A Little Bit About Dormancy

Let’s talk water

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Did you know that plants need very little water in September and October? September is a time when municipal water demands due to irrigation can still be high, however, during that time, it may not be necessary to add as much water to our landscapes. Plants actually need much less water in the late summer and early fall months and too much water can be harmful. Even vegetable gardens prefer less water in the late summer - cutting back on irrigation can actually help ripen those late season tomatoes. While it is true that September can have some of our highest daytime temperatures, daylight hours become noticeably shorter and the position of the sun becomes much less direct. These factors, more so than temperature, signal trees and shrubs to begin the transition into winter dormancy. By mid-September, the process is well underway for deciduous trees and shrubs to enter dormancy. Some of us may confuse the hot days and the leaves changing colors as signs of needing water, the opposite is true. As water customers, by getting a better understanding of when and how they occur, we can use the plant’s natural cycle of growth and dormancy to our advantage.

Dormancy is a defense mechanism that plants have developed to guard against damage or death in hazardous climatic conditions. You and I can go indoors and turn up the thermostat, or put on more layers of clothes to fend off winter’s chill, but trees and shrubs must survive in place. As the daylight hours diminish and the sun’s position

Winter Edibles

As you might remember from our June publication, this year I decided to make my yard a garden - not to have a little garden in my yard... I wanted a “yarden.” In keeping with our edible “Yarden “ theme, here are some great ideas for winter time garden panache and some good tasting items for the table.

Kale, Cabbage and Broccoli: All members of the cole crop family and loaded with antioxidants and nutrients. They are gorgeous in a container and flavor-wise they are much sweeter after weathering a frost or two. These are great wintertime choices for a container yarden if you are pressed for space.
Winter Edibles

Spinach: A very good plant for fall, when days are short and cool. Plants are very cold-hardy, tolerating temperatures as cold as the teens to low 20s once they are well established. This quality makes them great for overwintering in zones 8 and higher. Good tasting and good looking.

Onions, carrots, leeks, radishes: Easy to grow and many varieties to choose from. Can be harvested well into the fall and early winter if covered with mulch or blankets to protect from frost. Usually done once temperatures go below 25 degrees F.

Other helpful tips to extend the season:
Use your house and other structures to help extend the growing season. Place your containers next to the house on a sunny south-facing wall. Place containers on concrete patios and driveways or asphalt driveways. Concrete patios and driveways will hold the heat longer into the night. Place containers in wooden boxes to protect them from the wind. Insulate containers by surrounding them with mulch or blankets.

A Recipe for Your Winter Edibles

Kale & Cabbage Salad
(no measurements are given as this is totally up to you and how many servings you want!)

- kale leaves, cut into shreds
- purple cabbage, cut into shreds
- napa cabbage, cut into shreds
- baby spinach leaves
- broccoli florets, cut into bite size pieces
- brussels sprouts, cut into thin strips
- green sprouts
- green onions, chopped
- dried cranberries
- pumpkin seeds

Toss all greens and then top with sprouts, onions, cranberries, and pumpkin seeds.
Recommend a nice poppyseed dressing to top it off.

Thanks to Homestead Revival for this delicious recipe!

Let’s Talk Water

in the sky becomes less direct, trees and shrubs will begin to slow down their metabolic system in response. A plant will encapsulate its buds in a thick covering or shell to prevent frost damage. Circulation of water and nutrients into its leaves and limbs will be restricted to prevent them from freezing and splitting during the winter. This process is what causes the leaves to change color and drop. Only the roots remain active and if the soil does not freeze too deeply, they will continue to grow, making the plant even harder the next season.

Grasses have a seasonal dormancy as well, though it comes at a different time and protects them from a different hazard, drought. In this region, turf grasses are typically “cool season” varieties (Ryes, Fescues, and bluegrasses). These grasses grow best between 65 and 80 degrees. They are hardy enough to tolerate cold winters and most varieties will, in this climate, remain green and even continue to grow during the colder months. The natural dormant cycle for these grasses occurs during extended periods of heat and periods with no water. If left alone, the lawn grass will turn brown, but does not die. Once the temperature cools back down and Mother Nature applies rain, it will green up again. With grass, we can retard and even prevent that natural cycle from occurring by adding too much nitrogen fertilizer and water.
to our yards. Overwatering and over fertilizing is not only unnecessary, it is also expensive.

**Strategies for using dormancy:** As plants transition into dormancy, we can use that natural cycle to shorten the number of days that we need to supplement water for our plants. In our area, the driest periods occur from June to September, with July and August getting less than 1” of rain. Established native trees and large woody shrubs will need little if any water during this period. Non-natives and those trees and shrubs not yet established will need additional water as they cycle into dormancy. This additional water is added to help the roots, which are the only part of the plant that is actively using water at this time. A good rule of thumb is to water the trees and shrubs once or twice every 2-3 weeks from mid-September until the first good rain. The amount of water should be enough to soak into the ground about eight inches or more each time applied. A good way to determine the depth of water is to wait an hour after watering and then poke a screwdriver down into the soil to see how moist it is below the surface and how deep that moisture goes. Add or subtract minutes if you determine you need to. Once you know how many minutes it takes to put down enough water to get to the appropriate depth, you’ll use that number every time.

