

**What to do in the garden this week:** Water, water, water. This is a record drought.

**Q.** Can big trees die from lack of rain? Is it OK to just leave a hose dripping under a tree to water it? G.S., *Brockton*

**A.** Many people don't realize that even mature trees can weaken and die from drought. There can even be a delayed reaction. Some trees will die next year because of stress from this year's drought, and their owners won't know why. This is why I tell people to water their trees.

Watering your lawn doesn't do much for trees because lawn sprinklers spread a shallow layer of water, while tree roots run much deeper. The rule of thumb is to water a tree twice a month. Keep the hose on for five minutes for each inch of trunk diameter, or caliper. So if a tree trunk is 7 inches wide, you need to water it for 35 minutes. That's a long time to stand there with a hose, so you will want to set up a sprinkler or some other kind of mechanism.

A dripping hose is better than nothing, but the larger the area you irrigate, the better. Try to water most of the soil surface inside the "drip line" of the canopy, and even some of the area beyond the drip line, since roots reach further underground than the branches extend above ground.

Water needs time to sink in, so if you see runoff, you are watering too fast. Stop and let the water sink in before continuing.

Each morning I reposition three sprinklers attached to three \$15 Nelson timers that mechanically shut off the flow to the hose when time is up.

Though I have to turn each hose on, I don't have to hang around to turn each one off. I have an acre of trees, and it takes me about two weeks of moving sprinklers to water each of them. Happily, most trees only need to be watered twice a month. I stop watering at the end of September, when leaves start to col-



BEN GARVER/THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE VIA AP

or I water evergreens through October. Since they don't go dormant, they continue to transpire all winter and need to store up moisture in their needles before the soil freezes.

Early morning is usually the best time to water, but I water whenever I am able. During the hottest part of the day, from dawn to 3 p.m., I water plants in shady locations to reduce evaporation. I also have two permanently installed drip irrigation systems on Nelson timers. I bought them from Gardener's Supply, the innovative Vermont mail-order company, and they have really lowered my water bill. Friends also rave about the company's "Snip-n-Drip" watering system.

If you have trees growing in a lawn, the roots will retain more water if you replace the grass with bark mulch for several feet around the trunk, being care-

ful not to let the mulch actually come in contact with the bark, where it can cause rot.

The trees that are most at risk are the youngest. They are also the quickest to water. Their root zones are small, so you can build little saucers of soil around them to keep water from running off. Or you can buy those 20 gallon "tree bags." Just fill them with a hose and the water will seep out slowly. Other high risk trees are those planted next to a house or with roots growing under paving. If there is a municipal street tree growing by the sidewalk in front of your home or business, please water it. Chances are that your town does not. Some trees, such as dogwoods and birches, need more frequent watering than others. When you see a tree with drooping, curled, or browning leaves or needles, it is calling for help. A dead lawn can be replaced in a matter of months, but a dead 30-year-old tree takes 30 years to replace.