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August 26, 2012

Caring for Trees in a Small Yard

I will state again, within the last 5 years the trees in southeast Missouri have gone through some tremendous stress. A brief summary of what has been tolerated so far includes late spring frost damaging new leaf and flower buds in April, July and August drought, severe ice storm damaging woody tissue in February, July and August drought, area flooding damaging roots in May, July and August drought and finally drought for the last 6 months.

It is hard for trees and shrubs to recover from one major weather event and maintain their overall health but with the number of 'events' that have been going on in our region, trees and shrubs have just about had it.

Even if you keep an eye on your trees, it is time to really examine their health and evaluate what needs to be done. Start by looking at the trunk. What is the condition? Is the bark flaking off, are there small holes, Are there small seedlings (suckers) coming up from the ground near the base, do you see any rotting wood near the ground line or further up the trunk. These are all signs that the tree is losing the battle.

Small holes may indicate borer damage. Borer insects are most often attracted to and infest trees that are dying. Suckers are often a response to injury either to the root or to the shoot of the plant. Some types of trees and shrubs root readily because of the growth habit associated with that plant and fruit trees may sucker if there is trouble with a graft union or if the root stock is more aggressive than the scion (shoot). Rotting wood near the ground is an indication that a fungus which eats at wood has set into the root system.

Continue to examine the tree or shrub by looking at the canopy, the portion of the tree with leaves. The area of the tree above the trunk should be green and lush. It may be difficult to analyze the canopy this year if the drought has been hard on your location. Most trees are still holding on to green leaves but some have become brown and appear dead. Do not rely solely on leaves to determine if the tree or shrub is dead. Look for other signs. Are any of the limbs lacking leaves entirely? Do branches or limbs appear torn or cracked? Is the bark falling from branches? Do you see large holes in any of the branches? These are signs that the tree has met its maker and needs to be taken down this winter.

Care for all trees and shrubs properly to insure that the current and past weather related stresses do not continue to compound. Provide water to trees, even in winter, mulch around smaller trees to help conserve water, prevent machinery from hitting and damaging plants and do not build soil up around tree or shrub roots, causing suffocation.

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