The Flower Man

It's not the heat…it's heat and humidity that harm plants

By Ernest Jones

Ernest Jones is in charge of the landscaping and vegetation at SCDOT Headquarters in Columbia.

No matter where you live, everyone complains about the heat. But the truth is, summer heat is distinctly different around the country. The plants you grow must be able to cope with the conditions in your region. On those dog days of summer, can't you just imagine the flowers in your garden asking each other, "Hot enough for you?"

Of course, we don't need to ask. You can see your plants shriveling up and dying. But then, some annuals and perennials look as fresh as starched white linen, no matter how sweltering it gets.

Like us humans, plants cope not only with heat, but also with energy-draining drought, wind and humidity. Drought eventually kills plants, but at first they may merely grow more slowly, or their leaves might fade, or turn gray and soften. Heat makes things even worse. And in hot, arid areas, plants must have special physiology to survive. Wind batters leaves, tearing and scarring them. Plants with tough leaves are better able to take it. But wind also desiccates (dries out) plants. Their roots can't pull water from the soil fast enough to replace what's evaporating from their leaves.

Plants rehydrate when wind dies down. But eventually their leaf edges turn brown. In windy areas, then, plants also need ways to handle water loss.

High humidity is particularly hard on plants because it fosters insects and diseases. Temperatures don't drop at night in areas where it's humid, so plants never recover from the stress of the heat.

In hot, humid areas, flower and foliage colors can fade. Plants may grow tall and lanky and fall over. Southern gardeners wish there was a standard rating system for heat tolerance like there is for cold hardiness. But actually, it's the combination of heat and humidity that gets to plants.

In hot places, look for tough plants -- ones that bloom all summer, need little care and don't succumb to pests. The following are a few you may have good luck with: **Coreopsis, butterfly weed, purple cone flower, globe amaranth, common yarrow, lantana, spider flower, California poppy, lavender cotton, cocks comb, Blackfoot daisy, golden fleece.**

It's always possible that some of these plants may be right for your garden. To know for sure, call your county extension office. The agent should have lists of recommended plants. Your favorite nursery should be able to help too.

Three employees receive CPM

Three SCDOT employees received Certified Public Manager certifications at a May 12 ceremony at the South Carolina State Archives auditorium. The new CPM graduates are, from left, Chris Lacy, Susan Stone and Tony Magwood.

THE CONNECTOR wins again!

The Connector, SCDOT's newspaper won second place this year in the annual SC Press Association awards for Associate Members. The publication is published three times per year by the SCDOT Communication's Office.

There's something fishy about SCDOT's Bass Tournament

The 31st Annual SCDOT Bass Tournament was held on May 10 at Lake Murray's Larry Koon Landing on Shull Island.

Tournament Directors were Greg Rikard, Tony Sheppard, Wayne Corley and Darrell Munn.

If you would like more information about participating in next year's tournament, please contact Tony Sheppard at: SheppardTS@scdot.org.

THE WINNERS

1st PLACE
Joel Watts and Robbie Kyzer
5 fish weighing 22.69 pounds
Also won 'Big Fish' at 5 pounds

2nd PLACE
Dusty Turner and Bobby Stanfill
5 fish weighing 20.9 lbs

3rd PLACE
Kevin McLaughlin and J.J. Hudson
5 fish weighing 18.37 pounds

SMALL FISH
Mitchell Connelly and Jimmy Richardson
caught a fish weighing 0.81 pounds