

Weather Woes Continue Into Fall

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“Everyone talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.” This saying, attributed to Mark Twain, is right on target for this year. I just counted...this is the sixth column on weather I've written in 2016. I'm going to touch on several topics I've received questions on.

Several alert residents have noticed newly germinated corn coming up in tri-state farm fields; some of it is already 6 to 12 inches tall. No, this is not a winter cover-crop, nor is it a new mutant winter-hardy corn. The corn was so dry during harvest that a lot of it came off the ear and dropped to the ground before entering the combine. Somehow, this spilled corn found enough moisture to germinate, and the warm sunny days have encouraged rapid growth. I expect that the corn will soon die with the first freeze, which is already about 2 weeks later than normal.

Lawns are looking pretty rough right now. Usually, we begin getting some rain in September and October to help the turfgrass come out of dormancy, but Evansville hasn't had a really significant rain since July. Any grass seed or fertilizer that was applied in September is probably still sitting there on top of the lawn, unless you've been watering. Non-irrigated yards will continue to remain dormant until we get some rain; my concern is that by the time we get a few days of steady rain, the temperatures will be too low for the grass to come out of dormancy.

Trees, shrubs, and perennials that were planted this fall are desperately thirsty right now. Unless you can get water to them on a weekly basis, expect to see a large percentage of them not make it to spring. Ball-and-burlap trees are especially vulnerable, since they've lost a large amount of roots during the digging process. Newly planted bulbs should be OK, as they are probably still dormant and waiting for some moisture.

I'm becoming very nervous about how well some of our broadleaf evergreens, such as rhododendrons and magnolias, will survive the winter. Even though these plants are dormant and not growing in cold weather, the leaves are still losing water through the process of transpiration. If the soil is dry going into winter, the plants will not be able to replace the missing moisture. By the spring, you will notice most of the leaves will be scorched (brown, dead tissue along the leaf tips and edges), and then they'll drop off. Prevent this by irrigating heavily once per week, providing water to the entire root system.

You can learn more about planting and caring for trees in the fall on Saturday, November 19, at a free workshop sponsored by Keep Evansville Beautiful. It will run from 9 am to noon, and will be held at Central Public Library in Evansville. For questions on this workshop or other garden-related topics, please contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287.