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Summer Tree Care

Summer has hit – with a vengeance! Once adequate soil moisture levels have been reduced and summer rains in many areas have thus far been inadequate to meet the needs of landscape plants. It *is* July!

Watering is key towards maintaining trees in our landscape. While most mature trees will have an adequate root system to explore moisture from a wide enough area to keep them nice and green, younger trees do not and will likely require some special care.

For example, newly transplanted trees need at least ten gallons of water a week to keep them going. Two and three-year-old trees that are still getting established may require even more! The challenge: getting water where it needs to be!

Trees perform best when they have deep, but infrequent water applications. Try to get water to soak deeply in to the soil. This keeps evaporation levels low, making water available to trees over a longer period. Try using a small hole in a five-gallon bucket or a perforated soaker hose (water distribution can be helped with these hoses by hooking both ends together with a Y-adaptor to equalize pressure) to allow for slower applications that can soak in to the soil's subsurface layer. If soil is hard, consider a light tillage of some sort to rough up the surface, with an eye towards increasing infiltration. If even these slow watering methods result in surface runoff, consider reducing the watering rate even further or building a berm around the base of the tree (make sure it's at least four foot in diameter) to allow water to percolate in to the soil profile before running off.

Whatever method you use, be sure to wet soils to at least a twelve-inch depth! Use a metal rod, wooden dowel, electric fence post or something similar to check depth. Dry soil is much harder to push through than wet.

Focus watering efforts on smaller and stressed trees, but don't forget mature trees as well! Evergreen species, in particular, seem to be showing increasing amounts of stress, likely due to reduced winter moisture and warmer, drying winds. Many are under attack from bagworms right now as well, compounding the issue. Be sure both evergreen and deciduous trees are evaluated for insect and disease pressure in addition to drought stress, to see if they are adding to the problem.

Multiple watering publications are available from your District Office to help you design a watering program. Stop in and pick one up, or contact me for an e-mail link.