

Tree Health Following Drought

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The drought was and continues to be a hot topic for many in this area. For some moisture levels have returned to more normal; however residents should remain cautious. We often fret about the health of our lawns and gardens, but what about trees?

We all know that trees need water to survive. Times of drought can present problems for trees, but it depends on the type of tree. Less moisture in the soil means less water to convert into glucose significantly lowering energy reserves and production of defense chemicals in the tree, which means a shorter growing season for the tree. So heavily stressed trees in drought will enter winter dormancy earlier. This alone isn't a problem since most established trees can survive without photosynthesizing for up to a year. However, a prolonged drought could create a cycle of longer periods of dormancy and shorter intervening periods to prepare for it, which could have significant effects on the landscape.

Lack of water can cause a wide range of issues including leaf wilting, leaf scorch, stem dieback and increased susceptibility to pests and diseases.

To protect your trees from the effects of drought, start by choosing species that will grow well in your conditions and follow basic tree watering guidelines. Provide water during periods of dryness to ensure the health of your trees.

If a tree is not properly planted, its health could be compromised. One common mistake is planting the root flare (the point where the trunk begins to spread out as it meets the roots) too deep. This will cause a slow decline, ultimately killing the tree.

Drought can have a major impact on tree health and survival. Water is the most limiting ecological resource for a tree, and without adequate moisture, decline and death are imminent.

For more information, please contact the local K-State Research and Extension Office.

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