

Heatwaves & extreme heat

Protecting your garden, vegetable patch and greenhouses during periods of extreme heat

Drought, cracked soil, scorched plants: heatwaves put gardens under real strain. The good news is that the **materials from the Grosbreuil platform** (straw, wood chips, compost) are your best allies. Used well, they keep the soil cool, cut evaporation and help your crops get through the heat unharmed.

1 - Plan ahead: prepare BEFORE the heatwave

Mulch

Cover bare soil with straw, wood chips or dried clippings. Mulch lowers soil temperature, stops evaporation and protects soil life.

As early as possible
5 to 8 cm thick

Shade

Shade cloth (50%), crates, screens or covered stakes. Priority to young plants and fragile crops (lettuces, seedlings).

Before the peak
40 to 50% cloth

Build a reserve

Water generously the day before the episode to build a deep water reserve. Group pots together in the shade.

The evening before
Generous watering

Vent the greenhouse

Whiten the glass (whiting/shade paint), fit a shade net, clear all openings ready for ventilation.

Before the heat
Shade + airflow

2 - The right moves, in order

1

Water at the right time

- Water **early in the morning** or **late in the evening**, never in full sun.
- At the base of the plants, without wetting the foliage (risk of « magnifying-glass » burns).
- Prefer **deep, spaced-out** watering over frequent, shallow watering: it drives roots deeper.

2

Keep the soil covered and cool

- Maintain a thick mulch and top it up as it thins.
- Don't hoe during the heatwave: stirring dry soil dries it out further.
- Mulched soil can stay 5 to 10 °C cooler than bare soil.

3

Manage the greenhouse

- Open doors and vents **wide from early morning** to create a through-draught.
- Damp down the paths and floor: evaporation cools the air.
- Watch the thermometer: above 35 °C, tomatoes and peppers stop setting fruit.

4

After the episode: let plants recover

- Don't cut scorched leaves straight away: they still shade what's underneath.
- Resume watering gradually, without drowning.
- Top up mulch and a little mature compost to restart soil life.

3 - Which crops are most vulnerable?

Not all plants react the same way. Here is a quick guide to focus your protection efforts during the heatwave:

Crop	Sensitivity	Priority	Key action
Lettuce / Spinach	Very high	Shade + water	Shading essential, soil always cool; they bolt in the heat.
Tomatoes / Peppers	High (flowers)	Vent greenhouse	Above 35 °C flowers stop setting; shade during the hottest hours.
Courgettes / Cucumbers	High	Water generously	Very thirsty; thick mulch and morning watering at the base.

Crop	Sensitivity	Priority	Key action
Beans / Peas	Medium	Mulch	Flowers drop in drought; keep soil cool with mulch.
Carrots / Beetroot	Medium	Fine mulch	Avoid a surface crust; fine mulch to keep moisture in.
Potatoes	Medium	Thick mulch	Thick mulch shields tubers from soil heat.
Young trees / Shrubs	High (1st year)	Deep watering	Water slowly and deeply; wide mulch (5-10 cm) at the base.
Lawn / Grass	Low	Let it yellow	Don't water or mow short: grass yellows, then greens up with rain.

4 - Practical tips & frequently asked questions

Should I water every day?

No. A **good soak every 2 to 3 days** beats a little every day: water goes deep and roots follow. On mulched soil, needs are even lower. Pots and window boxes, however, may need daily watering as they dry out fast.

Why not water in the middle of the day?

Much of the water evaporates before reaching the roots, and droplets on foliage in the sun act like magnifying glasses and burn the plants. Very early morning is best: the soil recharges for the whole day.

My greenhouse turns into an oven — what's the emergency fix?

Open everything (doors, vents) to create a through-draught, water the path floor to cool by evaporation, and add shading as fast as possible (net, cloth, or whiting on the glass). A min/max thermometer helps you react before it overheats.

Is mulching really enough?

It's the most cost-effective move: a 5 to 8 cm straw or wood-chip mulch strongly limits evaporation, keeps soil loose and cool, and feeds soil life as it breaks down. It's the best heatwave insurance, and the materials are available at the platform.

My plants have scorched — are they lost?

Not necessarily. Many recover once the heat passes. Don't prune the burnt parts right away (they shade the rest), resume gentle regular watering, and wait a few weeks before judging.

Absolutely avoid during a heatwave

- Watering in the midday sun (waste + foliage burns).
- Mowing the lawn short: close-cut grass scorches and leaves soil bare.
- Pruning, repotting or fertilising a plant already under water stress.
- Hoeing or turning dry soil: it speeds up drying.
- Leaving soil bare: an open door to evaporation.

Stock up on mulch at the Grosbreuil platform

As a member (€2/year), you can collect **straw** (€2.50 a bale), **wood chips** and **compost** to protect your garden from the heat. Open Wednesdays and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to noon · variable stock · compostons-ensemble.fr