

July 1, 2015



Summer Tree Care  
By Debbie Hager  
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

This summer you may have chosen to water your lawn areas less or not at all -- but don't forget your trees need water, too. Trees often get their water along with the lawn. Trees and shrubs need years to mature and are costly to replace, making them the right choice to irrigate when water is limited.

Watch your trees to determine if they are showing signs of stress. A broadleaf tree will show leaf wilt in the short term and burning around the leaf edges in the long term. Pine tree stress will appear as needle die back, loss of needles or burning on the needle tips. Drought weakens trees and reduces their ability to withstand insect attacks. Coastal redwoods and birches are especially vulnerable to drought. However, native oaks in El Dorado County are adapted to little or no summer water. Summer water given to native oaks may even cause fungal infections of oak roots.

It is important to water trees in their drip zone. The drip zone is the area where rain hits tree leaves and falls off the tree canopy like an umbrella and drips to the ground. That outer edge of the tree canopy is the drip line where the strongest tree feeder roots gather moisture. Few feeder roots are close to the trunk so the trunk of the tree is not the most efficient area to water.

Water trees this summer deeply and infrequently, about twice a month. Young trees may need more frequent irrigation. To water deeply, water slowly and away from the trunk. Apply water directly to the drip zone with a hose on a trickle, or use a soaker hose or drip lines. Apply water in several places, spaced two to three feet apart, allowing the water to soak in.

July 1, 2015

This drought summer let up on pruning, fertilization and other normal maintenance that encourages tree growth. Prune only if absolutely necessary and don't fertilize a tree if it is under drought stress. Do mulch around trees to preserve moisture. Spread organic mulch in a circle around the tree, two to four inches thick, and at least three or four feet out. Leave a mulch free circle six to eight inches around the trunk to prevent rot. Lawn or other plantings directly under the tree may be removed, to help eliminate competition for water. Replace them with organic mulch also.

Water trees slowly, deeply and infrequently, and it's very important to water in the early morning or after sunset. Watering at these times cuts down evaporation and helps trees replace water lost to heat during the day. Trees may drop some leaves and experience wilting in our summer heat, but with appropriate care they will survive.

There is no public Master Gardener class this Saturday -- enjoy your Fourth of July holiday! UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer your questions at local Farmer's Markets and in their office every Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook.