

Dry Conditions Expected Through Spring

Eastern Nebraska and western Iowa continue to be at the center of a severe drought, according to the National Drought Monitor. Precipitation shortfalls across Nebraska have steadily increased since mid-September. Precipitation has averaged 20 – 40 percent of normal which are averaging four inches below normal across central Nebraska to nearly eight inches below normal across the northeastern corner of the state.

In most landscapes there are plants that survive periods of drought. Placing these plants in the garden reduces the need to supply extra water during periods of inadequate rainfall. While cacti and succulents may have a place in some drought-tolerant gardens, they are not the only alternatives. There are other choices available and appropriate for dry areas. With careful selection, planning and execution, drought-tolerant landscapes can be as pleasing as those needing heavy irrigation.

Select plants for the growing conditions in a given area when planning and designing the landscape. Each area should be irrigated separately, according to specific water needs. Incorporate leaf size, color, bloom period, size and shape of plant, to create visual interest.

Turfgrass requires more water than other plants in the landscape. By isolating turf from gardens, trees and shrubs, a gardener can separate irrigation zones and waste less water. Limit turf to areas that are regular in shape and easily irrigated. Cultivar selection should be appropriate to the climate, site, level of maintenance, intended use and reduced water consumption. Although coarse in texture and appearance, tall fescue mixes offer good heat and drought tolerance. Cut the grass at a height of 3 to 3 1/2 inches. Longer leaf blades help to shade and cool the ground, reducing evaporation from the soil and lessening the need to irrigate.

Efficient irrigation may

mean including an irrigation system. The least efficient system is the sprinkler. It delivers a large amount of water in a short period, but loses excessive amounts of moisture to evaporation. Sprinklers that apply water early in the morning are the only choice for turf areas. Low-volume trickle or drip irrigators and soaker hoses deliver moisture over a long period, losing little water due to evaporation or runoff. Check all systems regularly. An improperly calibrated, clogged or leaking system can waste a great deal of water. Carefully probe the root zone to help determine the moisture content in the soil. With some low-volume systems, the surface of the soil will not appear to be saturated, while the root zone will receive the proper amount of moisture.

Properly mulching an area lowers the soil temperature and decreases the loss of moisture due to evaporation. In addition to creating texture in the landscape, organic mulch decay adds nutrients to the soil. Appropriate depth of the mulch is important: two to three inches for trees and shrubs and one to two inches for vegetables, annuals and perennials.

Carefully planned landscapes and sound cultural practices reduce water needs. Controlling weeds will lower moisture competition with other plants. Lessening competition will strengthen existing plants and make them less susceptible to disease, insects and drought. By carefully preparing and meeting plant requirements, a gardener can develop a landscape full of color and texture, while reducing water requirements.

Irrigation Zones

Very Low Water Zone

This area is typically farthest from a source of water. Plants in this area must be chosen carefully, requiring little or no supplemental irrigation. Some of these plants may show problems in years of abundant rainfall.



Low Water Zone

Plants chosen for this area will require more water than that which is available naturally. During severe drought, supplementing the water supply will become necessary.

Moderate Water Zone

This zone will use the greatest ratio of water in the landscape. Keeping this area small will help limit water needs. It is possible to grow drought-intolerant plants in this area.

Plants Selected for Low and Very Low Water Zones

Hardiness may be microclimate dependent. This is not a complete list, but rather a sample of drought-tolerant species.

Many species require well-drained soils and will not grow well in poorly drained, clay soils. Some species resistant to drought may perform more vigorously when grown in ideal conditions.

Trees and Shrubs

- Amur Maple
- Lead Plant
- Japanese Barberry
- Butterfly Bush
- Peatree
- Hackberry
- Flowering Quince
- Cotoneaster
- Washington Hawthorn
- Russian Olive
- Honey Locust
- Kentucky Coffee Tree
- Juniper
- Privet
- Osage Orange
- Bayberry
- Nine-Bark
- Jack Pine
- Cinquefoil
- Plum

See DRY on page 11

To Prune is to Care

Fear of pruning shouldn't stop you from planting fruit trees — unless it's going to stop you from pruning them.

