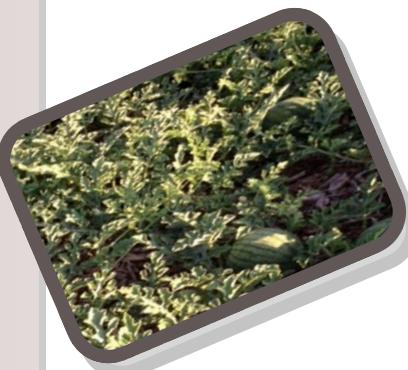
Various businesses in Tulia (such as Tulia Power and Light and Swisher Electric Cooperative) have sponsored the building of raised beds in several locations throughout the town. Tulia residents have enthusiastically planted these. Some of the beds are lush and flourishing; some struggling with burned-looking and stunted plants.

David invited Ron French, PhD. a plant pathologist from the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Amarillo, to come down and point out the good, the bad, and the ugly-- incorrect watering, fertilizer burn, problems with mulch. He pulled plants and showed what can be learned from looking at the roots. Pocket knife in hand he cut into stems to show the problems. Quite a bit of damage that people thought was from the late freeze, he identified as poor watering and bad roots.

Dr. French is not an enthusiastic advocate of city-chipped mulch or colored mulch. He favors light-colored pine mulch. He stressed that the mulch needs to be of an adequate depth to keep the ground cool, but not actually be touching the stem of the plant. The same was also said about soaker hoses. He pointed out damage that had already been done to tomato plants by having the soaker hose touch the stem.



Another plus of the evening was Micah Venhaus who "knows" tomatoes. He spent five years in tomato research at university. He had good information on magnesium deficiency and for lack of a more accurate term "pruning" the tomato for better production. To the left is a picture of Micah's sugar baby watermelons growing in one of his raised beds.



It was a very good evening – except for the women who were out using diffusers to top water their vegetables – they would not be thrilled to know that they were used as example of incorrect watering. Dr. French indicated that the only time leaves needed to be top-watered

(or sprinkled) is if you have something on them that needs to be washed off.

On the subject of deficiencies and fertilizers, Dr. French offered several suggestions.

He does not favor Miracle Grow, feeling that the salt build-up is too great. French does advocate the use of crushed egg shells in the vegetable garden. He also recommended making teas from composts. He puts the compost in pantyhose, soaks it in water and produces a tea that is then used as liquid fertilizer.

David Graf had a moisture meter which the entire group used testing the various beds – people could see how the watering was or was not working. Everyone was surprised to see that the moisture definitely was in layers; there might be a wet layer, a dry layer, and then another wet layer. One man was watering for 30 minutes with a soaker hose, but the moisture meter showed moisture to only a very shallow depth. Lack of deep watering and lack of a 3 to 5 inch layer of mulch were contributing to the plants wilting during the day.



This last picture shows Dr. French looking at a bed of onions and chard. He pointed out that the onions were too closely planted and that the bulbs couldn't get any larger because they were growing against each other. However, he does recommend planting heavily in the beginning to weather hail, wind, general attrition and then thin the plants – after nature has thinned them some.

In the three hours, there was a wealth of good, practical information. All-in-all, thanks you's to Gary Cross and David Graf for their work bringing good information to the average gardener. ... by: Cindy Simmons

Gardening tips for July

Zone 7

- Remove faded flowers from perennials after they finish blooming. Deadheading redirects energy towards healthy roots.
- Maintain a 3 to 4 inch mulch layer around trees and shrubs to protect them from mower and weed whacker damage.
- Check plants regularly for insect problems; hand pick or use suitable control measures if found.
- Fertilize warm-season grasses
- Plant butterfly nectar and larval food plants such as asclepias, buddleia, and passionflower.
- Replace spent annuals with heat-tolerant lantana, verbena, pentas, and hibiscus
- Consider drip irrigation and/or soaker hoses as efficient watering alternatives.
- Harvest raspberries and blackberries daily to avoid attracting insects to overripe fruit
- Water flowerbeds and vegetable gardens



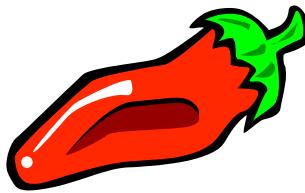
He who has a garden and a library wants for nothing...
Marcus Tullius Cicero

Teddi's Egg Plant Chips

Submitted by: Cindy Kingston

Spray cookie sheet with olive or canola oil spray. Slice eggplant thin, dip in egg (with little water added to stretch) pat parmesan cheese on both sides. Place on cookie sheet, spray with oil (each slice) and add garlic powder. Bake at 400 degrees for about 4-5 minutes. (You will know when ready to turn by the heavenly smell.) Turn and bake for another five minutes or so. (Smell is the indicator.) Dip in marinara sauce, heated.

