

Tree Planting Demo and Fall Watering
By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator
Release: Week of September 5, 2022

Trees are struggling. Environmental stresses like drought are compounded when trees are planted incorrectly. Too deep of planting is a common issue I come across when diagnosing tree problems, especially older trees. How a tree is planted affects growth rate and health throughout the trees lifetime.

With fall being tree planting season, a demonstration on how to plant trees at the correct depth is planned for Tuesday, September 20 at 6:30 pm. It will be held in Columbus at Pawnee Park just east of Pawnee Plunge. Extension Master Gardeners and I will be planting two Memorial trees to show correct planting.

Along with planting, we will cover staking and care of newly planted trees such as watering and fertilization. Please join us and bring your questions. Samples are welcome if you have a tree with a current issue. Place the sample in a closed transparent bag.

If you've always thought trees should be planted at the depth they are in their containers, you need to attend this free demonstration. It will last about one hour depending on the number of questions. If you would like additional information, call the Extension office at 402-563-4901.

Young and established trees are drought stressed given our dry conditions the last two growing seasons and this past winter. Low precipitation along with hot temperatures and windy conditions have combined to stress trees.

It is often believed trees growing in irrigated lawns are not drought stressed. While turf irrigation is beneficial, given our current dry conditions, lawn watering alone may not be deep enough to fully benefit trees.

The forecast is for continuing dry conditions this fall into early winter. Deeper watering of trees in September and October is always important but may be critical for trees this year. A deep watering is one that moistens the soil 8 to 10 inches deep.

Myths about tree roots is they grow very deep and will go in search of water. The fact is tree roots only grow where there is moisture and oxygen in the soil. They cannot search for water.

The majority of tree roots that take up water and nutrients are in the upper foot of soil. Rather than growing deeply, they spread out to about two to three times the trees height.

In years with average precipitation, deeper soil depths remain moist and turf irrigation may be all trees need to moisten the upper inches. In drought years where soil in the lower profile dries out, a deep watering of trees about once a month is needed.

Without rainfall or irrigation in September and October, evergreens will be highly susceptible to winter drying and will turn brown or die once spring arrives. Drought stressed shade and ornamental trees are more susceptible to damaging pests like insect borers, wilts, and canker disease.

To deeply water trees, set a soaker hose or sprinkler over tree roots and let it run until the soil is moistened to a depth of 8 to 10 inches. Insert a screwdriver or other probe into the soil to estimate depth. Try to water from the trunk to about 10 feet beyond the trees dripline.