Nancy's Almanac, Wednesday, March 20, 2013: Drought is an opportunistic killer

So far, the trees that have been dying in the 2012-13 drought tend to be those that aren’t native or have been poorly planted or maintained, according to the Nebraska Forest Service.

There’s a sliver of good news in that: Better care can result in healthier trees.

“It isn’t indiscriminate,” said Justin Evertson, forester with the Nebraska Forest Service. “Drought really shows us what’s wrong. It will take out things that are compromised for other reasons.”

By understanding the weaknesses in your own yard or gardening practices, you can ease some of the impact, he said.

Fundamentally, trees have different needs than lawns, so the passion that people put into lush lawns can end up hurting their trees. The fertilizer, pesticides and shallow, frequent watering that keep a lawn lush are hard on trees for different reasons.

Too much water can drown a tree or prevent it from developing a drought-tolerant root system. Fertilizer forces growth when a tree is stressed and needs to rest. And pesticides contribute toward sterilizing the soil.

This is why foresters hope homeowners will re-examine their yards and think in terms of creating ecosystems.

Trees should be clumped together in their own shady ecosystem. As groupings, trees strengthen each other by interlocking roots and buffering each other from wind and sun.

Companion plantings of shade-tolerant ground cover and shrubs add to, rather than detract from, tree health.

Another obstacle to tree health is the conveniences that make modern life easier.
The increased planting of potted-trees runs counter to creating a stock of long-lived healthy trees. Poorly potted trees lack healthy roots, which is something the tree can’t fix once it is in the ground.

Also, mowers and weed whackers deliver cumulative damage to a tree.

“Trees have a delayed response to damage,” said Graham Herbst, also of the Nebraska Forest Service. “You really have to pay attention to what you are doing. There are a lot of things we can do to minimize our impacts on trees.”

Current conditions and forecast

infrastructure - 3:43 am
Omaha man sentenced to prison for shooting friend - 3:37 am
Pedestrian injured by pickup truck at 60th, Center - 3:11 am
Kids sickened by ingesting nicotine from e-cigarettes - 4:51 pm
Nikko Jenkins opened up to police in 'long night' - 3:44 pm
Jim Sutfin chosen as Millard Public Schools superintendent - 3:05 pm
Speech champ wins fight over project on gender identity - 3:00 pm
Sheriff's Office warns of phone scam - 2:44 pm
NB 144th Street lane to close - 2:42 pm
Grace: Missionaries battle bureaucracy and war to find orphans again - 2:16 pm
Creighton administrator's window pierced by bullet - 11:45 am

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