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Vacation: What to Know Before You Go! By Sarah Preiss-Farzanegan UCCE El Dorado County Master Gardener

Summer in the foothills means flowers, gardens and orchards bursting into glorious activity. It is also prime vacation season! Do not despair however, for you need not sacrifice your garden for your summer holiday. With these valuable tips, you can prepare your plants before you go and enjoy your trip.

The two most important things to think about are the basic requirements of your garden and plants: sunlight and water. And how to prevent potential problems, like weeds and pests, that may crop up while you are away.

Make sure to mow your lawn before you leave. This will last about seven to ten days. Avoid cutting grass too short because this will cause increased water loss and stress.

Container plantings are most susceptible to water loss through the leaves, and remember clay pots dry out much more quickly than plastic ones. To counteract water loss, there are a few ways to increase the humidity around the plant and decrease the stress of sunlight and high temperatures. Move containers to a shady spot, and group them together for easy watering. Cover any exposed dirt with one to two inches of mulch to prevent water loss and weed growth. Consider using self-watering pots. Another method is to create a greenhouse for your containers by placing them in a kiddie pool filled with one to two inches of water; cover the pool with clear plastic and make a few vent holes to prevent it from getting too hot inside. Place the pool where plants can get a few hours of sun and some shade each day, and they will last for several weeks.

Similar considerations hold true for your garden: plan ahead and keep weeds and pests under control for several weeks before your vacation. Apply one to two inches of mulch to reduce water loss and prevent weed growth.

Install a soaker hose with a timer, or have a garden/house sitter turn water on as needed. Cover annuals and vegetables with a light-weight white fabric, also called garden cover, which prevents sun damage and weeds from seeding, and keeps pests away. Pinch all flowers off of herb plants and, before you go, harvest ripe fruit and vegetables. As a perk, invite your garden/house sitter to harvest while you are away! Ensure plants are adequately supported, as they will grow more than you think. It's best to avoid fertilizing within a few weeks of your departure, because the extra vegetation growth will require more water and tending.

Temper the above suggestions based on the length of time you will be away. A thorough watering will last through a long weekend but longer absences will require more planning and possibly extra help. If you have a house sitter, friend or neighbor watching your plants, be sure to bring them back a nice thank you gift!

There is no Master Gardener public education class this Saturday, May 25, 2013 – enjoy your Memorial Day weekend! Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.