

Drought Damage Showing Up in Landscapes

KRISTA HARDING, HORTICULTURE AGENT

Spring has sprung, but we still haven't received adequate moisture to pull the area out of a drought situation. According to the most recent U.S. Drought Monitor, all of the Southwind District counties remain in the moderate to severe drought classification. The drought is predicted to remain, but will improve. Unfortunately, the drought has caused permanent damage to some of our landscape plants – mainly fescue lawns and ornamental shrubs.

The fescue lawns in the area are not looking very good. I've noticed that some have areas of green-up and others have definite dead spots. In my own yard, the drought damage is very visible! Part of my yard is near an old hedge row and the grass located 20 feet or so out is completely dead. The hedge row successfully robbed all of the moisture and intensified the drought on the grass.

As much as I would like to overseed this spring, I'm going to refrain and wait until fall. You might be wondering why? Spring is not the ideal time to overseed fescue lawns because of the shorter time frame between seeding and when the hot summer conditions arrive. It is best to overseed in the fall when the temperatures are cooler and the plant can get a root system established before the brutal summer conditions.

That's not to say that there aren't times when a spring seeding can be successful. However, it requires committed watering and care from the time of seeding through the summer. The best time to attempt a spring seeding is mid-March through early April. We are near to closing the window of opportunity for this year. If you think scattering some seed out on the ground will suffice, you will be disappointed! It is definitely take more effort than that.

Soil preparation will be important and the use of verticutter is recommend. Verticutting slices grooves in the soil which will allow for good seed to soil contact for germination. Once the soil is prepared, the seed can be broadcast.

The ground must have moisture through germination and into early establishment in the form of light, frequent waterings. On average, it will take two weeks for the grass to emerge. After the seed is up, reduce the watering frequency. How often should you water? The grass will show you signs when it needs water. This will be evident by it wilting or it showing a bluish color to the blades.

The turf will need an application of fertilizer. At seeding, use a starter type fertilizer. About five or six weeks later, use a high nitrogen – slow release source of fertilizer at the rate suggested on the bag. As for crabgrass control, there is a product recommended for use on spring seedings. The active ingredient in the product is Dithiopyr. This product can actually be applied a little later in the growing season than other crabgrass preventing products and yet still provide season long control.



Have you noticed brown shrubs in area landscapes? Damage from the 2022 drought and winter injury is being seen on various woody plants, especially euonymus, boxwood and yew. Many that are brown have most likely died. However, the best time to assess the extent of the damage and the potential for recovery is May. By that time, new growth should have developed and it will be clear if the buds are going to put on some new growth and the shrub is still alive.

If you have questions about lawn care, gardens, trees or shrubs, please don't hesitate to contact me at the Extension office. Most Extension services are free of charge.

Krista Harding is a K-State Research and Extension Horticulture agent assigned to Southwind District. She may be reached at kharding@ksu.edu or 620-244-3826.

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