

The Carr Fire Damaged My Landscaping. What Now?

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Aug. 10, 2018

Q: We were evacuated for six days during the Carr Fire and much of our landscape did not receive water during that time. We returned to many of our landscape plants looking dead. Is there any hope that they can recover?

A: We have heard this question from many people who were evacuated and had a home to return to, but the unrelenting, over 100-degree summer heat fried plants and trees that were left without irrigation for several days.

The likelihood your landscape will recover depends on a couple of things:



(Photo: Jay Calderon/USA Today Network)

First, it depends on what type of plants we are dealing with. If your plants are ferns or perennials, then they can completely die back and still come back from the root. If they are trees or shrubs, they can have partial brown leaves or complete loss of leaves and as long as you can see some green on the stems, and the stems are not dry and brittle, they may leaf back out in a few weeks. Depending on the species you may start to see new leaf buds in just a couple of weeks or it could be three to four months before you see signs of

life. If they are annual plants, your best bet is to start over.

The next factor in determining if the plant will recover is the care you give it while the plant is trying to recover. The plant or tree will need to be watered but not overwatered. You want to keep the soil around the tree or plant roots moist but not soggy. Test the soil a couple of inches below the surface for moisture before watering to ensure that you are not overwatering. You should also fertilize the tree or shrub as it is going to take a lot of energy to regrow leaves. Use a complete fertilizer but one that only has around 10 percent nitrogen. Too much nitrogen will cause too rapid a growth that may put too much stress on the plant in this summer heat.

For perennials and ferns, cut off the obvious dead plant material, this will keep the plant from getting a fungal disease before it can regrow.

If your landscape was actually burned, it is much harder to determine if your plants will recover. Plant and tree recovery after a fire depends on how hot and prolonged the fire was and the individual plant species. Many bulbs, perennial grasses, native trees and plants may regrow as they are adapted to wildfires.

The Shasta Master Gardeners are in the process of propagating and collecting plants for a series of big plant and tree giveaway days. For those folks who can replant right away, we will have our first plant giveaway in October.

This will give homeowners a chance to assess what plants they have truly lost and October is a much better month for planting trees and shrubs. We are also planning for a couple more plant giveaways next year for folks who will not be ready to replant until later.