

Dry, hot weather risk to landscapes

Excessively high temperatures and very little rainfall are putting landscapes at risk from the central to southern Plains.

"We're getting a pretty drastic lesson in why we'd do well to plant native or other drought-resistant plant materials," said Pam Paulsen, K-State Research and Extension horticulturist.

"Cold hardiness isn't enough. We also need to be learning how we can get the most out of the water we have available. If we're lucky, maybe we won't have to limit our soap use, so we can recycle our bathwater outdoors on our dying plants."

During a drought, the most vulnerable plants are those that don't have a well-established, deep root system, Paulsen said. This automatically includes all recent transplants and all container plants. In fact, depending on how dry and hot the weather is, Kansas container plants sometimes need twice-daily watering, just to survive.

"Typically we recommend watering early in the morning. That's when you're least likely to lose irrigation water to evaporation," she said. "Plus, the day's rising temperatures will help foliage dry out quickly, reducing the risk of foliar diseases."

"When plants are under severe drought stress, though, watering as soon as possible minimizes further damage – regardless of the time of day. It's a myth that water droplets on foliage will magnify the sunlight and burn plants. What is true is that puddled water where soil doesn't drain readily can heat up and 'stew' plants."

From spring into fall, Plains landscapes need an average inch of moisture per week, supplied by rainfall and/or irrigation, Paulsen said. Some landscapes can need more – particularly where soils are sandy, plants are semi-tough non-natives, soil is bare, and/or temperatures are extremely hot. Extra watering also can be necessary in low humidity or high winds.

"Those exceptions also can affect how often you should water," she added.

In general, perennial plants, lawns, shrubs and trees do best if watered deeply and infrequently. On average, about once a week is often enough, except during extreme summer weather, she said.

This approach encourages plants to send roots deeper into the ground. The plants seemingly become more drought-tolerant because they can access soil moisture that's available well below the surface level.

The best timing also can have

exceptions, however, and not just ones that call for watering more often.

For example, if watered deeply enough, mature, healthy trees can actually go several times longer between drinks in typical Kansas summer weather, she said. Even Kansans' favorite cool-season lawn turf – tall fescue – can often survive without water for up to a month at a time. It goes dormant, so doesn't look too nice. Still, a monthly soaking typically will keep the grass plants' crown from dying.

"Other than that, a 2- to 3-inch blanket of organic mulch will shade the soil surface in planting beds and around trees. This shade will help moderate the soil's temperature and reduce its moisture evaporation rate," Paulsen said. "Rock and rubber mulches aren't as good in hot weather, because they can really warm up. They also retain heat quite a while."

She advises homeowners to remember how time- and energy-draining yard work can be during hot, dry weather.

"You're going to more likely water as often as you should if it's easy," Paulsen said. "For example, think about strategically placing soaker hoses, sprinklers or drip irrigation systems. You could even leave them out where they're always ready to go. If they've got snap-on connection valves, you can easily use them alone or in combination. You could even link them to an automatic, programmable timer."

To prepare for future water-scare times, she said, some possibilities are to:

1) Use free water to irrigate. Collect your roof's downspout runoff in rain barrels during the growing season.

2) Use yard slope and landscaping ideas (baffles, decorative rocks, mounds, etc.) to slow down any runoff from rain or irrigation, giving your yard more time to absorb all the moisture it can.

3) Whenever you can, apply this principle: Incorporating organic matter improves soil's water-handling ability – no matter whether the soil is heavy clay or fast-draining sandy loam.

"Organic mulch helps with No. 3 because it decays over time. But, you can make a much bigger difference in beds you till every year, because you can incorporate small pieces of organic materials at the same time," Paulsen said. "Any fall garden debris that you can mow and catch in your grass catcher – leaves, dead annual plants, whatever – is great for that."

Walking trail one step closer



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Work began this week on a sidewalk on the north side of College Drive between Franklin and Wheatridge (seen here looking toward the east). It has been designated as part of the walking trail.

Poor forage carries risk of poison

The relentless drought that has settled over much of Kansas and states across the south brings more problems than the lack of pasture forage growth for livestock producers.

One potential problem, according to K-State Research and Extension veterinarian Larry Hollis, is that weedy species with greater drought tolerance sometimes out-compete desirable grasses and begin to proliferate. Another scenario is that desirable forage species are consumed but fail to re-grow, and only weedy species are left in a green vegetative state.

"Either of these scenarios can become a major problem if these remaining plants also contain toxic components," Hollis said. "Fortunately, many toxic plants are also unpalatable, so livestock species tend to leave those plants alone. However, the problem comes when pastures are not properly managed, or forage supplementation is not provided in a timely fashion, and livestock are left with no choice but to consume toxic plants or go hungry."

"Good pasture and livestock management call for knowing the toxic plant species that are common in your area or pastures," he said. "It's also important to recognize when pastures are getting short enough that cattle may be forced to consider undesirable options, and either supplement the cattle with hay or other feedstuffs or move them to dry lot situations or different pastures where available forages do not pose a toxicity threat to them. Cattle will eat toxic plants if starved."

Thieves steal condiments

STOCKERAU, Austria (AP) – Austrian police say thieves have made off with an unusual heist – 21 tons of mustard and ketchup.

The loot was in a semitrailer parked in a lot over the weekend northwest of Vienna. Police say the truck driver showed up Monday to deliver his cargo only to see the trailer missing.

Police assume the thieves were more interested in the trailer than its contents.

Authorities had no price tag for the stolen condiments but said the trailer was worth about 15,000 euros – more than \$22,000.

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Senior Progress Center

There will be a dart game Monday at the Senior Progress Center. Activities for the week: **Monday:** 10:30 a.m. dart game. **Tuesday:** 10 a.m. exercise, 10:30 a.m. shuffle board. **Wednesday:** 11 a.m. sno cones. **Thursday:** 10 a.m. exercise, 10:30 a.m. pinocle. **Friday:** 10 a.m. exercise, 10:30 a.m. horse shoes.

Menus for the week: **Monday:** baked fish, macaroni and cheese, cook's choice vegetable, mandarin oranges. **Tuesday:** meatballs with gravy, mashed potatoes, seasoned carrots, watermelon. **Wednesday:** ham, scalloped potatoes, peas,

gelatin with apricots. **Thursday:** chicken Alfredo, broccoli, apple-sauce, garlic bread, noodles. **Friday:** chef salad, strawberries and bananas, bread sticks, brownies.

The Thomas County Nutrition Center invites anyone 60 and older and guests to lunch Monday through Friday at the senior center. Home delivery is available, as is pick-up service. A contribution of \$3 per meal is suggested for seniors, \$5.25 for others. For anyone under 60, home delivery is \$5.75.

Make reservations at (784) 460-2901 by noon the day before.

On the Beat

THOMAS COUNTY SHERIFF Wednesday

12:28 a.m. – Provided traveler's assistance to motorist.

11:54 a.m. – Released Joseph Bernard Castellana.

12:02 p.m. – Released David Lawrence Diab.

1:21 p.m. – Assisted police with missing juvenile from Walmart.

1:28 p.m. – Caller reported two subjects traveling westbound on I-70 at mile 46, stopping vehicle periodically, appeared to be yelling. Report filed.

2:58 p.m. – Brought prisoner from Marysville to Thomas County Law Enforcement Center.

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