Even in winter, gardens need water

K-State horticulture expert shares tips for watering home landscapes

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Snow across much of Kansas provided relief to landscapes during an abnormally dry December.

But Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham said yards may need another shot of moisture to alleviate stress in lawns and gardens.

“A good, deep watering with moisture reaching at least a foot down into the soil is much better than several light sprinklings that just wet the top portions of the soil,” Upham said. “A deep watering will ensure that the majority of roots have access to water.”

Upham urged homeowners to test the moisture content in their yard’s soil by pushing a metal rod, wooden dowel, electric fence post or similar item into the ground. “Dry soil is much harder to push through than wet,” he said. Measure how far down the implement goes to determine the amount of moisture is in the soil.

“Although all perennial plants benefit from moist soils before winter, it is especially important for newly planted or over-seeded lawns, as well as newly transplanted trees and shrubs due to their limited root systems,” Upham said.

“Even trees and shrubs planted within the last 2-3 years are more sensitive to drought than a well-established plant. Evergreens are more at risk because moisture is lost from the foliage.”

Upham shared a few tips for watering common areas of the yard:

- **Trees and shrubs planted within the last year.** Drill a small hole in a five gallon bucket near the bottom, then fill the bucket and let the water dribble out slowly next to the tree. Refill the bucket once so that you apply 10 gallons. Larger trees planted 2-3 years prior may require more water.
• **Large trees.** Using a soaker hose, circle the trunk one-half the distance to the dripline, or the outermost reach of branches. On smaller trees, you may need to circle the tree several times so that only soil which as tree roots will be watered.

• **Newly established bed or foundation plantings.** Hook the beginning and end of a soaker hose to a Y-adapter to equalize pressure, which encourages more uniform watering.

• **Fall planted or overseeded lawns.** Use an overhead sprinkler. Watering to a depth of 12 inches is more difficult; try to reach at least six inches deep.

Upham said watering once a month if conditions are dry and warm should be enough to help landscapes through the winter.

Upham and his colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden- and yard-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact your local extension office.

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