

# DROUGHT TAKES A TOLL ON TREES, BUT DON'T GRAB THAT AXE JUST YET

Despite periodic heavy rains over the fall and winter, the record drought that has parched Texas in the last year has taken a heavy toll on Texas' bountiful trees.

According to the Texas Forest Service, as many as 500,000 trees across the state have died as a result of the drought, now into its second year. The results of the preliminary survey add up to a loss of up to 10 percent of the state's 4.9 billion trees. For Texas homeowners, trees can add beauty to their property and quality to their lives. The death of a tree can be a profound loss, whether it is used for shade, landscaping or to hold a swing.



But if you suspect the drought may have killed your tree, don't cut it down yet, it may just have been drought-stressed by the extended dry spell.

A lack of water can cause leaves to wilt or turn brown and dry in many trees. On pine trees or other coniferous softwoods, the needles can turn yellow or red at the tips when they are suffering from lack of water.

In more extreme cases, hardwood trees may lose their leaves or branches during seasons when they would normally grow, according to the Forest Service. If the roots can't supply enough moisture and nutrients to the tree, the crown may die back to bring the tree's systems into balance. However, this may not mean the tree has died but may just be its means of coping with drought stress.

It is difficult at best to tell if a tree is dead or just dormant because of stress. The forest service suggests a couple of tests to gauge whether a tree is living. First, collect twigs about one-eighth inch in diameter and try to break them individually. If they snap easily like dead, dry twigs it could mean the tree has died. If the twigs bend and don't break with a snap, the tree may still be alive.

Second, you can use your fingernail to scrape bark from a twig or small branch. If the under the bark is green and moist, the tree may still be alive. Finally, to be certain the tree is not dead, watch in the spring to see if it sprouts a new crop of leaves.

If you suspect the tree may be alive, Forest Service officials recommend continuing to water unless it does not put on leaves in the spring.

A good way to check whether a tree has been watered sufficiently is to test the soil with a screwdriver. If the screwdriver doesn't go 6 to 8 inches into the soil, it's time to water deeply. While there are several ways to water, using a soaker hose is a good way to put the water where you want it without with less waste compared to a sprinkler. According to the Forest Service, a mature tree needs about an inch of water each week during drought. A soaker hose takes about four hours to put out an inch of water.

If you'd like to learn more about watering trees during drought, please click [here](#).

