

Yes, Redlands, it's OK to water the trees. In fact, they need it.

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Sunlight beams through dead tree branches on Fern Avenue near Sherwood Street in Redlands July 28. Redlands residents have been told to cut back on watering due to the drought, and some trees are now dying because of the lack of water. Rachel Luna/Staff Photographer

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Posted: 08/06/16, 4:56 PM PDT | Updated: 9 hrs ago

A dead tree on Fern Avenue near Sherwood Street in Redlands July 28. Redlands residents have been told to cut back on watering due to the drought, and some trees are now dying because of the lack of water. Rachel Luna/Staff Photographer

REDLANDS >> The statewide watering restrictions may have had unintended consequences on one of the city's most beloved assets — its trees.

City officials and tree advocates in town have been educating residents on the need to

keep watering their trees, while continuing to cut back on watering their lawns during the drought.

“First they’re being told to cut water and now they’re being told to water their trees. But it can be both,” said Linda Richards, a member of the city’s Street Tree Committee.

“One thing that people might not realize,” she added, “is that hand watering with a hose or letting your hose run, that’s not restricted. That can be done any day of the week.”

In January 2014, Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency due to severe drought conditions, which was followed by mandated water-use reductions statewide.

Since then, property owners have been encouraged to replace their water-guzzling lawns with drought-tolerant landscaping and install water-efficient irrigation.

But members of the Street Tree Committee and City Council have noticed that trees in Redlands are being neglected.

“People have been removing lawns and changing to low-water landscapes, which is appropriate, but their trees are not getting the water they need,” Richards said. “I’m seeing young trees that have been planted a couple years ago that have died, but it’s also many old trees that take decades to replace.”

Of the city’s 38,000 trees, there are between 1,100 to 1,400 dead street and park trees, according to information provided by Chris Boatman, director of the city’s Quality of Life Department. The city is conducting an audit to determine a more precise number.

“We see a lot of dead trees,” said Don Buchanan, Street Tree Committee chairman. “We see a lot of stressed trees, especially with our residents taking out the grass along the parkways.”

The Street Tree Committee has taken an active role in ensuring the city’s trees are cared for and has been searching for additional ways to educate residents about the need to water trees during the drought — both city-owned trees in parkways and their private trees.

Buchanan said the city’s redwoods, like elsewhere in the state, have really been



struggling during the drought.

“If we want to save the redwoods, and other historical trees in Redlands, we’re going to have to have a lot of support for residents to deep water all the parkway redwoods,” he said.

Buchanan also worries that the replacement of landscaping with dirt or rock, combined with the loss of trees, ultimately will lead to warming in Redlands neighborhoods.

“If you have 40- to 100-year-old trees, you don’t want them to all die and allow the city to become a heat island,” he said.

The Redlands Sustainability Network and the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District are developing yard signs about trees for residents and business owners to place in their yards. The signs are expected to be available later this month, said Richards, who is a member of the sustainability network.

Street Tree Committee members, meanwhile, have been working with the Redlands Horticultural and Improvement Society to purchase and install a large, informational banner to be placed across city streets.

“These are innovative ways of reaching out,” Buchanan said, “so there’s going to be a combined effort.”

Buchanan said he has been giving presentations to service clubs about the issue. Though the committee championed for inserts in customers’ water bills, he said, many service club members say they have not seen the inserts.

The city has taken several steps to remind customers of the need to water their trees, city spokesman Carl Baker said in an email.

The city has used the Redlands 311 app and the Reverse 911 system, social media posts, bulk mailers, Redlands TV, the city’s website, newspaper advertisements and three electronic signboards placed at various intersections in Redlands to communicate with residents, Baker said.

According to Buchanan, saving the city’s trees is a true team effort.

“We’re all in it together, working together to educate people,” he added. “We need to encourage because we cannot legislate or mandate residents to water their trees. All we can do is encourage them.”