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Plant Care

Now that the rain has slowed and heat has finally arrived plants may reveal symptoms of the stress they continue to go through in our area. Disease is likely but on many plants what may appear to be disease can truly be caused by simple physical plant issues.

The highly saturated soils from rain or flooding have limited the amount of nutrition plants could take up. This could be due to altered pH, poor oxygen uptake or to nutrient leaching in soil. A lack of nutrients, especially nitrogen and iron, will show up as yellowing of leaves. Plants will appear sickly yellow instead of dark green. With the change in weather leaves should begin to darken and new leaves should appear normal. If changes don't occur you may eventually need to reapply fertilizer to ornamentals and gardens.

With the excess water that has been available, roots have not needed to move out and look for water. In some cases they may have been damaged by waterlogged soils. If the damage is severe the plant may not recover and will continue to wilt and die. If the root system has not developed enough to support the plant then you may see wilting on the tips of stems or in one particular area of a plant. Pruning the plant to reduce the size will help the roots that are available support the plant. As roots spread the plant will also grow. Ironically watering will be more of an issue this summer as plants have become accustomed to the high rate of water they have received in the last two months. As the rains move on, be extra cautious and water plants at least once each week until they have built up a root system capable of withstanding the dry conditions.

Another symptom that you may notice is leaf drop or even leaf curl. This may be more apparent on trees and shrubs than herbaceous plants. Again, the root system has been weakened and the canopy is too large for the roots to support. You may see leaves drop from the tree as a means of reducing the size of the plant that needs to be fed. You may see leaves curling in response to a sudden lack of water. This issue should resolve itself in a few weeks. Again, irrigation may be needed weekly to compensate for the abrupt lack of water.

Trees may simply die from the stress they have been through. Severely damaged roots or sensitivity to oxygen loss can both lead to death. Trees that were severely damaged in recent weather events that might have been able to overcome excess water before may be too stressed to recover from a second or third weather event. One or more branches may die back with more branches following. Once the tree has reached 50% canopy loss then you should consider having it removed.

Again, it will be important to water all plants around your home once each week if rain does not occur. Water deeply so that water will reach the roots that are there instead of staying in the top one inch of soil. The sudden loss of water will be just as hard on them as the accumulation of rain. Pruning may help plants with damaged root systems overcome stress quicker. It is better to selectively prune where you want than to allow the stressed plant to decide what will die for you.

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