

Year Round Gardening

Hail Mitigation

Fredricka Bogardus, Colorado Master Gardener

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 give your plants some protection and perhaps minimize the damage.

Watch the weather. Protection won't do you any good if it isn't in place when the storm hits. Hail is difficult to predict but certain weather patterns may give you a clue. Hailstorms occur when ice crystals form within clouds. Warm air rushing upward keeps the ice crystals suspended in the cloud. The strength of that updraft is a direct result of the heating at the surface; the stronger the updraft, the larger the crystals that form. When they fall as precipitation bigger crystals, nickel size, will do more damage than smaller, pea size ice. 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 is available in local garden centers, it 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. 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, they can be left on until the plant outgrows the structure or needs access to pollinators. Use your imagination and you will come up with other ideas for protection

If you do not have plant covers in place, then you may want to resort to running outside during the storm and covering plants with whatever you can, cardboard boxes, sheets, plastic, buckets, anything that will bounce the hail off or at least slow it down.



Walls of Water are a great way to protect your newly planted tomatoes from hail, wind and late frosts.

I cannot recommend this approach as it is too risky to your personal safety.

After the storm, if your plants have been damaged you may wonder what to do with the damaged plants. Here are some suggestions:

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, and if it is still early in the season replace the plants. 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 CSUmq2@elpasoco.com.

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