

Water Evergreen and Shade Trees Now  
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Most of our area is abnormally dry or in moderate drought. Trees are likely suffering from a lack of moisture. Deep watering in September and October will be important to avoid future problems.

Trees often have a delayed response to stress. While they may look okay now, they could be drought stressed. This makes evergreen trees more susceptible to winter drying and other trees more likely to be attacked by pests like insect borers and canker disease.

As I've answered tree questions related to borers and cankers the past few years, I've often told people the issue could have started when the tree was stressed during the 2012 drought. It just took this long for the damage to progress far enough for trees to dieback.

The same is true of evergreens each spring and summer. When I suggest that a brown evergreen is suffering from winter desiccation injury, they remind me that the tree was fine all winter and only started to turn brown during spring or summer. But this is due to the delayed response in trees.

With winter desiccation, we don't have to wait 3 to 5 years to see symptoms. They symptoms usually show up a month or two after winter is over. However, the damage still occurred during winter and could only have been avoided with correct watering the previous summer and fall.

I suspect next spring and over the next three to five years, I will be saying the same to tree owners about the dry year of 2020. To help protect trees from future issues tied to drought stress, provide water to trees especially evergreens and young trees.

In dry years, lawn irrigation rarely provides enough water for both turfgrass and trees as it tends to be too shallow. Trees will benefit from a deep watering that moistens the soil 8 to 10 inches deep from the trunk to well beyond the dripline.

Again, focus on watering evergreens and young trees in the landscape but know that all trees will benefit, especially if we do not receive fall rains. Repeat irrigation throughout early fall as needed in the absence of rainfall.

While conditions are quite dry and a good irrigation will help, don't forget it is possible to overwater trees. The goal is to have a consistently moist soil that is not too wet or too dry.

Plants require oxygen as much as they do water. The oxygen they used is absorbed from soil by their roots. When soils are too wet, oxygen levels are too low and root function is reduced. If soils remain saturated for too long, roots will die.

To avoid overwatering in a clay or compacted soil, insert a Phillips screwdriver or other tool such as a piece of rebar into the soil. If the soil is dry, it will not be easy to insert the tool.

For trees growing where it is difficult to get water to them, the use of mulch will help conserve soil moisture. The soil must be moist prior to applying the mulch.

Once the soil is wet, spread a two to four inch layer of mulch over the soil in at least a four to six foot diameter ring. Do not use a deeper mulch layer and do not pile mulch against tree trunks. Too deep of a mulch layer reduces oxygen exchange between the air and soil.