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Nearly halfway through the growing season – How does your garden grow?

A quick excursion through most northern Colorado communities show not all is well. Pines, spruce and leafy trees are apparent with brown or off color foliage and dead branches. So what's the cause?

Most of the chronic plant problems we see in Colorado are weather related. Colorado is characterized by abnormal or erratic weather patterns. And, the long term outlook is for more of the same.

July 2008 was a scorcher. It was the third warmest July on record. It was also the third driest and we broke the all time streak of consecutive days over 90 degrees at 24. The streak went into August with two days breaking the century mark. However, August ended being the third wettest on record. This year, January 2009 was the fifth driest and February was the least snowiest on record. June 2009 will go down as the third wettest.

How does weather affect plants?

Summer Heat

Just like us, plants slow down in the heat. The leaves produce less food and energy for the plant. Underperforming foliage is shed (dropped) by the plants. Sometimes entire branches shut down. We saw plenty of evidence of this with trees and shrubs showing fall colors in September. The end result is that the leaves are producing for a shorter time period and the plant has less stored energy going into fall and winter.

Winter Moisture

Trees, shrubs, and grass use water all year long even while dormant. As long as the soil is not frozen, roots grow. And above ground, in the trunks and branches, chemical processes continue. Dry soils cause roots close to the soil surface to dry out. These roots die, no longer able to absorb water, and must be replaced the following spring.

Wind

The wind this winter was relentless. Chinook winds took the life right out of small twigs and foliage especially on evergreens that have foliage all year around. Some pine trees were almost totally brown this spring.

What to do?

Mulch

Apply wood mulch around trees and shrubs. Mulch conserves moisture, builds soil structure and encourages root development.

Winter Watering

Make plans now to water this winter. Watering during the winter months is no longer an elective activity – something nice to do. This is becoming an essential part of horticulture along Colorado's front-range. Sprinkling every couple of weeks is needed during prolonged dry spells, with warm dry winds.

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