

Drought & Hot Weather Make Tree Care Even More Critical

What a summer we are having. Extremely behind in precipitation, with no end in sight. And now the temperature is reaching into the high 90's and low 100's. As I drive through Clarksville, trees are showing signs of stress. From large, mature trees to ones just planted this spring, our trees are really taking a hit with the drought and extremes of temperature. And let's not forget that late freeze we had. The damage from that freeze compounded with our current conditions is creating a nightmarish situation for our trees.

Let me say first, if you have not been watering your trees, now is definitely the time to start. Delaying any longer could have serious long-term effects on your tree's health and survival. I am not just talking about small and younger trees. I am also referring to the mature trees in your yard. Most often during dry spells, watering is concentrated on flowers and young trees. We cannot forget about those large trees that shade our yards and homes. The current water deficit is making these larger trees struggle to find water. You also have to factor in how much water is being lost through the leaves everyday. There is a lot of water going out and little coming in.

Even if your trees do not die due to lack of water, the drought severely stresses the trees and makes them vulnerable to disease and insects. Healthy trees are usually able to cope with these problems, but when they become stressed they cannot operate at maximum efficiency. When trees become stressed, they also emit chemicals that many insects, such as borers, can detect. It is like a beacon for these nasty critters. Many times they

will attack in mass numbers and the tree does not stand a chance. By the time you notice the problem it will be too late.

What I am basically trying to say this week is that this drought and heat is going to have some major effects on the health of our trees. Even if your trees look fine, they are still struggling on the inside. The effects may not show up until next year. We need to do our part now to help keep our trees healthy until Mother Nature begins to give us a hand. There are some very simple things that we can do that will help our trees cope with this enormous stress, and may determine if they live or die in the coming years.

The first is water. You need to be watering your trees now more than ever. A simple way to do this is with a soaker hose. One 75' – 100' section may be enough for small and medium trees, but you will probably need a couple for your large trees. Start a few feet out from the base of larger trees and wrap the hose in a spiral out to the drip line of the tree. The soaker hose allows the water to slowly soak into the soil and penetrate deeply, as well as minimizing runoff. What is also nice about this method is that you do not have to stand outside the entire time you are watering. Simply turn on the soaker hose and let it run for a while.

The second thing you can do for your trees is mulch them. A 3" mulch layer will help conserve the water you are giving the tree, as well as cool the soil temperature in that area. It will also act as a slow release fertilizer and give the tree some of the nutrients that it requires. If you are using a soaker hose to water your trees, I suggest mulching

right over the top of it. This way the water does not have to penetrate the layer of mulch to reach the soil. Another added benefit is that it hides the soaker hose. The long, black, spiraling ring around your tree may not be the most attractive thing to look at. The mulch will conveniently hide it so no one can even tell it is there.

I really hope that everyone takes what I am saying to heart. Our trees are extremely stressed, whether they are showing it or not. Watering and mulching are the two best things that we can do right now to help our trees cope with this stress and keep them as healthy as possible. A little attention now will pay big dividends in the future. If you choose to ignore my advice, do not blame the insects or disease when your tree begins to decline and die. The real culprit will be your inattention when your tree really needed your help. Pesticides cannot fix everything.