

We've all heard the saying, "Timing is everything." Although I'm reasonably certain timing is applicable to many things in life, I am convinced timing is crucial when it pertains to gardening.

In preparation for writing my column, I regularly take timing into consideration. Often I select a subject matter that relates to current gardening concerns or problems. Frequently, my readers inspire me through their inquiries.

Of late I am reminded of a television commercial that aired many years ago. It involved the Maytag Company. The commercial featured the late Jesse White as the Maytag repairman. He claimed to be the "loneliest guy in town." The ad featured Jesse sitting and staring at his telephone, anxiously waiting for someone to call. The obvious message was Maytag appliances are so reliable they rarely need a repairman. Unlike the Maytag repairman, I am certainly not idle, nor am I lonely or sitting and staring at my telephone. Yet, like the Maytag repairman, my phone isn't ringing as frequently as it did a month or two ago. During the summer months, I can barely finish a telephone conversation before the phone rings again. It's apparent, gardening activities are slowing down.

It's common knowledge that December is not a key gardening month. By now, most gardeners have completed their autumn gardening chores. Vegetable gardens and flower borders have been cleaned. A winterizing application of fertilizer has been applied to the lawn. Hopefully automatic watering systems are shut down and the garden hoses rolled up and stored. Lawnmowers and other gardening tools are likely stowed away for the winter. In the landscape, perennials have entered a state of dormancy—the condition of being alive but not actively growing. Perhaps, you too are entering a state of dormancy—alive but not actively gardening.

Before you become too complacent and relaxed, remember Central Nebraska is still dealing with drought conditions. Little, if any, precipitation has fallen whether in the form of rain or snow. Sadly, the month of November was listed as the driest month for 2012.

Interestingly, of the few inquiries I have received, most pertain to whether one should continue watering. Additionally, I hear, "If I continue to water, will it cause my trees, shrubs or lawn to break dormancy and start growing?"

I've been answering the first question with a resounding YES. Watering is vital, especially for those plants that were planted within the past season. Newly planted flowers, trees and shrubs have limited root capacities and are extremely vulnerable to damage from drought. Furthermore, evergreens, both conifers and broadleaves, continue to lose water vapor to the atmosphere through their foliage on bright sunny winter days.

The fact remains, the majority of vegetation including turfgrass is drought stressed. All will benefit from a good watering. The key is to water only when the ground is **not** frozen. As long as the soil is not frozen, water intake continues, thus allowing plants to replace any water loss from transpiration and/or evaporation.

I assure you watering will not cause your plants to break dormancy. What I really fear is that if one's turf, flowers, shrubs and trees are not adequately watered before the ground freezes, they might easily change from being dormant to being dead.

I have personally shut down and restarted my automatic watering system four times this fall. I will continue to water my lawn on bright, warm sunny days and shut the system down at night to avoid freeze damage. Once the soil freezes, I plan to shut it down for good. Although I've disconnected my hoses from their hydrants, I have them available to water my trees, flowers and shrubs.

December has finally arrived, and generally it is a time for gardeners to relax—but not this year. Due to the prolonged drought, it remains crucial that you take the time to continue watering. Remember, timing is everything — especially when it pertains to gardening.