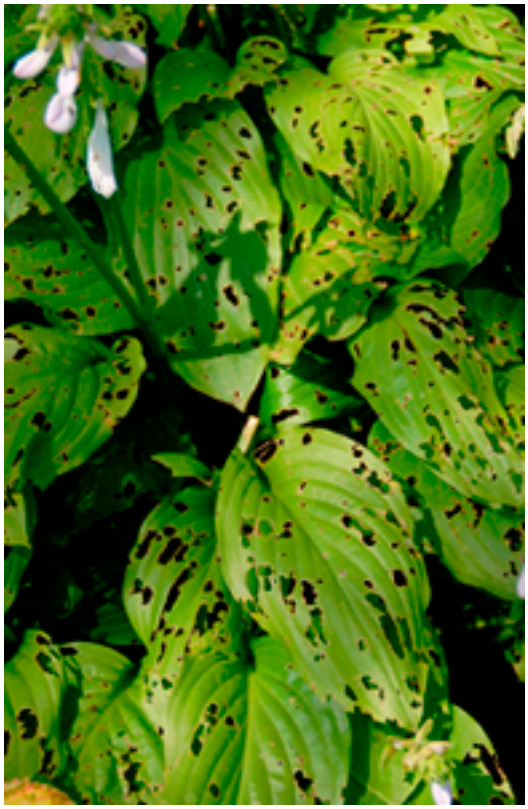

Don't let summer stressors ruin your landscape's good looks. Instead give your plants' natural defenses a boost and keep both vegetable gardens producing and flowers blooming.

Busy summer schedules can lead to plant neglect and less-than-picture-perfect gardens. When you team this with summer heat and drought that can lead to wilting, brown leaves, and poor growth, and add insects and diseases that can further weaken and damage plants, gardens can really suffer.

An exciting new organic tool for gardeners is now available to help. Plant strengtheners, like JAZ sprays, help boost plants' natural defenses so they are better able to deal with environmental stress, neglect, as well as insects and disease attacks.

Scientists found that when plants experienced stress from drought, temperature extremes, insects or diseases they produced certain molecules that activated their natural defenses. They isolated these molecules, applied them to other plants, and found that the treated plants were better able to tolerate stress.

Plant strengtheners contain such molecules that increase natural defenses in plants. One such family of molecules is the jasmonates, originally identified in the jasmine plant, that increases hundreds of natural defense molecules in treated plants. Some of the natural defenses make the plants more resistant to pathogens and others help reduce damage from drought, heat and salt.

While proper care can help increase a plant's natural defenses, plant strengtheners give them an extra boost to help plants thrive even during periods of environmental stress. These organic products act like vitamins or immunizations, helping plants deal with extreme and often unpredictable weather, pest, and disease challenges.

You can even keep healthy plants performing their best by proactively using a plant strengthener. By doing so, you'll boost a plant's immune system before environmental stresses hit and ultimately help it thrive as it faces serious challenges throughout the remainder of the season. It's a great way to protect plants before they become threatened.

Make sure to give your plants proper care throughout their lifetime. Water thoroughly and as needed. Then mulch the soil surrounding your plants with shredded leaves, evergreen needles, or other organic materials. These conserve moisture, keep roots cool and moist, suppress weeds, and improve the soil as they break down.

And, if your plants experience the same problems each year, it is time to make a change. Move stressed plants to more suitable growing conditions. Match the plant to the light, soil, and moisture it prefers. Replace diseased plants with resistant varieties and provide proper care.

By taking these steps and investing a bit of time and energy you'll be sure to create a beautiful, healthy and productive landscape.

Nationally known gardening expert, TV/radio host, author & columnist Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written over 20 gardening books, including Can't Miss Small Space Gardening. She hosts the nationally syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment segments which air on over 115 TV and radio stations throughout the U.S. and

Canada. She is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine and writes the twice monthly "Gardeners' Questions" newspaper column. Melinda also has a column in Gardening How-to magazine. Melinda hosted "The Plant Doctor" radio program for over 20 years as well as seven seasons of Great Lakes Gardener on PBS. She has written articles for Better Homes and Gardens and Fine Gardening and was a columnist and contributing editor for Backyard Living magazine. Melinda has a master's degree in horticulture, is a certified arborist and was a horticulture instructor with tenure. Her web site is www.melindamyers.com