

WATER TIPS FOR DROUGHT CONDITIONS

Drought stress is a real issue. If you have invested in trees and shrubs, you definitely want to keep those alive. Water according your priorities, but a good suggestion would be in this order: trees, shrubs, the perennial flowerbeds, and then the lawn.

Watering Trees, Shrubs, and Plants during this Time of Stress

Trees are suffering from the lack of rain, and proper watering of newly planted trees is absolutely essential for maximum growth, root development, and overall health and survival. The primary considerations are frequency of watering and volume per application. Frequency can be simple by following a weekly routine, and if you throw in a periodic soil moisture audit, you will be on your way to healthy trees and peace of mind.

Plantings

Watering: Roots of newly planted shrubs and trees should not dry out completely for extended periods of time, particularly during the first growing season. If Mother Nature does not provide 1" of rain per week, then we suggest you water per the following instructions. Watering should be provided until November. Using the open-hose method (which is the most often used by the homeowner), turn water volume to flow out at a low stream the size of your pointer finger. The best method of watering is to run the hose at a trickle for 20-30 minutes 2-3 times per week (equal to 1" of water per week). Shrubs a little less, 10-15 minutes at a trickle twice a week. Soil, however, should not be soggy. It is best to allow soil to dry out between watering. Also, remember to deep water all evergreens before the ground freezes for winter. This serves as a protective measure to insulate the roots so that they don't freeze as quickly as they would have had they not been given this final watering.

A soaker hose can work, too, especially if you have large perennial beds, garden areas, etc. For the soaker-hose method, let run for 1-hour, then move to different areas as needed.

Watering applications of 10 to 12 gallons per inch of trunk diameter, on a weekly basis, are recommended. This will help carry the trees through this period of drought stress. Over that amount will not hurt, but it starts becoming wasteful. Again, once you start watering, you need to continue watering through this drought period. Some communities may be restricting water usage, so be aware of water utility restrictions during times of drought.

Stress Symptoms on Trees

Stress symptoms include marginal burning on the leaves, leaf cupping, and leaf curl during the heat of the day, and leaves browning out – the entire tree can brown out, then it may be too late to do anything. Trees planted within the last 2-5 years should be on a watering schedule. Don't forget your city-planted tree if new.

Lawns - To water or not to water?

As far as picking priorities in the landscape for watering -- the lawn is a low priority. A lawn will go dormant, and green up when we actually have some substantial rainfall. Remember, once you start watering your lawn, then you need to continue; so better to leave it dormant. Another suggestion would be to hold off on any fertilizing of the lawns until we have some re-greening of the lawn. Now is the time to save your trees and shrubs. Irrigated lawns are perfect breeding grounds for Japanese Beetles.

Watering exception: New seed or sod must receive regular watering.