

# Plantings Showing Effects of Drought

by Chicagoland Hort Newsletter  
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Though recent rains have greened up lawns, we know from '88 that the effects of the summer's drought will last for years. Already, we are seeing dieback and outright killing of trees and shrubs from dryness. Some plants, unable to cool themselves by transpiration, died from fatally high internal temperatures.

Fall has started early this year. Some drought-damaged plants colored up early and dropped their leaves. While early color often indicates root loss or girdling, some of these trees may recover nicely, at least they will be dormant for winter. Other plants have responded in a different manner. Heat-hardened and dormant throughout the summer, they have started to grow with the cooler moist weather. Lilacs and rhododendron in bloom, new growth on shrubs, blossoms on crabapples are all being reported. These plants may not be dormant by the time winter sets in, and could be seriously injured by the cold.

Not so easily observed are some other problems. Root systems are much less tolerant of extremes than are tops. Our trees and shrubs tend to produce roots in the upper foot or so of soil. Even in dry years there usually is sufficient moisture at that depth to keep them from dying. But, without any rain for many weeks, fine roots were killed by the dryness, or by excessive soil temperatures. Many of these plants will leaf out next spring, then suddenly dry up.

If the roots of these trees have not been completely killed, the recent moisture and a two inch mulch of wood chips over the entire root system may help them regenerate roots. **Caution — even though the grass is green and moist, do not take for granted that soils are thoroughly moistured.** We have found beneath 2 or 3 inches of moist soil, soils that are powder dry. Dig down and make sure.

There is an even more subtle change that occurs in some drought stressed plants. Plants that normally fend off insects and diseases become susceptible to insects and diseases that usually do not hurt them. Expect canker diseases to develop on crabapples, redbuds, viburnum, spruces, pines, willows, and hawthorns. Next summer seemingly healthy branches will suddenly dry up. Examination will reveal the canker that killed the bark and the branch. Sometimes cankers on trunks result in whole plants dying.

Bark beetles and borers are attracted to droughty plants. Bronze birch borer, ash borer, flat-headed borers in maple, oak, and apple are to be expected. Red pine, always a problem here, can be expected to suffer from Ips beetles (type of bark beetle) under the bark.

Drought-damaged plants will need attention this fall. If rains continue, be sure your plants do not go into winter with waterlogged soil. If it turns dry again, water. This is especially important in winter if there is no snow cover.

Wrap newly set and thin-barked trees with tree wrap to prevent winter scald and frost cracking. Protect evergreens from wind and sun with burlap screens or antidiastic materials. Be prepared next summer to spray for borers where possible.

Assume that replacement plants will be needed in some cases, and tell your customers now so it will not be a surprise next spring.

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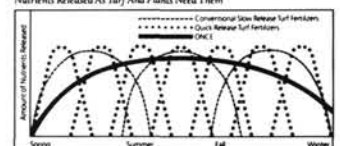
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