

Plan Ahead for Hail Mitigation

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If there is any single risk to your garden for total destruction, it is probably a 20 minute hailstorm in the middle of the growing season. Plants that were just moments ago flourishing and green can be reduced to something that resembles chopped spinach. While there isn't a lot you can do to prevent the damage, you can try to minimize it.



Watch the weather. Protection won't do you any good if it isn't in place when the storm hits. Very warm weather and predicted thunderstorms in the afternoon are the risk periods for hailstorms. The warmer the weather, the more likely damage will occur.

Hail cloth, available in local garden centers, is a tightly woven cloth that allows sunlight through but is tough enough to repel hail. This is a great product idea for the top of hoop structures, tomato cages or any other structure you may have available. For young plants consider some temporary protections while the plants get started. Walls of water can be placed on heat loving plants such as tomatoes and peppers. Gallon milk cartons with the bottom cut off can protect new seedlings such as cucumbers, squash etc. Make sure to leave the cap off for ventilation. They offer pretty good weather protection until the plant outgrows the structure or needs access to pollinators.

After the storm, if your plants have been damaged you may wonder what to do with them. Annuals, if severely damaged are probably not going to recover. If damage is minor, fertilize lightly and wait for one week or so to see if they recover enough to be welcome in your garden. If recovery isn't satisfactory to you then your only option is to remove the plant, and if it is still early in the season you can replace it. Remember that some plants sold as annuals are actually tender perennials, geraniums are an example. Those plants should be treated like the perennials below. Perennials, shrubs and trees will probably survive even severe damage. They may not look great this year but will be back another year. Fertilize lightly to encourage foliage growth, cut back severely damaged foliage, and broken branches. Clean up the garden to minimize the risk of plant disease carried in the debris. It may take a few weeks but most of these plants should recover even from severe damage.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by ask.extension.org. any time day or night. Monday to Thursday from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. you can phone 520-7684 or emailing CSUmg2@elpasoco.com.

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