Drought Taking Its Toil on Trees

AMEs, Iowa — Dry conditions are putting stress on Iowa trees. With much of the state experiencing abnormally dry and moderate drought conditions, trees on marginal sites are dying all over the state, said Jesse Randall, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach forester.

“This year trees with other non-fatal ailments will die because of the addition of drought stress,” said Randall. “Trees planted within the last three years need two to three waterings per week. Once you start to water you cannot stop.” Randall said residents must decide whether to provide consistent watering or take their chances with Mother Nature.

Randall recommends watering in the early morning hours or late evenings, and continuing to water until 1 inch rains become a regular event. But be careful not to overwater! ISU has also seen some issues with root rots most likely due to excessive irrigation.

Newly planted trees don’t have the root systems to handle drought stresses. Even when planted correctly and with a good healthy root system, they just can’t make it without help because the roots system is not fully developed said Randall.

“This drought will speed up the decline of ‘hidden' unhealthy trees as well,” Randall said. “While it is difficult to lose a tree, drought conditions are exposing a lot of older trees that had pre-existing conditions and would have been lost at some point.”

Around the state conifers are taking the drought hard and showing lots of stress. Street trees are showing increasing amounts of stress. Additional information on tree health and care is available on the Iowa State University Extension Forestry website (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/forestry).

Symptoms of drought injury to trees can be sudden or may take up to two years to be revealed. Drought injury symptoms on tree leaves include wilting, curling at the edges, and yellowing. Deciduous leaves may develop scorch, brown outside edges or browning between veins. Evergreen needles may turn yellow, red or purple. They may also turn brown at the tips of the needles and browning may progress through the needle towards the twig. In continued drought, leaves may be smaller than normal, drop prematurely or remain attached to the tree even though brown. Often times, drought stress may not kill a tree outright, but set it up for more serious secondary insect and disease infestations in following years.

The Green Scene is a tip sheet developed by the Marion County Extension Office to inform people of horticulture events, problems, and interesting ideas. Let us know if you want to be added to our mailing list. Some issues are also available at www.extension.iastate.edu/marion/. This material has been prepared Karen Ackley, Agriculture Program Assistant. If you have questions, please contact the office at (641) 842-2014.
Keep an Eye Out for the Zebra Swallowtail Butterfly!

By Nathan Brockman, Reiman Gardens Butterfly Wing Curator

The zebra swallowtail butterfly (*Eurytides marcellus*) is one of six species of swallowtails found in Iowa. While you are much more likely to find them in the southeastern part of the United States, they are occasionally spotted in Iowa, particularly in years when there are higher than normal populations in the southeast. Sightings in Iowa are typically in the southern part of the state but, this year I have heard a couple of accounts of them being spotted in central Iowa. It is very likely zebra swallowtails are flying around other parts of the state, but those sightings are not being reported anywhere. If you happen to see an individual and would like to submit your sighting, you can do so at www.butterfliesandmoths.org.

As caterpillars zebra swallowtails feed exclusively on pawpaw, a shrub in the genus *Asimina*. According to the USDA NRCS distribution maps, the one species of pawpaw found in Iowa is *A. tri-loba*. While pawpaw is considered native to the state, it’s currently found more in the southern part of the state. Even though the caterpillar of the zebra swallowtail uses pawpaw as a host plant, the feeding that is done does not typically harm the shrub drastically, so they are not typically considered pests.

Pawpaw is hardy in Iowa and can do well across most of the state. By planting a pawpaw in your yard you increase the odds that one day you might just see a zebra swallowtail. The zebra swallowtail is an amazing species to see in flight, if you are lucky enough to come across one.

“Cool” Hort Classes at Fair!

The 2012 Marion County Fair added interesting new categories to challenge gardeners’ creativity this year. In addition, the exhibition moved to the air-conditioned Bingley Building. Although according to Fairboard personnel the number of entries did not increase significantly, it is thought that the reason was due to poor growing conditions rather than lack of enthusiasm.

Liz Dean took top honors with her arrangement (pictured right) in Division 42—Artistic Arrangements, Plants & Flowers.

Make a note for next year...it’s a fun way to show off your flowers!

Wanted...Ticks!

Entomologists at Iowa State University want to find out where these ticks are, and if they are carrying Lyme disease bacteria. If you find ANY tick, wrap it in tissue, add a small drop of water and seal in zip top plastic bag. Mail this to:
Department of Entomology
Lyme Disease Project
436 Science II
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 50011-3222

Please provide information about the tick encounter including where you found the tick; geographic location, if it was on a human or pet, and whether or not it was attached.

*Contact a doctor if you suspect Lyme disease. Early symptoms include a red rash near the bite site, headache or fever.

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