

**Pima County Master Gardener response to request for an evaluation of Stone Curves' Landscape, July 10, 2021**

Dear Lois,

Thank you for submitting the following question to the Pima County Master Gardeners.

Your inquiry number: TID-03255

Your question: A group of us who live at Stone Curves, a 15 yo cohousing community not far from you at Stone and Limberlost, have become very concerned about the trees on our property, primarily native: mesquite, acacia, ironwood and palo verde. Four years ago the community voted to turn off the irrigation system so, for the most part, our trees have not been watered except for the minimal monsoon rains.

We need guidance about preserving what we have amid changing climate and limited water supply. We would very much appreciate the Master Gardeners providing a consultation regarding our trees.

Please help us.

Hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you

From Kim Antieau, Pima County Master Gardener

Having researched your gardening issues, here is our recommendation:

Hi, Lois. Thank you for your question about your trees and watering and caring for them and our environment.

This is an ongoing discussion we are having in the Plant Clinic. What is the best advice to give during this exceptional drought? Right now we are at the top of the chart for drought. And we don't know how long we will be in exceptional drought. We used to get 12 inches of rain a year. Will it ever get back to that or do we need to adjust to what it is now going forward? How can we encourage people to water when water conservation is so important? These are questions and discussions we are having all the time, and since it is an ongoing emergency, we don't have all the answers. We do have some guidance, however, that I hope will help.

Our native trees do have an easier time during drought and exceptional heat. Mesquites have very deep tap roots, normally, the deepest tap roots of maybe any tree on the planet.

However, during this exceptional drought, many trees are not finding water no matter how deep they go. So we are recommending that people water their trees if they can.

Of course everyone's situation is different. It depends on your microclimates, your elevation, your soil, your ability to pay for water. One might have to choose trees which are closest to the house or buildings to water or to water trees which might seem stressed. But the most important thing is to water the trees deeply and infrequently. Most trees will be OK if you water them out to the drip line (and sometimes beyond) down to 36 inches. Many people water their trees and plants too often and not deeply enough, so this is a waste of water.

So what first?

1. I encourage you to first read this easy pamphlet on watering trees. It is a good introduction: <https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1298-2017.pdf>

2. Then look at this alert from Tucson Botanical: <https://tucsonbotanical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/final-urban-tree-alert-6-21-21.pdf>. They are encouraging people to water trees and shrubs now because of the ongoing emergency.

3. Then read this short piece on taking care of our landscapes during heat and drought: <https://extension.arizona.edu/maintaining-landscapes-during-heat-drought> Take note in all of these publications on how to use a soil probe to determine if you are watering deeply enough.

4. Then I encourage you to look at this piece by Dr. Schuch on drought and trees: <https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1876-2021.pdf> It might feel overwhelming at first, but you've read the other articles so it will begin to feel familiar. She explains what is happening to the trees now. She believes we should be working to save the trees and shrubs--and doing it water wisely--because the trees and shrubs do so much to protect the rest of the environment. Cacti and flowers can be replaced, but it takes years and decades to replace shrubs and trees.

5. This whole publication is useful, but I'm linking to the part that shows you how you can tell if you're watering deeply enough. <https://wateruseitwisely.com/wateringguideflipbook/#p=4>

6. Finally, the city of Tucson has some great info here with really good links throughout: <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/water/landscape>

This is a lot of information, and it can be overwhelming, I know. IF you go through this and you don't feel it helps or it doesn't help enough, you can always ask for a Master Gardener to come out to your property. You would just go to the form again, click on the ask a MG a question link, refer to this ticket number, and say that you now want a home consult. It costs \$50.

(<https://extension.arizona.edu/pima-master-gardeners>)

And you could consider having an arborist come out. Most of them will come out for free to look over your trees. This is a good publication on how to find an arborist: <https://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist>

I hope this helps. Good luck! Your care and search for answers is so important during these times.

Best wishes,

Kim

We appreciate you reaching out to us and hope that this answer helps you maintain a healthy, happy garden.

Should you need to follow-up on this answer, please call us at 520-621-0948. During the COVID-19 issue, our physical plant clinic is closed but we're still responding to voicemail.

Thank you,  
Kim Antieau, Pima County Master Gardener