

Summer prep

When the calendar says it is late spring, it means - time to prepare for summer, when southern Nevada will be hot. We experience few hints of warm breezes during summer months; rather, streets and gardens might as well be convection ovens. Only during the earliest part of

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the day can the intrepid gardener get work done. Summer is the time when Mojave gardeners sit back and look out at the fruits of the labors. When it gets extraordinarily hot, that often means looking out the window in a pleasantly air conditioned room.

Fortunately, spring was temperate and long enough for much of the planting and pruning to be finished, despite the extreme winter. Because we had such a difficult, long and cold winter, there is a particular satisfaction that so many plants actually survived and returned to life. Some of us were not terribly sanguine about their chances of recovery, but plants can be tenacious! To see the garden this summer is to see a lot of resurgence.

For instance, in my garden, I had two oleanders. Until recently, my biggest concern with them was trying to decide whether I wanted them to remain shrubs or prune them to become more tree-like. They have no problem surviving the heat that settles in from May through August, blooming profusely, and even thriving on the very limited amount of water I provide. In other words, until this past year, they seemed indestructible. By the end of the cold snap this past winter, however, most of their leaves were crispy brown with a ring of dull grey green. They looked as if they had perished in the frost. I decided to take my own advice, however, and did not act out of despair. Instead, I let them sit, gave them a little water, and hoped for the best.

The gale force winds that blew through my neighborhood several weeks ago pelted those oleanders, shaking off virtually all the dead leaves. In so doing, they revealed a host of new growth – bright green and healthy. As a result, the shrubs produced blossoms, behaving as if nothing ever happened.

For the summer, the biggest tasks most gardeners need to face will be refreshing any mulch that might have blown away, checking the irrigation, occasional weeding (get them while they are small!) and deadheading spent blossoms. Plucking off dead and dying flowers encourages plants to produce more. In the case of annuals, since they only produce seeds once before dying, removing flowers before any seeds form will “trick” them into continuing to survive and produce more flowers. Annuals are often the brightest colors in the garden; keeping them alive cheers up a landscape considerably.

Let me recognize the newest group of Master Gardener students who are in the middle of their 80 hours of coursework. Soon, they will be ready to start their volunteer training to become the experts who help the community handle many horticultural difficulties. The over 300 Extension Master Gardeners of Southern Nevada deserve great recognition. Thanks to them all!

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