

## Archive for August, 2012

### Drought Lessons

Sunday, August 19th, 2012

“There’s a little bit of good in every bad situation.” I’m not sure if this quote is attributable to anyone – even Mark Twain or Anonymous – but I have said it myself many times. Maybe it’s my own original saying, but I doubt it. However, it could be a mantra for the optimists among us who try to look for the silver lining beyond the immediate crisis.

As the great Midwest drought continues, it is difficult to see anything good in the lack of moisture while watching our trees suffer. However, let me offer some advice that may help to soften the blows for we humans who cringe when we see wilting crowns, premature dropping of leaves, and dying friends out in our home landscape:

1. Look for indications of where your better spots of soil are located. Such places mean that the moisture which does fall will be more likely to be of benefit to a tree planted in that location. Good soil means better utilization of the available water and nutrients by any plant located there. In my front yard, which I have not watered, most of the lawn grass is a very light tan color and is very crinkly to the touch. I’m suspecting it is dead or really in a deep dormancy (lots of luck there Brunkie!). However, out on the southwest part of my lawn (the hottest location on the lot) there is a 10 ft. diameter of green grass that hasn’t been watered except by the very few light showers we’ve had this summer. Smack dab in the middle of this oasis is a crepemyrtle that I planted about 8 years ago. The crepemyrtle is doing great and had many beautiful flowers for about 3 weeks. My judgement is that this is a place of good soil, and I was lucky to have a species there that is very tolerant of hot weather. Crepemyrtle is one of the best hot weather species. It thrives down south. So.....look for indicators of good soil.

2. A drought can provide valuable information on species selection. Whether you’re replanting, or planting anew, giving more weight to drought tolerance can help you select a species that has a better chance of surviving the next drought; and there will be future droughts, believe me.

3. If you have been watering this year, you have gained valuable experience in how to apply water – especially if you have successfully mastered techniques of deep watering, as described in a previous blog entry. Experience is a good teacher.

4. The drought can provide valuable lessons in a number of tree care situations and can especially emphasize the importance of planting the right tree in the right place.

5. Drought should make you a believer in proper mulching, if you are not already indoctrinated into the mulching brotherhood. Mulching is one of the best friends your tree can have.

I guess my major message from this little treatise is to use the tough love lessons being provided by mother nature as learning tools to help you manage your landscape plants better during the rough weather spells that are inevitable across our Wide Missouri. Remember.....there’s a little bit of good in every bad situation. Use the good to help ameliorate (or even avoid) the bad in the future.