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A close-up of a flowerbed still growing strong despite the drought at the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill. (Spectrum News 1/Cam Jandrow)

DROUGHT CONDITIONS

New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill combating drought conditions

BY [CAM JANDROW](#) | WORCESTER COUNTY

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BOLYSTON, Mass. - Rain on Monday and Tuesday didn't end the drought conditions most of Massachusetts is experiencing. With one look at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill's pond, you could see the impact.

"The water would be much higher," said formal gardens manager Dawn Davies. "You can sort of see the cat tails, the water would probably be up easily about

- Staff spends a significant portion of the day watering the plants manually, while others have automatic irrigation systems
- Formal gardens manager Dawn Davies said some trees are going dormant early, similar to if it was autumn
- Tomato and pepper plants are thriving at Tower Hill, with the produce being donated locally

And while the flowers are still bright and beautiful at Tower Hill, keeping them this way hasn't been easy.

"We have some surface moisture, but it's not as moist further down," said Davies. "It gets really, really almost to the point where you can see dust coming up in the air. Really dry."

For 23 years, Davies has helped take care of the plants at Tower Hill. The 171-acre space has what they describe as an irreplaceable collection.

Some of the grounds have irrigation systems, but many of the plants require manual watering.

"In some cases, most of those areas haven't seen more than an inch of rain for months," Davies said.

The heat and the lack of rain in central Massachusetts in recent months is starting to take its toll on some of Tower Hill's more vulnerable plants.

"With something like this, you'll see some browning of the leaf edges," said Davies. "And in some cases, if it has gotten really bad, you can see complete leaves going brown."

Davies said many of their trees, particularly those with shallow roots, are starting to go dormant, meaning the fall colors could be here a little sooner than normal.

"It will go dormant and hopefully come back in the spring," said Davies. "If you were to see that go brown, that's a bad sign, because that's most likely that it's dying."

There is a silver lining, though: Davies said plants like tomatoes and peppers thrive in the heat and humidity. Tower Hill donates fresh produce to the South Worcester Neighborhood Center.