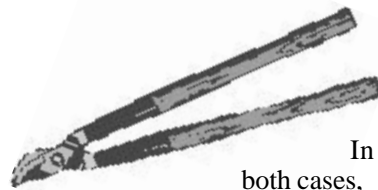
Young trees need pruning to develop a desirable shape; mature, bearing trees need pruning to stay healthy and productive. Pruning, in other words, is a basic part of fruit tree care and maintenance. If you keep in mind why you're pruning and what you want to accomplish, taking a saw in hand doesn't have to be scary.

Young trees are pruned to encourage them to develop a strong, but open branch structure that will expose leaves and fruits to sunlight and pest control materials. The two methods ordinarily used are the open

center and the central leader methods.

Peach and Japanese plum trees are usually shaped by the open center method. The central upright trunk is removed and branches are selected and directed so the mature tree has a sort of wide, flat vase shape. As the name suggests, the center of the tree is open.

Apples and other fruits are trained by the central leader method. The main upright stem is retained and two or three branches are selected each year for two to three years to form the basic structure of the tree. If the tree was viewed from directly above, the lateral branches would look like spokes of a bicycle wheel.



In both cases, you select branches that form wide angles with the main stem. Sharp, V-shaped crotches are weak and prime to break under the weight of a heavy fruit crop or a load of ice or snow.

Mature, bearing trees are pruned each year during the dormant season, usually in late winter.

The first step is to remove dead, broken or diseased branches. Cut them back to the trunk or to healthy buds. It's important to remove dead or broken branches because they can provide an entryway for disease organisms and insects.

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Acreage Insights



The Business Plan: Executive Summary

By Frank Leibrock, Small Business Support

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Now that you have opened the door to the possibility of starting your own business, you need to look carefully at how your business will function. In order to do that, you need to develop a plan that outlines all the details associated with the enterprise. You began with the end in mind when the idea of starting a business first surfaced. Now you will begin at the beginning.

The Executive Summary This section of the plan should outline the basic idea of the business. It should be brief, but still have an impact on the reader. The summary should stand on its own, but so capture the readers' imaginations, they will want to delve more deeply into the details.

Your opening remarks should provide all who read them a brief but clear understanding of, not only what your business is about, but how you plan on conducting business. Your executive summary should address the following questions and points:

- What is your product or service? Although this may seem obvious, without a clear and concise definition, the remainder of your plan may be weakened from the start.
- What makes it salable, marketable — in other words, a winner? Why would a consumer (or another business) buy your product or service instead of something already on the market?
- What are your competitors' strengths and weaknesses? As you assess this issue, remember the words of Jack Welch, the CEO of General Electric: "If you don't have a competitive advantage, don't compete."
- Exactly how are you going to operate? If you are in production, describe how you will manufacture your product. If

you are in a service industry, tell exactly how you will deliver your service.

• What makes your product or service hard to imitate? Many successful enterprises have come onto the market after modifying something that was a good idea, but was not quite "right" before it was presented. Look hard at what you are going to do. Be sure you recognize the need to innovate as you grow.

• Who are you selling to and how? Please note the reference to "other businesses" mentioned previously. There are all kinds of customers out there. Be sure you clearly identify the ones you will serve. The "how" of your service is just as important as the "who" you are serving.

• Different customers want the product or service delivered in different ways. Be sure you understand those differences.

• What innovative technology is involved in your business? Patents? Licenses? In many cases, these become your competitive advantage.

• Lastly, and probably most importantly, your executive summary should highlight your management team. In the beginning, this will be you and possibly a few others. It is critical you clearly illuminate the qualifications of all involved in running the business. Not only will this provide you an opportunity to discover gaps in the management and leadership, it will give you time to close those gaps before you embark upon your enterprise.

In our next article, we will look, in detail, at the management team; the people upon whose talents the success of the business depends. Begin thinking now of what talents will be necessary to develop and deliver your product or service. It is true in almost any business—people do indeed make the difference!

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