

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Droop to droop

BY SIOUX ROGERS



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If your garden plant is drooping, wilting, or fainting—whatever you call it—it isn't necessarily thirsty for a glass of beer. You may be, but not necessarily your plants. Plants often can be likened to humans. Say you drank too much beer. You might droop, wilt, or faint. On the other hand, you may droop, wilt, or faint if you are very thirsty or dehydrated. At first glance, both too much *and* too little appear very similar. Perhaps you are just napping or hiding from the heat. I am referring to you or your plants. So while drooping is drooping like dead is dead, the causes differ.

How to tell the difference from droop to droop

When the temperature is very hot, chances are your plants are thirsty. I was kidding about the beer.

A drooping plant is most likely thirsty. Sooner or later the leaves will turn brown, maybe curl up, droop over, and then fall off. Stressing a plant from lack of water reduces the plant's vigor, just as it does a

person's, and may be a direct invitation to diseases and insect attacks.

If the call to water is ringing in your ears, then water. If leaves do not perk up, your plant is likely overwatered. It can't handle one more drop; dead is dead. Your plant has drowned, and no CPR is going to help. If you do nothing, although leaves are folded over or down, check again in the early morning. If the leaves look happy and perky, great. The plants learned a "functional adaptation" without going to college. They know that closing their leaves reduces surface exposure and thus water loss. Plants are 80 to 90 percent water and must salvage every percent of water. However, in the hottest part of the day, hydrangeas or, say, squash vines, with their large leaves, are often the first to appear in a dead swoon.

It is very tempting to water these plants, but *stop!* The plants may be using that brilliant adaptation of swooning and are not really thirsty.

Watering plants, especially the leaves, in the late afternoon does not give the leaves a chance to dry out but rather invites all kinds of diseases, mildew being at the

top of the list. Matter of fact, it's best not to ever water the leaves.

Deep watering is best as it encourages more root growth to absorb more water. This in turn encourages the roots to go even deeper and makes the plant more drought-resistant since there are more roots to soak up water. Shallow watering encourages a shallow root system that is closer to the surface and dries out quickly.

Overwatered flowers may be rather small, lack color, or be brown. Leaves look yellowish, and stems may be mushy or dry. There may be "white stuff" at the base of the plant, and the soil is still wet. Plants need to breathe via their roots. Too much water is like killing someone with a pillow over their head. The plants and the person are dead by suffocation!

Trick

Because over- and under-watering look so similar when symptoms first begin, try this remarkable trick: Stick your finger in the soil.

Britannica.com tells us, "Finally, some plants, especially legumes, wilt at night—a phenomenon known as nyctinasty. The leaves of many of these species are

fitted with joint-like growths called pulvini, which allow the leaves or leaflets to wilt in response to darkness and temperature. The turgor pressure in the pulvini is largely regulated by a chemical photoreceptor that triggers water to move from the joints at night and refills them during the day. The purpose of this unusual adaptation is unclear, though genetic studies suggest that it may aid in growth" (britannica.com/story/why-do-plants-wilt).

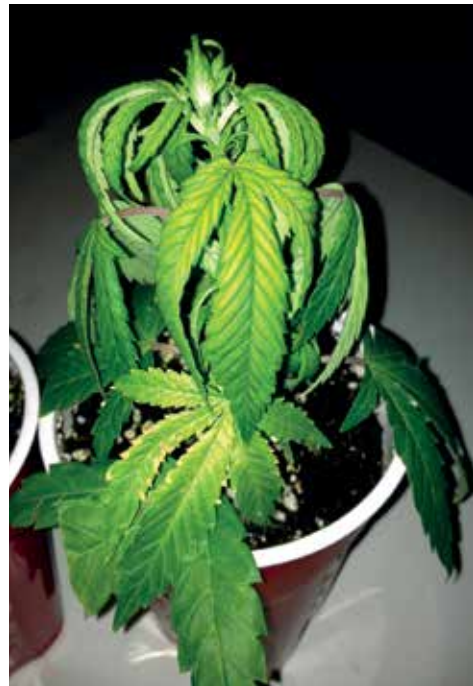
Basic rule

Here is a basic rule for your garden and, well, for just about anything: You need a good foundation. For your garden, amend with organic material and, to help with the right amount of water, mulch, mulch, mulch.

"The watering of a garden requires as much judgement as the seasoning of a soup."

—Helena Rutherford Ely

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Photo, left: An over-watered cannabis plant (growweedeasy.com).

Photo, below: wilted zucchini plant experiencing transpiration or functional adaptation (gardenstylesanantonio.com).

Photo, right: An under-watered tomato plant (sympiop.com).



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