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How We Keep From Wilting

by Hana Newcomb

July is the hottest month, generally, but August is the hardest somehow on a vegetable farm. In July we are just getting started with the summer harvests, and we can still remember what it felt like to be comfortable while working. It is exciting, in those early weeks, to find ripe tomatoes and gorgeous eggplant on heat-loving plants. By the time August rolls in, we have been hot for a long time and heat fatigue starts to affect all of us – the humans, the plants, and I assume the animals as well.

The humans have the option of changing the work schedule, starting early in the day and stopping when it gets too hot. We also can go to the movies and sit in air-conditioned bliss. The plants do not have any way to escape the heat.

In the last ten years, climate change has become a presence on

the farm and everywhere else. Winters are shorter and warmer, and we can now count on having some crops survive January and February – picking for the Winter CSA was less reliable. We used to spend hours covering and uncovering the crops in the field, protecting them from the extreme cold. Now we can pick kale in the fields on Groundhog Day, without ever covering the plants. Spring is still a mixed bag of heat and cool, wet and dry, but the last frost date is inching backwards, and we have taken more educated risks over the years, planting summer squash in the middle of April instead of early May. Summer in Northern Virginia has always been hot and steamy, but in recent years the nights have been hotter and that is concerning. Plants need a certain cycle of cool – they can't thrive if it is hot all night long and there is no dew.

Many people probably don't think about dew

as an important part of plant health. This isn't something I have read anywhere, so perhaps I am making it up, but my observation is that on the mornings where there is no dew, the plants just look weary. Forty years ago, when we used to pick sweet corn every day at dawn, we were soaked to the skin each morning. On the rare day when there

was no dew, we felt tired from the start, fighting our way through the scratchy leaves that had no moisture on them. In recent years, I have observed more dew-free mornings and more thirsty-looking plants, both wild and domestic.

So what do we do about all of this? We continue our practices of conserving moisture as

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Bruised Ribs

By Cat Baker

Recently, I have dipped my toe back into the rugby pool after a year off due to a combo platter of COVID and a gnarly patellar tendon injury. The summer season of rugby is known as 7s, where there are 7 players per team and each game consists of 7 minute halves (as opposed to the fall/spring season of 15s where each team has 15 players and we play for 40 minute halves). 7s season is also known to contain the biggest, the baddest, the fastest, and the absolute DUMBEST players – because who else would elect to sprint all day in the sticky icky Summer heat but those with a couple of screws loose? This summer I've primarily played with Rappahannock Rugby's women's team, and they've helped me remember how much I dislike tackling people BUT how much I love to be tackled. Although I would never claim to be particularly good, it's been said that I bring a peculiar energy and excitement to the pitch- and some could say that I contributed

to several victories we've had this year. Thus far there have been no major personal injuries to report, but will keep everyone updated on my bruises, scrapes and bone status as the season wears on. My aim this summer is to wrap up the season with Rapp with a few

good tackles under my belt and no broken fingers, and then return to my home team, DC Revolution, to play in our debut season in D3 level rugby. Check us out and meander on over to a game this fall to watch me high-tailing it to the try zone!



Cat Baker, top left, celebrating a win with their rugby team by chomping on the medal.



photo by colleen ryan

"We made a campfire on the hottest day of the year."



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much as possible. That's partly why we use an abundance of hay mulch, to keep the ground covered and protected from the blazing heat of the sun. When we irrigate, which we do in moderation because we use wells as our water source, we deliver most of the water through drip lines that are under the mulch or at least lying right on the ground, so not a drop is lost to the air. When we decide to water using sprinklers that shoot water into the air – maybe because we are trying to reach a lot of bare ground all at once, to get the carrot seeds to germinate or to keep the just-

planted broccoli plants from dying – we are careful not to water in the hottest parts of the day. It's a waste of water, and it is never the best thing to water a parched, overheated plant in the heat of the day. Kind of like steaming the broccoli before it has even had a chance to grow up.

We watch the plants during the hottest parts of the day to see which ones are really drooping. That tells us who is the most thirsty and probably in the most trouble. We turn on the irrigation, watering some fields all night and some fields all day. But it is our general philosophy that we should not water too much.

Mature plants have roots that do amazing work. Baby plants need a lot of help and can't be left to fend for themselves, but once they have reached a certain age, they are mostly on their own. We help when they really need us. There are farms that have a regular weekly watering schedule, keeping all plants at maximum productivity. We are both frugal and a little bit lazy when it comes to irrigation. We are less interested in maximum anything and more interested in a self-sufficient, healthy plant that thrives with minimum intervention. That's how we are as parents, too, so this is all consistent.

Climate change is scary, and none of us has a good enough imagination to visualize what is coming. We continue to farm as moderately and carefully as we can, trying not to make things worse. Things are getting worse anyway, and we are all adapting, but these are challenging times for all of the biological world. All the sandy soil and dry air in Florida and California cannot compete with the rain and humidity that our plants count on. This region is one of the best there is for growing vegetables, and we feel lucky about that.



photo by tara kulak

Vermicelli Salad

by Sydney Morrison

Too hot to turn on the oven? Still want delicious, satisfying, summer meals? Rice noodles cook in minutes while you prep your veggies, and lunch is complete! Cold leftovers are perfect for the next few days.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 packet of vermicelli rice noodles
- assorted carrots, peppers, corn, green beans, cabbage, onion, whatever vegetables you need to use up from your CSA.
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 thumb ginger
- 1 fresh chili
- 1/4 cup tamari
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 1/2 cup mixed peanuts and sesame seeds
- handful of cilantro

Instructions:

1. Boil a small pot of water on the stove or use an electric kettle.
2. Pour boiled water over vermicelli noodles in a heat proof bowl. Cover and let sit while you prep your veg.
3. Slice up all your veggies, remove corn from the cob, mince your garlic, ginger and chili.
4. In a small bowl, mix tamari, garlic ginger and chili.
5. Drain noodles very well, let them drip until no water is left. Toss noodles, veggies, and sauce in a bowl. Drizzle in sesame oil, add peanuts and sesame seeds, add cilantro. Mix again.
6. Lunch is ready!



photo by hana newcomb

Ciara and Sydney picking beans.