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Fall Blooms on Spring Flowering Plants

Over the past couple weeks, many people have noticed plants that are blooming out of season. Crabapples and lilacs that normally flower in the spring are starting to bloom. You may be wondering: why did this happen, and will my plant still bloom in the spring?

This past summer saw some extreme heat. We had several weeks with 90 to 100 degree F heat that felt relentless. Our plants felt the heat too. Many plants, although they had sufficient water from our rainy weather, still felt the heat stress. Some entered dormancy to avoid trying to grow in such high temperatures.

Now our weather has been unusually warm this last month. In mid-September some days saw highs in the low 70s, while other days reached upper 80s to low 90s. These unseasonably warm fall days and the temperature fluctuations, combined with all the rain, can confuse plants, especially if they had a hard summer. They interpret their intense stress from the heat similar to the way they experience their winter dormancy. When followed by weather that mimics spring, it is easy for these plants to think it might actually be spring.

This likely means fewer blooms next fall. Many of our plants put new buds on their old growth in the summer after they finish their spring bloom. These buds should stay dormant until the following spring and pop open when the weather warms up in March or April. In these cases, plants will not have enough time to put new buds on before winter to give off a nice full bloom in the spring.

The best course of action to support your plants is to ensure they have enough water. Continue to provide water during dry weeks while soil temperatures are above 40 degrees F. This can help ease their stress so that they are able to survive the winter and thrive in the spring.