

While we have received some heavy rains recently, it is important to keep your trees well watered going into the winter. Even with more rain this summer than last, the effect of 2012's summer heat and drought still shows up in the landscapes and yards of many southeast Nebraska residents. Several trees died in 2012 and 2013 in the region while others still have not recovered. One thing that is very important is to make sure your trees have been watered well going into the winter months and are not being stressed from dry conditions. Young and newly planted trees (those planted within the last 3-years) are the most susceptible. They do not have the extensive root system of established trees to draw moisture from the soil. This past spring a number of conifers died, (i.e Eastern red cedar, junipers and arborvitae). The extremely cold temperatures and dry winter we had last year, really were hard on the trees. Some of the trees and shrubs were older, but others were 1-3 years old.

The summer of 2012 was very hard on trees and some still show the stress due to the extremely hot conditions and also stress from insect pests and diseases. The stress that is put on trees by insects and diseases makes trees more susceptible to drought stress. While generally healthy, well established trees will not be affected by insects or a short term drought for that matter, watering these trees will not hurt. You can water these trees out to the drip line, the ground beneath the tree where the leaf canopy ends.

How do I know if my trees need watering? Even if you have been watering your trees on a regular basis all summer, they still will need a good soaking this fall headed into the winter unless we receive a great deal of natural precipitation (rain). Trees will benefit from a good soaking this fall. If you can't push a screwdriver in the ground around the tree, the ground needs soaking. For newly planted trees, Dennis Adams, Forester with the University of Nebraska recommends soaking the soil around the trees about an hour every week to 10 days. For young landscape trees he recommends deep watering before the ground freezes to thoroughly soak the soil. Letting a garden hose run for several hours should provide sufficient water. Dave Mooter, a Forester with the Nebraska Forest Service recommends applying 5 gallons of water two or three times a week to young trees. Deep watering trees this fall could prevent serious injury to trees this winter if dry conditions persist.

If you haven't done it, apply 4-6" of wood chip mulch around the base of trees, especially the newly planted trees and then water the mulch. It is also a good idea to water early in the morning which allows the tree to use the water during the day. It is best to water slowly, but deeply for newly planted trees. This helps trees develop deeper roots making them more resistant to future drought stress.

Winter is a difficult time for trees, so anything you can do to reduce the stress will be beneficial. Throughout the winter if precipitation has been short, deeply water trees if the ground isn't frozen with a slow trickling hose or a slow running sprinkler left in place for a couple of hours. Apply it slow enough that it can soak in and not run off. These are some tips that should help your trees make it through the winter in good shape.

Gary Lesoing
Extension Educator
Nemaha County
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