



The word that is on everyone's mind this season is drought. While we have had a few rains this year we are still in need of some good soaking moisture. This lack of moisture along with the hot, windy conditions can play a big role in how your landscape will react to the weather.

When it comes to applying additional moisture, pick the plants that matter the most or have the highest value. Trees and shrubs will take the longest to replace if lost due to dry conditions. If a tree doesn't receive enough moisture, the water column can be disturbed and lead to a dead top in the tree, or worse a dead tree. The replacement tree can take several years, or decades, to reach the same size as the tree that has died. Shrubs and perennials will also take a few years to reach mature size if lost to drought. While we don't want to lose the lawn, the good news is that turf can be reseeded within a year. Selectively applying moisture in droughty situations is cheaper than replacing plant material and waiting for it to mature.

It would be a good idea to apply additional moisture to trees that aren't located in irrigated turf. Apply enough water to these trees to get the soil moist about 12 inches deep around the tree and past its dripline. Soil type, site conditions, tree's age and species all can play a big role in the frequency and amount of irrigation. A good rule of thumb for trees planted within the last three years is to moisten the top foot of soil about once a week. Trees planted more than five years can also benefit from additional moisture. Try to water these trees about once every few weeks or so in the absence of rain. A three-to-four-inch layer of mulch around the tree's trunk and under its dripline will also help to conserve moisture. We want to be sure to cut back on the moisture as we get closer to fall to allow the trees to harden off for winter.

Avoid pruning trees during drought conditions. Typically, it is recommended not to prune trees during spring when they are leafing out and early fall when they are going dormant and dropping leaves. With current heat and drought stress, pruning is best avoided this summer as well. Ideally, wait until trees go dormant to prune if possible.

The type of turfgrass in the lawn will determine how it will react to lack of moisture. Some cool season grasses, like Kentucky bluegrass, can go dormant in summer months if they don't receive timely rains. Just because it is dormant doesn't mean that it doesn't need water to keep it alive. A good rule of thumb is to water 1/4 inch of water every four weeks to keep the crowns wet and to make sure they survive. When the temperatures cool down and moisture increases, either by rain or irrigation, the Kentucky bluegrass should re-green up with only a little bit of thinning. Try to limit heavy traffic on dormant turf because this can cause damage to the crown and increase the thinning when it recovers.

Tall fescue reacts a bit differently to lack of moisture than Kentucky bluegrass. Fescue has a deeper root system than bluegrass and is able to reach for water deeper in the soil profile. Contrary to what many people believe, tall fescue uses more water than Kentucky bluegrass, but because of its deeper root system it is able to get more water. One downside to tall fescue is the fact that it has poorer drought survival, and it should be irrigated more to keep it from going dormant. Just like with the Kentucky bluegrass, limit traffic, including mowing and foot traffic, on drought stressed turf to prevent damage to the crowns.

With some properly timed moisture the moisture, plant material can still be green and lush for the remainder of the year.

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