

Industry works through heat, drought

Dallas— Summers on the Southern Plains summer are typically hot and dry—but not so hot and dry so early in the season. This year, triple-digit heat greeted mid spring, and as August approached it hadn't relented. A bigger concern for green industry pros was drought. By mid July some areas of north Texas hadn't seen significant rain in over a month.

"The heat is pretty normal for this time of the year," said Cody Whelchel, Cody Lawn Care, Ft. Worth, TX. "It's just that it got hotter quicker and for longer this year. It's been hard on the people doing the work."

Temperatures in Dallas exceeded 100° F almost every day in July with no relief forecast as the month ended. The same was true in Oklahoma. Wes Hadsell at Hadco Lawn & Landscape in Bartlesville, OK, reported 21 work days over 100° F through mid July.

"Our May and June seemed like our normal July and August," said Hadsell. "We send our guys out with a lot of water. We start early, and the guys have chosen to work a little bit longer days and take Fridays off to recoup."

Ed Herndon at Phillip's Landscape Mgmt. Inc., Ft. Worth, TX, said maintenance crews throughout the city are working in spite of the heat.

"Our maintenance schedules are so full, we need a full day to get through it all. We come in at 6:30 a.m. and it's hard to get on any properties earlier than that."

Cody Whelchel says the grass, particularly St. Augustinegrass, thrived on the heat and had to be regularly mowed on his accounts which were irrigated.

Not surprisingly, irrigation services have been in great demand.

"All of the cities surrounding Dallas are instigating water rationing programs, and we have to go around each and every city and set our customers' controllers to match the cities' rationing programs. It's keeping us

hopping," said Herndon.

"We have water restrictions here in Plano," said Gary LaScalea, owner/operator of Gro-Green. "It's the first time for that since I've been here in 13 or 14 years. Everybody's trying to irrigate and irrigate to keep things alive."

"Any call regarding a sprinkler system is an emergency now," added Doy Geller, general manager TechScape, Inc., Richardson, TX. But, even with those accounts that have irrigation systems, Tech-

Scape's crews often have to hand water to save plants, he reported.

"Sometimes I have to have guys work on weekends just to water, just to make sure plants that we've recently installed don't die," he explained.

In spite of the industry's best efforts, many customers will be losing trees and ornamentals because of the drought. "There's been so much construction in Dallas that we have difficulty in getting trees now," added Geller.



Drought not the only problem

EAST TEXAS— Drought stresses trees, but the damage does not end there. When trees are stressed they are weakened and become less able to withstand additional stresses. In many cases, when a tree fails it is not simply due to a single cause but to a number of stressors which were simply too much for the tree. For trees which survive a drought situation, the additional stress factors include diseases and pests.

One concern is a group of insects, commonly referred to

as "shade tree borers". This group includes, among others, longhorned beetles, metallic wood-borers, cottonwood borers, poplar borers, locust borers and re-headed ash borers. However, once you see the signs of borer infestation, it is too late.

The best method for treating borers is preventive. Maintaining tree health is important and that includes watering. Fertilizing, pruning dead and dying branches are also important steps in preventive tree care. Should bor-

ers be a concern in your area, it is important to have correct identification of the pest.

According to Dr. James Robinson, entomologist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, trunks and tree limbs up to 0.5 inches in diameter can be sprayed with a solution of lindane or chlorpyrifos, with the first treatment being in April when the insects first emerge. Later applications in late May, mid-July and August are also recommended.

Florida fires devastate trees

PALM COAST, FL— Employees of White Acres Nursery & Garden moved their landscape equipment into an open field and turned on the irrigation to keep the equipment from burning. At their Palm Coast branch they even filled their 700-gallon lawn spray trucks with water to ward off flames. "The fire came right up to the edge of our business," said a company spokesman.

Wild fires devastated over 400,000 acres in Florida, mostly timberland, in June and early July. A lot of the damage occurred in northeastern Florida where, just before the busy July 4 holiday, the entire population of Flagler County (just north of Daytona Beach) was evacuated because of wind-blown fires.

When people were allowed to move back into their homes and tend their businesses more than 40 homes had been destroyed, and, perhaps 10 times that many had been damaged. Landscapes, both trees and turf, also suffered.

"A lot of trees were burned close to people's home and they have to be removed," Danny Barrett of Big Dan's Tree Service, Ormond Beach, tells Landscape Management. In one subdivision alone, Barrett reports taking down about 250 trees because the fire was so hot it burned into the dried muck beneath them. Statewide

Florida reported its driest June in 119 years which contributed to the wildfires.

"If it weren't for the firefighters my wood lot (at the intersection of U.S. 1 and I-95) would have burned," says Barrett.

"A lot of trees will probably recover if we keep getting rain. A lot of trees will come out of shock, but a lot of the pines are gone," says Barrett who's been putting in 12-hour days. Those not imme-

diately destroyed, but severely stressed, will eventually succumb to beetles and other pests.

"A lot of the large specimen trees may refoliate," speculates Bret Bartlett of Bartlett Landscape in Palm Coast, one of the hardest hit communities. "A lot of the palms should refoliate too, but it's going to take several years. But there's going to be a lot of foundation plantings and a lot resodding because

the fires went right up the foundations of houses in some areas."

Also, some landscapes were destroyed when firefighters used bulldozers in some areas to clear firebreaks.

"The real scare happened over a three-day period. We shut down and had to leave the county," says Bartlett who tells Landscape Management that the fires generated incredible amounts of smoke and falling ash for days on end.

Montana State starts turf program

Bozeman, MT— Students can enroll in a new Turfgrass Science option at Montana State University here this fall, thanks, in large part, to a recent addition to the MSU horticulture staff.

Ten students are enrolled in the turfgrass program, with about eight more expected this fall, says Rob Golembiewski, Ph. D., Assistant Professor of Horticulture. The MSU board of regents approved the program in July. It is being promoted to prospective students through groups like the Peaks & Prairies Golf Course Superintendents and the Association of Montana Turf & Ornamental Professionals, both of which have contributed financial support too. Other young people learn of the program through high school career fair days.

The program is significant to cool-season turfgrass research for several reasons, not the least of which is geography. The nearest other significant turfgrass programs are at Colorado State, Utah State or Washington State.

Dr. Golembiewski, Montana State U's only turfgrass expert, will offer courses in Introductory Turfgrass Management, Advanced Turfgrass Management, and Turfgrass Pest Management. Turf students will also take numerous horticulture courses along with small engine instruction.

A new three-acre turfgrass research farm is under construction too. It will be the location of NTEP bentgrass putting green and fairway trials along with NTEP fine fescue trials. Other work that's already underway at MSU includes: snow mold and fairy ring fungicide evaluation trials, and a creeping speedwell herbicide trial.

"Upon completing my Ph.D. last year, I never thought I would have the opportunity to go and build a turfgrass program," Golembiewski tells LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT. "It can be a very solid turfgrass program."

Golembiewski said many people and companies generously contributed both time and supplies to make the program and, particularly, the three-acre research farm a reality.

"The establishment of this farm is an excellent example of how university, industry and turf associations work together to achieve goals never thought possible," said Golembiewski. "This farm will always be an example of how truly unique the turfgrass industry is."

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