Drought and Heat Stress Continues to Affect Trees and Shrubs

Rainfall across the Southwind District has been spotty at best for several weeks now. The US Drought Monitor was recently updated on August 25th. It now has most of the area in a D2 intensity – classified as a severe drought. Unfortunately, the long-range projection doesn’t show the drought breaking anytime soon. As Kansans, however, we all know that could change and we could go from a drought to a flood in the matter of a few days! I’m not hoping for rainfall like that, but several inches in the upcoming weeks would be welcome.

Heat and drought stress has taken a toll on newly planted trees and shrubs this year. Any time we plant a new tree, it will go through a period of “transplant shock.” Just like the name implies, this is a period of stress on the new plant as it tries to adapt to its new environment. Many times, new trees will drop almost all of their leaves the first year planted. Due to the heat and lack of rainfall this year, it has been more severe. Obviously, this is quite concerning to homeowners. The good news is that in most instances, the newly planted tree will be fine and leaf out the following spring.

However, as we continue to remain in a drought situation, careful attention needs to be paid to any new trees or shrubs that were planted this spring. Here are watering recommendations:

- Water should be retained around the base of the newly planted trees by building a low berm just outside the planting hole.
- Soak soil weekly - applying approximately 10 gallons of water
- For every inch of trunk diameter greater than two inches, an additional ten gallon should be applied.
- Monitor trees even into the winter as supplemental watering will still be needed if drought remains

As for shrubs, since they are smaller, they will require less water. Water enough to thoroughly moisten the entire rootball, down to a depth of 8 inches – about once a week.

To reduce the stress on our older, mature trees, concentrate on good watering – not just a quick shot here and there. As long as we remain in a drought, water older trees to a depth of at least 10 inches. Make certain to water out beyond the drip line. Avoid watering at the base of the trunk as the absorbing roots are farther out. Check the watering depth by pushing a screwdriver or metal rod into the soil. It will stop when it reaches dry soil.

If you have concerns about the health of a tree or shrub, please feel free to contact me. I am available to make home visits if needed.

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