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Rooting for Landscape Success

Summer 2009 will be remembered as one of the most pleasant in recent memory with the mercury inching over the 90 degree mark just 17 days. The normal is 32. The spring and early summer rains came. And came and came again. The rains were welcomed by our parched landscapes after an unseasonably dry winter.

Still we saw trees and shrubs that didn't do well. Off color leaves and early season defoliations were noted on many species up and down Colorado's Front-Range. Lawns prone to turf diseases also had a time with leaf spots and dead rings. Why?

If you have the opportunity to dig in the soil you may find something missing – roots. Last winter the soils were so dry many fine fibrous roots died. When the soils warmed up early in the summer, some lawns were saturated with sprinklers running at full force along with the soaking afternoon storms. Saturated soils lack the soil oxygen necessary for fibrous roots to grow. The good news is fall is an excellent time to encourage root growth ensuring success for the following growing season.

Lawn Aeration – Fall is an excellent time to aerate. As the soils cool, root growth increases. Aerations with an aerator that pulls plugs out of the soil will encourage grass roots to grow deeper in the soil. With the cooler fall temperatures, the lawn is less likely to dry out allowing the aeration plugs to breakdown quickly.

Leaves – Raking and bagging fallen leaves is a backbreaking chore. Try something different this fall. Mow them. Continue to mow weekly mulching as many leaves into your lawn as possible. The mulched leaves will provide bedding for your lawn retaining soil moisture and encouraging more root growth. Also, as the leaves break down they return nutrients to the soil giving your landscape an added boost come spring.

Fertilization – Plants most effectively use fertilizers when the roots are growing. Your fall lawn fertilization is the most important application of the year.

Water – Keep your hose handy until late October to take care of those dry spots and take the time to set out a sprinkler around your trees and shrubs. In the absence of natural precipitation a sprinkling every other week should suffice. Soil moisture will keep those roots growing.