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Reduced watering helps plants prep for winter

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Special to the Sentinel

The hot days of July meant watering every day to keep some Grand Valley lawns from drying out. Now that those days are over, you do not have to water your lawn and garden as much. In fact, if you cut back on unnecessary watering, it will help your plants and trees prepare for winter and you'll be rewarded with healthier plants in the spring. That means they'll require less water to get started next year.

Late-summer watering tips

Most gardeners have areas of their lawns or sections of their flower gardens that indicate drought stress. Some sections of my lawn tend to dry out first, and several flowers wilt before the rest of the garden needs to be watered.

Water when those indicator areas show the need for water. Watering no more than once a week at this time of year is a good goal. Be sure when you water that the water penetrates to a depth of 8 to 9 inches. You can check this with a long screwdriver. If you can easily push the blade into the ground to that depth, you know you have watered deep enough for the roots of lawns, trees, shrubs and flowers.

Cutting back on the amount of water you apply this fall will allow roots to go deeper into the soil in preparation for winter. As cooler weather approaches, try to put more days between each watering.

Trees and shrubs, like your turf and flowers, should be soaked just before water is turned out of the ditch, usually in mid-October.

Fertilizing tips

Fertilizing lawns should be done sparingly in the next few months, but a heavy dose of nitrogen fertilizer should be applied to your lawn just before your last watering of the season. For gardeners using ditch water, this means fertilizing lawns between mid-October and mid-December. For more information on fertilizing lawns, call the Colorado State University Master Gardener desk at 244-1836.

Fertilizing trees and shrubs should be avoided at this time of year, because it can increase plant succulence and cause shoot growth sensitive to cold temperatures. Avoid fertilizing roses.

For more water-conservation tips, visit www.thedripwebsite.com.