

Rain: It does a plant Good!

Another hot and humid Mississippi summer has left most areas very dry. Some places have not had a substantial rain since late May! At my home in eastern Lowndes County, I have had less than two inches of rain since June 1st. This can create a great deal of stress on our landscape plants, since they are comprised of anywhere from 80-95% water.

When you are working in the yard or garden and get extremely hot, you don't simply spray water in the air to lightly cover your skin, you consume it. It has to go into your body to replenish your system. Plants are no different! They don't need to be 'cooled off' by lightly spraying them over the top, they need to be replenished. This means watering them through their roots. It also means watering them heavily when you do water.

Most ornamental shrubs and trees need about 1 inch of water per week. They need this amount in 2 watering periods, with around one-half inch each time. They do not need to be watered multiple times per week, no matter how hot or dry it is. This only leads to a water dependent plant that has shallow roots. Keep in mind, deep watering equals deep roots.

If you are using automatic irrigation or just a hose and sprinkler, it is important to know how much water you are putting out. Simply place a pan or rain gauge in the center of the yard while the irrigation is running. Water for 30 minutes and then check the depth in the pan or gauge. This will let you know how long you have to run that sprinkler to have 1 inch of water per week. Remember, twice per week is much better than 5 times per week.

If you have a vegetable garden, it will probably need around 2 inches of water per week while it is producing. Again, vegetables are comprised of mostly water. If you have annuals and hanging baskets, they will also need to be watered more often and need to be completely saturated.

In addition to the dry weather, in July and August we also have to contend with insects. Armyworms are showing up in lawns right now and you need to be on the lookout. These army green worms can devour a lawn in just a couple of days if left untreated. Chinch Bugs are also a problem in the late summer. These tiny black bugs eat turf at the soil line and can create a lot of damage in a short time. They are especially a problem in Centipede and St. Augustine grasses. If you think you have one of these turf insects, call your Extension agent for more information.

If your shrubs and trees look dry or dead, keep watering them until fall arrives. This extra water may give them enough energy to survive the winter and grow again next summer. It is also cheaper to pay for the water now than to buy new shrubs next year. While it may be very dry in most areas, we can at least be happy we do not have to deal with numerous disease problems like we did last year. Remember, go outside and enjoy your gardens. Water, Water, Water!

If you have any questions, please contact your local county Extension office at (662) 328-2111 or visit our website at <http://msucare.com>.

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