

Drought and Your Garden – Symptoms

Plants that do not receive enough water eventually show signs of water stress. During a drought or under water restrictions aimed at water conservation, keeping plants alive can be challenging. Most plants exhibit similar symptoms when they are in need of water. Check the soil before irrigating because over watering and under watering symptoms are the same.

Common symptoms of water stress include:

Wilting or drooping leaves that do not return to normal (without additional water) by morning. Curled or yellow leaves that may fold or drop, along with twig drop. Leaves that lose their luster and become grayish or bluish. Sunburned leaves, especially on the south side of the tree. New leaves that are smaller or stem sections that are closer together than normal. Lawn grasses that retain a footprint for several minutes.

What can be done to keep plants alive during drought?

First you want to rule out other causes of plant stress. On hot days plants may not be able to absorb water quickly enough to compensate for water lost through their leaves, causing temporary wilting. This is temporary. Next, apply a layer of mulch 3 to 4 inches thick. This keeps the ground cool and discourages weeds. Don't fertilize when water is scarce. Fertilizer makes the plant grow. During a drought we want the plant to grow as little as possible.

Control your weeds. You don't want weeds using your precious water. Prioritize your landscape needs. Mature trees and shrubs can usually be kept alive with occasional deep watering. Reduce water waste in lawns by correcting sprinkler problems. During a water shortage, it is possible to keep a lawn alive by gradually reducing water to one-half the recommended amount. Also, increase the mowing height for your lawn. The grass blades shade each other creating a cooler and less thirsty lawn.