

By Bobbie Holder

It is hard to beat the beautiful weather this spring, but it is very dry. The warm weather is tricking the trees and other plants into thinking it is time to start growing. Lilac buds are swollen, cotoneasters have leaves, and catkins are hanging off the aspen and cottonwoods already. Those of us that have lived in Wyoming a while know that this could result in frozen buds, flowers and entire plants when the weather approaches something close to normal again, but in the mean time we need to help the trees and plants with some water. Yes, there is the possibility that watering them will make them bud out and flower sooner than they should, but without water they are not going to be able to develop leaves, buds or flowers later on and the entire plant could die. Better to lose some buds or flowers than to lose the whole tree or plant.

How much water depends on what kind of tree or plant, where it is located and what kind of soil you have. Sandy soil will need water more often than heavy clay. Generally you want to apply 10 gallons of water for every inch of trunk diameter. Be sure to apply the water to the root zone of the trees and plants. For trees and shrubs this means watering in a donut shape just inside and outside of the dripline. As dry as it is this spring it would be wise to water every 2 weeks until we get precipitation or normal summer watering starts. Smaller shrubs and perennials can use 4-5 gallons at a time every 10 days to 2 weeks. Apply the water early in the day so that it has time to be absorbed before freezing night time temperatures.

Leave the mulch on. I know it is tempting to remove all the leaf litter and mulch from around perennials, but don't get carried away just yet. There could easily be many days of cold and snow before growth really gets going. The mulch helps keep moisture in the ground; helps mediate fluctuations in soil temps and can help protect new tissue from freezing. Most plants can make their way up through several inches of mulch if it is not too compressed.

All in all we need to remember that we live in Wyoming and it is only March.

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