

## Drought Harms Your Trees

Recent drought conditions throughout the country have created serious challenges for natural vegetation, including trees. The National Weather Service's "Long Lead" forecast predicts that most of the country will continue to have normal to above temperatures with normal to below normal rainfall. For many regions of North America this means a continuation of drought conditions, with no relief in sight!

The lack of rain showers and high temperatures is sure to create more hardships for trees. Water is required for all biological processes of plants, trees, and even people. When there is an adequate supply, water seeps down through the soil, gradually saturating each layer. Trees depend on water and moisture in the upper layers of soil – usually the top 6 to 12 inches where the root system is located. Water that seeps beneath the upper layers eventually becomes available for use by people as well water. In severe drought conditions, more water is required to keep the upper layers of soil moist.

The first signs of water stress in large shade trees is flagging, or wilting, of foliage. It can be difficult to notice. Next the leaves become "scorched" as they gradually curl, become dry at the edges, and begin to die. Eventually, trees will drop their leaves in an attempt to "save" themselves. It is important to remember that defoliated trees are weakened, but not dead. Many of these trees will survive.

### **What can you do?**

Apply 2 to 4 inches of mulch around trees. This conserves soil moisture and keeps soil temperature cool. Water trees in the evenings. Lower temperatures result in less evaporation and better conservation of water. This means more water for the trees!

Do a home soil moisture test. Remove a small amount of soil near the roots of a tree and squeeze it. If a sticky ball forms, the soil is too wet. If it breaks like chalk, it is too dry. If your trees need watering, use proper watering techniques. Light sprinkling only settles the dust and evaporates quickly in the sun. Give the plants a weekly, deep soaking with a lawn sprinkler, allowing the water to seep at least 5 to 6 inches down. This helps the water to get below competitive grass roots, and reach the tree's deeper roots.

In fact, if you water in too shallow a manner, the tree's roots could turn upward in a search for the lightly sprinkled water. When the soil then dries, the new, shallow roots will be killed more readily.

Over-watering can be just as bad as under-watering. Do not water if there has been adequate rainfall. Let the soil dry somewhat in between to avoid "drowning" your trees. Consult the licensed tree experts at Pardoe's Lawn and Tree Service at 800-427-4890 to perform a quick health check and recommend good watering techniques.

