

WILL THIS BE A DRY SUMMER?

Following on the heels of a dry summer and a cold, dry winter, it is interesting to speculate on what is in store for us this summer. Will the already low water levels continue to drop in wells? Or will we have enough rainfall to recharge moisture deficient soils?

According to James A. Fizzell, University of Illinois Extension Horticulturist, things may be better this spring and summer than some weathermen have been forecasting.

Using Illinois temperature and precipitation records for the last 80 years, the Illinois State Water Survey is predicting chances are good that there will be plenty of rain this spring to recharge the moisture-short soils.

And, they add, it will be a nice summer, with temperatures about normal and rainfall above normal.

"There is about a 70 percent chance of the weather coming out like this," according to Fizzell. "Of course, there is also a 30 percent chance of it not coming out this way."

Some gardeners in the state probably will experience dry conditions. Even in a wet year, there are pockets of drought, but generally, it looks good.

Fizzell explained that the Survey bases its forecast on years that most closely resemble the previous season. For example, the summer of 1973 was used to forecast the winter of 1973-74 by examining temperature and rainfall statistics of summers that were similar to the summer of 1973.

The forecast was for a mild and wet winter, which proved accurate. They did the same thing with statistics from the winter of 1975-76 to accurately forecast the summer of 1976.

Two winters closely resembled the winter of 1976-77, according to the survey. Those were the winters of 1892-93 and 1917-18. Both included below normal temperatures and insufficient moisture for most of the season.

December and January of all three winters registered below-average cold, ranging from the 15 degrees below normal in January of this year, to 12 below in January of 1893. It was colder than normal in March of 1893, but a little warmer than normal in 1918. But April and May of both of those years were cooler than normal.

Precipitation records show below-normal moisture in December and January of all three winters. March 1893 had normal rainfall but it was below normal in March 1918. It has been above normal so far this month. April and May also were wet months in 1893 and 1918, according to records.

The best outlook is for cool temperatures and heavy rainfalls. Analyses over the last 80 years would indicate normal to above normal rainfall this spring and summer. If I were gambling, I'd go with wet conditions, said Fizzell.

A soil moisture survey in February indicated below normal soil moisture levels. The rainfall during the last two weeks has raised levels in many areas to near normal and if precipitation continues, soils should be at capacity by the time gardening season gets into full swing.

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