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## ARTICLE



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## Trees planted with human hands.

Thirty-four million years ago, Colorado consisted of a dense forest. The giant sequoias only exist in fossilized records. Today, Colorado's front-range is a short-grass prairie. Human hands have planted and created nearly every landscape.

Water is the most limiting factor in our semi-arid climate. The lack of abundant precipitation not only results in wilted plants, but also has far reaching effects on the soil. Consistent and abundant soil moisture is needed to wash minerals through the soil. Without this activity, salts and other alkaline materials accumulate at the soil surface leading to high soil pH's and soil compaction. Compounding the dry weather is the lack of soil litter including twigs and leaves. Adequate moisture along with a constant supply of decaying wood litter is necessary to fuel the soil microbial community. This community consists of bacteria and fungi that serve to build soil structure and recycle nutrients. This leaves our soils infertile, unproductive and low in organic material.

Colorado weather also limits our plant palette. It's not so much the cold, hot, wet and dry – it's that it is constantly changing and severe. On any one day, Colorado communities may experience hurricane force winds, severe hail storms and wild fluctuations in temperatures and without warning. The trees that we do get to grow may be damaged and deformed by such events. It's enough to make you retire your pitchfork. But there are things you can do.

**WATER** This is a precious commodity and must be used wisely. Provide consistent water to your landscape – both in the growing season as well as winter dormancy. Irrigation systems should be checked and calibrated for proper coverage throughout the growing season.

**MULCH & FERTILIZER** Mulching with wood chips helps mimic the natural forest litter degradation found in nature. Mulch conserves soil moisture, builds soil structure and provides a food source for soil microorganisms increasing soil productivity. Fertilizer, soil surfactants, and humates may also be helpful.

**INSECT & DISEASE CONTROL** Due to harsh growing conditions, wood boring insects prey on weakened trees. This is especially true for pines and spruce with mountain pine beetle and Ips engraver beetles. Treat trees that are important in the landscape.

**PRUNING** The best way to prevent storm injury from broken limbs is through a consistent regimen of structural pruning every 3 – 5 years. Tree pruning should begin while the tree is still young keeping a 3 – 5 year interval.

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