

## REAL ESTATE

# County Flirts With Drought Disaster

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THE ALMANAC

**R**aspberries like lots of water. Blackberries can thrive in a dry spell. But people who like to pick their own berries wither when the temperature creeps much into the 90s.

Ben Allnut of Homestead Farm says that the heat of this summer impacts the number of customers who come to Homestead.

"People just aren't as eager to come out" on exceedingly hot days, said Allnut. "92 [degrees] is about the fall-off point for the pick-your-own people."

A severe drought and emergency restrictions on water use have persisted in parts of Montgomery County through the summer, and the county may be on its way to being declared part of a federal drought disaster area.

By a unanimous vote, the U.S. Department of Agriculture State Emergency Board voted to recommend that 21 Maryland counties, including Montgomery County, be declared a federal drought disaster area.

**EMERGENCY-LEVEL RESPONSE** by state

#### Drought Hotline:

1-877-4DROUGHT (1-877-437-6844)

The Maryland Department of the Environment website updates drought conditions: <http://www.mde.state.md.us/drought/>

and federal government officials does not necessarily mean area farms or garden centers are in dire straits.

"We're kind of used to it; we've learned to live with it," said Allnut, who owns Homestead Farm in Poolesville with his wife Maureen Allnut. "Of the last six years, four or five have been really dry."

Dry weather also encourages some gardeners to look for more tolerant plants.

"It hasn't hurt our business at all. People are still planting," said Jennine Thomas, assistant manager at Good Earth Garden Center. "If people are interested in plants, they continue to water."

#### THOUGH ENDURING THE DROUGHT,

Thomas and Allnut say that the dry, hot summer has spelled changes from business

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## Drought Disaster?

as usual.

"Some people were concerned about it, especially with it being so hot," said Thomas, who said indigenous plants such as sedum and Black-Eyed Susans, Maryland's state flower, are

braced for a dry summer, some crops suffer more than others.

"Raspberries have really had a hard time; they're prolific users of water," said Allnut, who said blackberries are native to dry areas and fare better. "Blackberries are a Texas crop ... They're a big hit this year."

better able to weather the drought.

"Sedums are very good to plant because they don't need very much water."

While Homestead Farm is



Elle Ulasevich, 15 months, demands another blackberry from her mother, Laura Ulasevich, as she picks her own at Homestead Farm. Blackberries are drought resistant, says Ben Allnut of Homestead.

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—Ben Allnut, Homestead Farm