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## Watering Fruit Crops

It's my hope that by the time you read this we will have seen some temperature and moisture relief! Even so, a recent climate prediction report noted that expectations for August are much the same as conditions for July!

I've referenced in this space before the need for trees to be watered during the summer months. Fruit trees need to be included in that watering program as well! With the number of days above 90 degrees that we've seen over the last couple of weeks, fruit crops have certainly taken a hit. When soil moisture can't meet the plant's need, it starts to pull it from the fruit to supply the tree to help it survive. This stress, either from high temperatures and/or moisture deficits in the root environment, can cause fruit to drop or fail to increase in size. Further, the stress can inhibit the development of fruit buds for next year's fruit crop.

Now is the time to be checking all fruit crop soil moisture levels. Do so by insert a spade or shovel or a pointed metal or wood probe (a long screwdriver works well) in to the soil to a depth of eight to twelve inches. If the soil is hard, dry, and difficult to penetrate, the moisture level is very low. At that point, plants should be watered to prevent drooping and promote fruit enlargement. Add water using sprinklers, soaker hose, drip irrigation, or even a small trickle of water running from the hose for a few hours. Add enough moisture so you can easily penetrate the soil in the root area of the plant with a metal rod, wooden dowel or other probe. When it's hot and dry weather persists, check soil moisture at least once a week and apply water as needed.

Because of their shallow root system, strawberries may require special attention and more frequent watering during extreme weather. Check moisture levels with strawberries twice a week when heat is extreme.