

## FALL WATERING



The lack of rain during the late part of the growing season should be a major concern for anyone who values their landscape plants. How much watering should you do? We wish there was a simple, easy answer that would fit all landscapes. Many factors including soil type, drainage, variety of plants and method of applying the water will influence how much you should water and how often.

To make the most of the watering you do, apply it slowly and target the feeder root system. With perennials or grass, the feeder roots are in the immediate area of the crowns of the plants. With established trees and shrubs, the vast majority of the feeder roots are out beyond the drip-line or canopy. The area within the canopy of the tree is called the rain shadow. When you apply the water within the "rain shadow," most of it will miss the feeder roots.

***50% of your tree's surface area is below ground.***

***The majority of the feeder roots are outside the canopy and within 12 inches of the surface.***

***Feeder roots are fine, fibrous roots capable of absorbing water. Most of the roots within the canopy have bark. They are conduits for carrying moisture absorbed by the feeder roots. They are also the anchors, providing stability to the tree.***

**If we have had some rain lately, do I still need to water?**

Rain and cooler days help, but the plants need much more. The ground has been dry for several weeks and the sunny, windy days dry it out even more. It would take at least an inch of slow rain every week from now until it snows and the ground freezes to help us catch up. Try to keep track of the rain each week and adjust the amount of water you supply accordingly.

**How Late in the Season Should You Water?**

Plants need moisture up until the ground freezes solid. In this area, that is usually in mid to late November. This is later than most people leave their hoses out, but it is important that plants go into winter with adequate moisture. This is especially true with evergreens which continue to lose moisture through their needles during the winter. Plants that go into winter dry are much more susceptible to winter damage and are weakened, making them susceptible to other problems during the next few growing seasons.

**Measuring the Amount of Water**

It is difficult to determine just how much water you are applying when you run a sprinkler. There are various rain gauges that can be used for exact measurements, but the easiest and least expensive tool to judge how much water you are applying is a cat food or tuna fish can. These are great because they have straight sides and are low profile. Measure your cans to make sure - most of them are just over an inch deep. Space out several cans in the area where the sprinklers

are running to help judge how much water you are applying. Check the water levels soon after you finish watering so evaporation won't be a factor. You may want to leave them out between watering sessions too, to judge how much rain falls in your area. Soaker hoses apply water slowly, but it can be very difficult to determine just how much water was applied. It can take over an hour to apply an inch of water, depending on the type of sprinkler or soaker and the water pressure.

### **Lawns**

On average, lawns need 1/2 inch of water per week to survive. Those on sandy soils will need to be watered more often. To be the most effective, the water should be applied as a slow deep soaking instead of frequent light sprinklings. Shallow watering encourages shallow rooting. Frequent watering sets up conditions that encourage disease problems. Slow, deep watering applied at least 3-4 days apart will encourage deep, strong root systems. When a lawn goes into the winter dry, it is more susceptible to damage, especially if we don't have consistent snow cover to protect the crowns of the plants from the winter cold.

### **Trees and Shrubs**

Given average conditions, newly planted (within the last year or two) trees and shrubs need at least an inch of moisture each week. Water should be applied as a deep, thorough soaking with time between for roots to breathe. Trees and shrubs that have been in place a few years have a deeper, more extensive root system that helps them through temporary dry spells, but that doesn't mean you don't have to water. As dry as it is this fall, even mature trees are in need.

### **Perennials and Bulbs**

It is important to water your perennials and bulbs during dry weather, even if they are dormant. Well-drained garden soil needs at least a half inch of water per week to maintain healthy root systems. Moist soil is very important for newly planted bulbs to develop an adequate root system so they will bloom when they should next spring.