



Ask A Master Gardener Q & A

Drought / Trees

Q. Because of the drought in this area some of the younger trees in my yard are beginning to lose their leaves. I had been watering them when I could but now the time we can water is limited. They say the lawn (which is totally brown) will come back. Will the same thing happen to these trees?



Ash tree

A. We wish we could be optimistic about your trees, but their reaction to drought conditions is often very different from that of grass. When grass goes dormant and turns brown it most likely will recover when there is a period of rainfall, or if watered more frequently.

The tree's growing season is over when the leaves of trees begin to turn brown and drop. They use the chlorophyll in the green leaves to build up energy for next year so you should expect the trees and shrubs to be in a weakened state. The browning of the leaves before they get leathery and fall off is known as scorch. This makes the tree more vulnerable to disease and infection. The tree may even lose limbs if the drought is severe.

You don't say what type of trees you have or how old they are. Not all trees will have the same reaction. Some trees and shrubs begin to look more like they would in fall. There is no way to predict what will happen to your individual trees.

The important thing is to water those trees properly. Each tree and shrub has its own general requirements and those requirements vary with their location. Trees should be watered at the drip line not at the trunk. The tree should be watered slowly so more sinks in the ground and is not lost due to evaporation. Keep track of the rain we receive. Your tree probably needs between an inch to two inches of water every two weeks. One suggestion is to keep a small flat tuna or cat food can to catch and measure the water. Some trees, including birches, pin oaks and silver maples, need closer to three inches a week.

If you use a drip hose or root feeder you will have to move them around your trees to make sure all of the areas receive water. Use the directions to calibrate the water being released.

Be certain you water the bushes and shrubs such as lilacs, spirea and forsythia that have already flowered. They are building up their energy for next years show.

For more home, yard, garden and insect related information, visit our website at www.extension.uiuc.edu/cooknorth/mg or call the Cook County/North Suburban Extension Master Gardeners at (847) 818-2901 or (847) 298-3502. Office Hours are reduced during the fall and winter months.