

"Just Add Water"

Articles and Photos by Soni Forsman

Temperature Risin'

Some hardy reds 'fry' as temps climb

Some of my red hardy waterlilies 'sunburn' in the heat of summer. The edges of the petals blacken causing the bloom(s) to collapse. Burning happens when daytime temperatures soar into the 90s and /if they receive all afternoon sun.

Greg Speicher writes in his book, *Encyclopedia of WATER GARDEN PLANTS*, that the red petals 'absorb too much sunlight, causing the petals to overheat and dissolve.'

The good news is that the scorching does not affect the overall health of the plant. It continues to grow, producing new buds/flowers and pads. When the air temperature drops to near 90 or below, the appearance of the opening flowers returns to normal. Recommended sunscreen for hardy red cultivars is a water garden that receives minimal afternoon sun.

Two of my red hardies are particularly sensitive to high ambient temperatures and sunny afternoons. They are *Nymphaea* 'Attraction' and *N.* 'Black Princess. Both are good waterlilies but infamous for sun burning. They have not shown signs of sunburn yet this year. Either they were not in flower during the two heat waves or the afternoons had a light cloud cover.

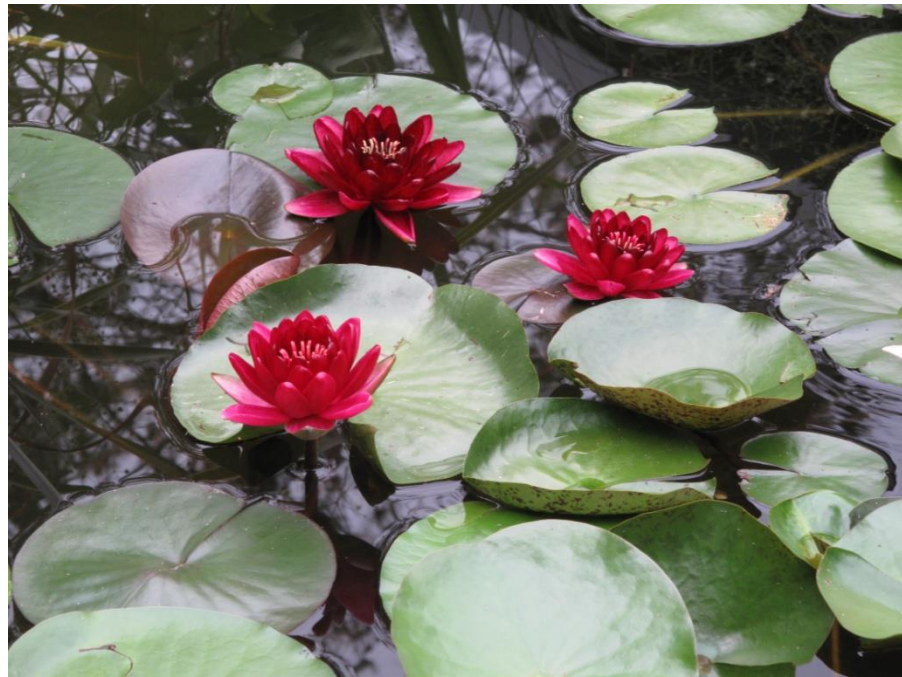
N. 'Attraction' has reddish-pink classic-shaped blooms with nearly white sepals. It is very hardy, tolerates part sun and is one of the first hardy varieties to bloom in the spring. *N.* 'Black Princess' has black-red peony-shaped flowers and begins blooming in June. Its deep red color makes it a standout in the water garden.

Despite the occasional sunburn, I still recommend these waterlilies. All their good qualities far outweigh the few blooms that fizzle in the intense afternoon sun. And, these waterlilies do not fry in all water gardens even in unseasonable high temperatures. Every water garden is different from the hours of sun it receives, time of day it receives that sun and even how the water garden is positioned in the landscape.

I have one red hybrid, *N.* 'Reflected Flame,' that thrives in full sun. It has never shown any evidence of burning in more than 10 years. That was highlighted in its original description. The name reflects its intense vibrant red color. It is a small-to-medium waterlily with a pad spread of three-plus feet and blooms that measure three-plus inches in diameter. It is a hybrid from the late Dr. Kirk Strawn. (1998).



N. 'Black Princess' - a collapsed bloom with another beginning to show the effects of high ambient temperatures and afternoon sun.



Healthy - N. 'Black Princess'



N. 'Attraction' - too much sun combined with 90-plus degree temperatures causes the edges of the petals to blacken.



Healthy - N. 'Attraction'