HOT, HOT, HOT!!!



We are experiencing heat and drought. As a result, many established trees, shrubs and lawns are suffering. Plants may look chlorotic or even losing leaves. Especially new plantings (1-2 years old), or less adapted plants such as Japanese maples or Dogwoods. If you think you can't lose a large established shade tree in this weather, think again. Not to mention, the stress of this drought will affect the tree's health for years to come and has a compounding effect.

Frequent, shallow watering contributes significantly to plant stress this time of year. Watering your established turf and landscape for 5-10 minutes a day is the absolute WRONG way to water. Established plantings need 1" worth of water weekly. A deep watering 1-2 times per week is much more effective than a short, daily watering, which will damage root systems and waste water to evaporation.

Realize, of course, that smaller herbaceous plants and annuals will require supplemental hand watering in addition to your sprinkler system, because they have much smaller and shallower root systems.

New plantings will require supplemental watering in addition to your sprinkler system. Water should saturate at least 6" deep. Gator bags are a great way to keep newly planting trees watered.

Some people promote that you should stop watering all together during a drought like this. Problem is, allowing shade trees and shrubs to die will only result in massive increases in energy usage to cool your home. Allowing turf to die will result in soil erosion. Replacing the plant material, which is inevitable, will cost more in \$ and resources to get the new plants established. Watering *properly* will cut down on waste and preserve the landscape we have.

Cities feel the heat worse due to the high concentration of concrete and metal which can raise our temps a good 10-15 degrees. Shade trees and shrub/turf plantings are key to holding down temperatures, reducing cooling costs and reducing pollution.

Mind your watering restrictions where you live. Even if you are only allowed to water once per week, one solid deep watering per week is enough to keep your established landscape healthy. 10 minutes won't do the job.

Addendum: So how long to water your landscape?

It really depends on your individual landscape, irrigation system, hand watering etc. The easiest way to "audit" how much you need to water in order to get the equivalent of 1" worth of rainfall per week, is to get several tuna cans and place them in different areas of your sprinkler zone - or where you put out sprinklers. Run the irrigation until you get 1" of water in the can. That's how long you'll need to run it. **HOWEVER**, in very dry or clay compacted soils, sometimes your landscape can't take in that much water at once without runoff. So you may have to split the time into 2 cycles. For example, if you see run off after 20 min, but you've only got 1/2" of water in the can, then what you'll want to do is irrigate for 20 min, then let it rest, then wait about 1 hour and do the remaining 20 min (so an A and B cycle on your system) or split up your hand watering.

When it comes to using soaker hoses or drip irrigation, you have to run those systems much, much longer. That's a big mistake people make with soaker hoses - they run them for the same time they would a sprinkler, which will result in even less saturation. Soaker/drip systems put out a much lower volume of water, but over a longer period of time, which can really reduce waste and help plants absorb all the water they need. But if you run your sprinkler for an hour, you may need to run the soakers for about 6 hours. You'll just need to see how long it takes to saturate at least the top 6" of soil.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Gary Cross, CEA-Ag/NR

Hale County Extension Office

225 Broadway, Suite 6 Plainview, Texas 79072

Tel. 806.291.5267 Fax: 806.291.5266

Website: <http://hale.agrilife.org>



**Texas
Master GardenerSM**



Watering tip for tomatoes

South Plains Farmers Market has opened on Gebo's parking lot.

**Plainview Times: Tuesday 3-7;
Thursday 3-7; and Saturday 8-
Noon. Tulia times: Monday 3-7;
Wednesday 3-7.**

**Plainview Area Wide Farmers Mar-
ket at Tractor Supply parking lot
on Saturdays from 7:30—11:30.**

Drought on the Southern Plains meeting with Dr. Katherine Hayhoe, Director of the Climate Center of Texas Tech will be held on Thursday August 8th from 9:00 to 11:00. The program will be held at the Ollie Liner Center and the public is invited with no charge. This is an important meeting in understanding the science and the effects it has had on our community and we will look at the economic impact, Ag statistics, and science behind the drought. Put this on your calendar and come on down. This program is being sponsored by Wayland Baptist University, Industrial Foundation, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. To reserve a seat call our office at 806-291-5267. Master Gardeners will receive two volunteer hours credit for attending this meeting.