

Finding a water substitute

Ohio town hydrates trees while saving water during hot weather.

Although Bay Village, Ohio, experienced one of its hottest summers ever last year, the trees in the city parks fared well without much watering from grounds maintenance staff. By adding a time-release gel to the soil around the trees' roots, the city cut its watering costs and reduced staff workload.

Beautifying city parks and ensuring they are well maintained are often considerable portions of many park and recreation departments' budgets. However, with more demands being placed on park workers to meet — and exceed — their visitors' aesthetic expectations, many departments find their employee and financial resources stretched thin. Faced with the challenge of making the most efficient use of its workers' time and using its water supply wisely, Bay Village sought a new way to water trees located throughout its 138 acres of city parks.

A small suburb west of Cleveland located on the coast of Lake Erie, Bay Village had difficulty watering trees in the city's park system as often as was necessary for them to flourish. It tried using irrigation bags, which, when filled with water and secured to the base of the tree, dripped steadily to keep

the soil moist. The bags kept the trees alive and healthy, but city workers still had to schedule water trucks to fill the bags, negating any time-saving benefits that were intended when the irrigation bags were installed.

Parks department managers decided to try a time-release water product they had used in 2004 for suspended flower baskets along the city's downtown streets.

The product, manufactured by Glendora, Calif.-based Rain Bird, consists of an all-natural gel that slowly converts back into liquid water over 90 days. Bay Village's head landscaper, Jon Liskovec, thought the continuous water application would help establish the parks' young trees.

In April 2005, Liskovec and his workers applied 14 containers of the gel to

a variety of 32-inch Serviceberry and Crab Apple trees by removing the bottoms of the product's quart-sized containers and placing them in the soil next to the trees' roots. The number of gel packs and frequency of applications needed to establish and maintain each tree depends on the type of tree, its size and the area's typical weather.

Workers did not have to re-apply new gel packs until August 2005. "I was so surprised to see no leaves browning and to see the trees thrive through one of the hottest summers we have had," Liskovec says. "The larger [trees] were watered by truck twice this entire summer, which is remarkable."

Bay Village plans to continue using the gel to help keep trees healthy. "We have been able to plant trees and know they are getting the water they need while using our resources in other areas," Liskovec says. **ACC**



A Serviceberry tree at one of Bay Village, Ohio's parks was nourished last summer by gel packs that slowly turned into liquid water to keep the soil moist during hot weather.