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Rochester Sentinel Article

Watering Problems

Most of Indiana is technically in the beginning stages of a drought with a title put on by the USDA of abnormally dry. During this hot and dry weather, the misuse of water is a topic that is on my mind. Using too much and using too little are both a problem. Watering a plant daily is just as much of a problem as not watering them at all. I have seen plants develop various problems, including death from overwatering. Probably the number one plant that seems to be the most abused is the tomato. Daily watering creates limited rooting that leads to a calcium deficiency that leads to a condition called blossom end rot. Here the tomato fruit becomes black and leathery on the bottom end.

Watering deeply once a week in heavy soil and twice a week in sandy soil will be enough.

The second most over watered plant is grass, this occurs with those timed sprinkler systems that go off for a short time every day. Back Off! This kind of watering is not recommended by any university. The grass becomes shallow rooted and prone to diseases. Additionally, a lot of the water is wasted as it evaporates during the hot day.

Under watered plants are primarily trees and shrubs. Yes, these plants do grow in nature without additional water from a hose. But they don't have grass competing for their water. Instead they have a nice layer of leaves holding the moisture and coolness in the ground. They don't have sidewalks and buildings reflecting heat and restricting root growth. They are not growing in a strange soil and environment that was not meant for them.

In the woods, dogwoods grow in the shade of another tree and are not found in full sunlight. Birches are found along streams in lower wet soils, but we put them in the middle of sandy lawns. Tulip trees have been showed to die 5 years after a drought. They have additional stresses put on them for many reasons. So when it's this dry, protect a 100 year investment with a little water. I heard someone say for 50 cents worth of water you can save that big old tree. So about once a week put the hose near the base of the tree and let it run for a long time giving it a chance to soak in. Check out what it costs to have a dead tree removed and you will find that to be a cheap investment.

Stressed shrubs are also susceptible to spider mites. They feast on water stressed plants. The lack of water concentrates the protein in the sap and they can now have what is described as a protein shake. Take that hose and spray the leaves with a hard burst of water and you will help kill off those tiny insects. Then water the plant.

Drought stress may take several years to kill a plant so even if they have green leaves this fall don't think you are out of the woods yet. Of course that is where those trees would prefer to be.

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