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Water, Water, Where Art Thou?

Monday, June 4th, 2012

It looks like much of our Wide Missouri may be in for a droughty (spell check says there's no such word) summer. I could have said dry, but I like messing with spell check now and then. As with most droughts, some localities have received recent rain in quantities decent enough to help recently planted trees. However, even then, relief can be short-lived, so I admonish those of you with newly planted trees to keep a close eye on local conditions, and keep up with supplemental watering as recommended in my previous blog entry. Extended droughts (1 – 3 months) are not uncommon during Missouri summers, and we could be in for such an event this year. So.....**BE AWARE AND FOREWARNED!**

Appropriate watering, proper pruning, and responsible pest control have long been among the basic tenets of good urban tree care. A major part of appropriate watering is the need to conserve (wisely use) the water that is applied, so that this precious resource is not wasted, while providing benefits to tree growth during our dry periods. Listed below are some steps that can be taken to help conserve water in a home landscape:

1. Plan and design to save water – large shade trees on the hot side of the home, a dense windbreak to slow drying winds, reduced lawn sizes, and other design features can help reduce water needs. Other, more specific, ideas can be sought from local experts: arborists, nurseymen, & urban foresters.
2. Reduce lawn area – lawns are high water consumers. There are many ways to do this – collect ideas from local landscapers.
3. Select the right vegetation- remember **RIGHT TREE, RIGHT PLACE!**A tree naturally adapted to your locality will require less supplemental watering, than a non-native species.
4. Work with your soil – make it as close to a good loamy composition as possible, and avoid compaction as much as possible.
5. Use mulch – freely! It does a bunch of good things, including conserving soil moisture, and is a trees best friend; especially during a drought.
6. Provide regular landscape maintenance – Aerate the soil, water between midnight and 10 am, if you have a sprinkler system, Don't over fertilize or water, Control weeds (they sap water from desirable plants), Set your mower high (taller grass is good for a yard), and Check your irrigation system frequently to assure it's working properly (and not putting out more water than is needed).
7. If you need to irrigate regularly, use a drip irrigation system, rather than a broadcast technique. A simple drip (or trickle) system can be put together from materials readily available from local garden centers, and they will probably have someone on staff who can provide directions for properly using it on your trees. A broadcast system (e.g. sprinklers) can waste as much as 70 % of the water applied due to runoff, evaporation, and application on sidewalks, weed patches, and other non-targeted areas. Fresh water is a precious and limited resource. Don't waste it!