

Summer Watering Tips

With the weather getting hotter and rain decreasing of late, let's hope those trends abate themselves and we do not have a repeat of the 2007 drought. Should we have a repeat, however, the following tips from Regional Extension Agent Tony Glover that can help you manage water more wisely while enabling your plants to survive...

Homeowners tend to over-do-it when summer weather arrives. The danger may be even greater this year. Many people have called to ask about their trees and shrubs that are sickly looking coming out of the winter and spring. My response is to not do anything as long as rainfall is adequate.

Adding additional water now is not going to make up for the damage from last year's drought. The damage is largely due to root death; therefore, time to regenerate roots is the main cure needed. Daily shallow watering is hard on your wallet, hard on your plants, and hard on your utility's water treatment facility. Here are some tips for summer watering in case of another drought:

Only water the plants- not the street or sidewalk.

Water plants according to their needs. Established herbaceous plants, like flowers, need water once per week, but established large trees may never need supplemental water unless severely stressed from last year.

Water during the coolest part of the day. Water between 4 a.m. and 10 a.m. to decrease disease problems and water lost to evaporation.

Use trickle or drip irrigation systems. Drip and trickle irrigation water where it's needed—into the roots. Sprinklers waste water to evaporation and wind.

Don't over water. Over-watering causes root rot and foliar diseases. Make sure the water has time to soak into the ground. Water run-off is a waste and extra expense. Water plants deeply but less frequently to encourage deep-rooting. Avoid frequent and brief, shallow watering. This creates shallow roots and increases the chance of drought stress, if water use becomes restricted like it did in many places last year.

Water based on the weather, not the clock. Check the soil periodically to determine moisture depth. Consider collecting rain water from your home's roof and other hard surfaces in the landscape. Rain gardens and rain barrels can be used to reduce water runoff and pollution.

Mulch reduces water loss. A two to three inch mulch layer supports plants through weather extremes by moderating moisture loss and soil temperatures. Mulch as large an area as possible around trees and shrubs. However, be aware that overapplication of mulch can be detrimental because roots can grow up into deep mulch and quickly die when dry weather comes.

Minimize gardening activities. Avoid pruning and fertilizing in dry weather. Pruning and fertilizing both stimulate growth, which can additionally stress plants. Also avoid planting trees and shrubs in dry weather. Smaller annuals and perennials can be planted anytime but water the first few weeks to establish new roots.

Hopefully, we won't have a repeat of last year this summer but at least you can reduce potential problems by following a few of these water and money saving tips.

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