

Surviving Summer Heat

Like humans, hibiscus aren't at their best at the peak of summer heat in places where temperatures stay at or above 100°F (37C). They need a little help to survive the heat and keep blooming and growing. We can't change summer temperatures, but we make some small changes that can make a big difference for our hibiscus.

Should I Create Some Shade:

If your summer temperatures are mostly in the 90's F (low-mid 30's C), you don't need to worry about giving them extra shade. Hibiscus can get used to temperatures in the 90s and will be fine as long as you provide plenty of water and good nutrition. Your flowers may be a little smaller during the hottest months, but otherwise, your hibiscus plants will be fine. But if your temperatures are consistently around 100°F (37C), a little bit of shade will make a big difference in both the health of the plants and the quality and quantity of the blooms.

If your hibiscus are in pots, shift them to the north or east side of your house, a tree, a wall, larger shrubs, anything that will give them partial relief from all-day, relentless sun. Porches or covered patios are ideal for hibiscus in very hot climates, but even just a couple of hours relief from blistering sun is better than no relief. Every little bit of shade gives the hibiscus plant a chance to cool down and recover from the kind of stress the burning sun induces.

If your plants are in the ground, you'll need to bring the shade to them. It doesn't take much to help. A standing umbrella, a piece of shade cloth or parachute cloth strung up between some trees, anything at all that breaks up the sun will provide some help for your hibiscus. Make it artistic if you like! String up several pieces of colorful cloth criss-cross across your hibiscus garden. Shade doesn't have to look like institutional shade cloth. It can be anything that crosses between your hibiscus and the hottest sun and blocks out even a little bit of the sun. Of course, you can use greenhouse-grade shade cloth if you like. Whatever suits your fancy is fine, and any shade is better than no shade in places where heat is extreme.

Use Water to Cool Your Plants

A daily shower during the hot part of the day is one of the best ways to quickly cool your hibiscus plants. If you do a thorough showering job, spraying up under all the branches, leaves, stems and all around the trunks, you will also prevent most pests from ever getting started on your hibiscus. Hibiscus thrive in places like Hawaii where it rains every day, so providing a daily rain shower is optimum care. In extreme summer heat, though, this kind of shower is NOT the same as watering your plants! The water from a shower will evaporate very quickly, cooling the plants in the process. But it won't get down deep into the ground and water the roots! A daily shower will never take the place of watering your plants. This needs to be in addition to deep watering of your plants. Think of a shower for your plants like a shower for humans. It is necessary and healthy, but it does not replace all the water that we need to drink during hot summer days. A shower is no more a drink for a hibiscus than it is for humans.

Water Your Hibiscus Well and Often

In places where heat is extreme, hibiscus need to be watered twice per day - once in the morning and once in the afternoon or evening. If you water only once in the morning on very hot days the hibiscus can reach the pre-wilt stage by afternoon. You can't see any wilt yet, but the hibiscus are stressed and can be set back if this happens often. One of the first consequences of this type of stress is fewer buds and flowers. If you want to keep your hibiscus healthy and blooming, it really is important to water twice a day in extreme heat.

A drip system is the easiest way to give hibiscus the water they need. You adjust your timers for each season - once a day watering in spring and fall, twice a day in summer, and once or twice a week in the winter, depending on how much rain you get. In areas of extreme heat, unless you want to spend your summer months holding a garden hose, a drip system is really almost a necessity. Drip systems are not very hard to build. We have instructions on our website that anyone can follow: [How to Build a Drip Watering System](#). There are many other websites that provide information on building them too, plus any landscape company can build one for you for much less than the cost of traditional sprinkler systems.

Watering takes time. If you do it by hand you need to take the time to make sure that the water soaks all the way through the rootball. If you're watering hibiscus in pots, the easiest way to water thoroughly is to fill each pot to the rim with water, then go back a second time and fill each pot to the brim one more time. If your potting soil comes up all the way to the top of the pot, you may need to fill each pot a third time. It is also important to use a potting mix that doesn't have too much peat moss in it. Peat tends to harden so badly that water won't soak into it. If the mix is mostly peat, it won't matter how much you water. The peat over time will stop absorbing water. A little bit of peat mixed in with other ingredients is fine. But very inexpensive potting mixes tend to be mostly peat, and you will quickly find hard dry clumps of peat in your pots, even after a thorough watering.

To check your pots, tip one or two root balls out of their pots to see if your technique is actually watering the entire rootball. People are often shocked to find that the water only penetrated a few inches down into the rootball. You can see the dark area that is wet and the lower dry area of the rootball that is still dry. If you see this, it means you need to spend more time watering each pot. If more watering still doesn't soak the entire rootball, you will need to find a better potting mix.

Hibiscus planted in the ground do best with deep watering. If you water with a hose plan on spending plenty of time watering so that a deep soaking is achieved. Again, the only way to know for sure is to get the shovel or trowel out and dig down into the earth after watering. You don't need to do this often once you learn how deep the water is penetrating. But don't be shocked if you discover that what seemed like a deep watering to you has only penetrated the top 4 inches of soil. In hot areas, watering is quite a skill. Be patient and keep working at it. You will learn over time exactly how much water it takes to give your hibiscus the water they need.

Pot Properly to Protect from Heat

Pots are important. They should be big enough to provide plenty of water but not so big that they never dry out. It is often quite amazing to see how hibiscus take off when given more room for the roots to grow. Eventually every hibiscus in a pot will want to be moved to a larger pot. If that does not happen they start to languish and eventually decline.

As an alternative to moving a hibiscus to a larger pot, you can do root pruning on them. Though this sounds drastic, in reality it works out quite well usually. During spring or early summer (Never in mid-summer heat!) prune the roots by removing 1/3 of the rootball from the bottom and sides. Then, using good quality potting mix, repot the hibiscus in the same pot or same size pot that it was removed from. This allows fresh root growth without a larger pot. This process will refresh the entire plant, and good top growth will follow new root growth.

Exposing plant pots to direct sunlight can cause overheating of the root ball. One technique for preventing this is to double-pot your hibiscus: Place the water-retaining plastic pot inside a larger ceramic pot that will provide cool shade for the roots. In addition to cooling the roots, ceramic pots usually look prettier, plus they are heavier and help keep large plants weighted down, and standing up. We've all had the experience of hibiscus plants tipping over easily in their lightweight plastic pots. Heavier ceramic "sleeve" pots help provide the anchoring and cooling that the earth provides for hibiscus that are planted in the ground.

We grow hibiscus in temperatures up to 115°F using these techniques, so we know they work! It takes some patience and diligence to get everything right, but in the end, you should have happy, healthy, blooming hibiscus all through the summer months. Happy blooming!