For turf grass, if you are an advocate of dormancy, only water once every 10 days to 2 weeks starting around the 1st of July and continuing until the first good rain in September. The time should be set to allow the water to penetrate the soil at least 6”. You can use the same screwdriver method we mentioned above to check the depth. Add or subtract minutes as necessary. Once you figure out how many minutes you need to get the water down to the required depth, this will be the run time you use throughout the season.

Another choice with grass, and one I recommend, is to stress your grass. By stressing it you accomplish two things: 1) you reduce your water usage, and 2) you encourage the grass to put down deeper roots which means even less water in the future. A well-stressed lawn should never be watered more than twice per week and then only in the hottest part of the season. Again the depth of the water should be a minimum of 6” into the soil. Use the same method as before to calculate how deep the water is penetrating the soil. Try not to fertilize, just leave the clippings on the lawn. The beauty of this method is that the grass never goes completely dormant. So if you are having company over or you want the grass to look greener at some point, just add water. The grass will green up in a week to 10 days. When the party is over, cut your schedule back down, and you’re back in business saving water.

Not only will these management tips help you save money on water bills, they can actually protect the investment you’ve made in your landscapes. Plants that have deeper and broader root systems will fare much better during a water emergency, should one occur, than will plants that have been watered with less attention to their natural cycles.
How is our new water pipeline being built under the Willamette River?

Over 10 miles of large diameter water pipeline is currently under construction in Gladstone, West Linn, Lake Oswego and Tigard as part of the Lake Oswego Tigard Water Partnership Project. Construction methods for the pipeline vary between traditional cut-and-cover trenching and trenchless methods including horizontal directional drilling, micro tunneling and pipe ramming. While much of the pipeline is being installed in streets using typical cut-and-cover trenching, a special technique is used to get across the Willamette River.

The new pipeline between Gladstone and West Linn requires a 0.75 mile crossing under the Willamette River. Crews are using a specialized, steerable, trenchless method known as horizontal directional drilling or HDD. HDD technology was chosen because it limits disruption and has minimal impact on the environment compared to cutting a trench in the riverbed. Two drilling rigs are set-up on land at Meldrum Bar Park in Gladstone and Mary S. Young Park in West Linn. Both drill rigs are currently drilling through rock in a shallow underground arc about 80 feet below the riverbed to meet under the river. Each drill rig is creating an underground tunnel or a pilot hole. The hole will then be enlarged to four feet in diameter using one or two passes of a large drill bit or a reamer. Once the hole is properly sized, a 36-inch diameter welded steel pipe will be pulled through the hole from Gladstone all the way to the other side of the river in West Linn.

Construction of the water pipe under the river is expected to take about six months. In contrast to the existing 46-year-old, undersized 27-inch diameter pipe, the new pipeline will be seismically resistant and capable of delivering up to 38 million gallons of water a day to customers in Lake Oswego and Tigard for at least the next 75 years. The project is also providing work for local contractors and suppliers and helping the region’s economy by creating more than 2,200 jobs.

For more information about the Lake Oswego-Tigard Water Partnership project, visit lotigardwater.org, email lotwater@ci.oswego.or.us or call 503-697-6502.

Remember by…..

**September**: If you haven’t had an audit done on your property, September is a great month to have it done. You will get some great tips and find out how well your system is functioning, plus you’ll have time to make recommended corrections before next season. Audits are provided free by the City - participants who have used this service and implemented the suggestions are enjoying summertime water savings averaging 20 to 30 percent. To schedule an audit, call Kevin at 503-675-3747.

**September 15**: Cut lawn watering days by 1/3. Don’t adjust the time, just number of days. Turn off all water to established native plants and trees and only water when needed. For non-natives, reduce days to ½ of normal.

**October 1**: Suspend all regular water to shrubs, turf (grass) and trees. Water manually and only if needed.

**October 15**: All watering should cease on established landscapes. Water should be applied manually and only on new, under-established or non-native plants.

**Last two weeks of October**: Winterize/drain irrigation systems. Insulate backflow preventers and valves. Make sure that outside hose bibs are drained and/or insulated against freezing. Water features should be winterized and basins drained if not used during the winter. Cover pools and ponds. Monitor and clean leaves and other debris that may collect on or near storm drains to help prevent winter flooding. Good time to aerate and de-thatch lawns. Rake up and compost debris.

**November to March**: Enjoy the seasons … and watch KOIN 6’s Garden Time video and learn how making the right sprinkler choice can give you 30% water savings!

Garden Time: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS-w8PR_FDE