I think a lot of the trees that were just holding on, walling for El Nino, are starting to quit on me," Arias said.

...have recently seen increasing mortality among the city's roughly 400,000 streetside trees.

"Increasing mortality," said Sergio Arias, who has the bulky title of transportation and stormwater/street division horticulturist for San Diego, said his crews

"This is an environmental policy issue, not a gardening issue," said Robin River, an urban forestier, arborist and member of the San

Southern California's trees are often the inadvertent side casualties.

...grass die or replacing it with fake turf or decorative rock. They said while these alternatives might seem appropriate for semi-arid

artificially believe many people have taken the conservation message too far, turning off their sprinklers completely and letting the

Among other things, trees cleanse the air, sequester carbon dioxide, create shade, reduce soil erosion, raise property values and


"We need to get the message out that people need to water their trees," said Mike Palat, chairman of the San Diego Regional Urban

back on watering could imperil the urban forest in the long term.

Nino delivers the hoped-for abundance of rain this winter, residents, business owners, pronounced still toward permanently cutting

That's the view of some arborists who said thousands of local trees are distressed or dying due to lack of watering. And even if El

natural resource in urban communities, are threatened.

San Diego County's success at conserving water during the state's historic drought could have a downside: Trees, a cherished

By Robert Kern (slaff/robert-kern)  |  Midnight Dec. 23, 2015  |  Updated 8:05 a.m.

ARBORISTS: DROUGHT PUTS TREES IN TROUBLE SOME...
better option is to replace water-guzzling grasses with native grasses or other low-water vegetation.

In many cases, lawns were replaced with artificial turf or rocks, which don’t provide the same benefits to the soil. Grangetto said a

diseases are not far behind."

"The turf serves as a reservoir," Grangetto said. "Now we have salts concentrating in there. That weakens the trees, and the"

California this year "jumped the gun a little,"

Colin Center, said he believes water managers’ decision to offer turf-removal rebates is a dramatically greater number of Southern

Kevin Grangetto, whose family owns Grangetto Farms and Garden Supply stores in Escondido, Encinitas, Fallbrook and Valley

Taking out turf

danger of losing at least tens of thousands of urban trees.

There are many variables to consider, but it similar percentages of trees in the rest of San Diego County are affected. The region is in

trees - or 14,000 - had died in the past year.

property - 5 percent - are stressed or dying. A recent study in Los Angeles showed that 4 percent of the city’s 350,000 parkland

Debra Juncal, landscape coordinator inspector for Oceanside, said about 2,000 of the approximately 40,000 trees on that city’s

population, and there is no census of the millions of trees on private properties in the county.

There’s no official count of the number of dead or dying trees in the county, said Patel, who does contract work for most cities in the

trees has gone past the point of recovery."

"Lots of concerned people are reaching out to arborists," Patel said. "However, there is a common trend of the call coming when the

Unfortunately, he said, removing dead trees is becoming a bigger part of local arborists’ business.

"In wet years, trees have better defense mechanisms," he said. "In a drought, it’s like cutting off your root and then trying to fight a

local arborists have seen increases in pests infestations and diseases because trees are stressed by lack of water, Patel said.

minimize irrigation."

"save-water-at-all-costs" mindset that they’ve developed during the drought. Raising water bills could give residents further incentive to

Once the winter and springtime rains have passed, urban trees could face a sharp decline if well-informed residents maintain a

and if the succession of storms does arrive, they may not do so until February or March.

Patel said the winter holds irrigation potential of short-term moisture relief, but that El Niño doesn’t guarantee ample precipitation.
could water 251 trees with what it takes to maintain one lawn.

Rob Kuther@sununiorhn.com

Because deep watering, but only needs it once a month to be happy, I'm trying to get people hip to that.

"I really believe strongly that drought is an opportunity for trees," he said. "You've got to get the water down 18 to 24 inches at the drip line (outer edge of the tree's branches)." If you want to make a tree happy, it's all about managing the root zone. A tree wants

Streeter said maybe 5 percent or 10 percent of people water their trees properly. He sees the drought as a teachable moment.

During the past four years, San Diego has had far below its usual winter rainfall, and the trees have suffered because of it.

A fairytale wet fall has helped, but January through March, the typical rainy season when the days are cooler and shorter and the sun

San Diego County had unprecedented rains in May and July, but those storms did little for most trees because the moisture didn't

Improper watering

In communities, "The classes emphasize the important role played by trees for shade and climate, and the need to maintain tree cover in our

"In conjunction with the rebate program, the water authority offered numerous classes on water-smart landscaping," Michelson said.

includes retrofitted irrigation systems.

Grant funding can only have a positive effect on the region's tree cover - if property owners followed the recommendations that" about improve trees' stress levels and dying trees. He said the agency's water replacement program, which was suspended in January when

Carlos Michelson, a principal water resources specialist for the San Diego County Water Authority, said the agency is concerned

Artificial turf also adds heat around a home, she said, and it has "no environmental justification. It's an outdoor rug."

"Five years down the road, if you want to take out that gravel, it's difficult to undo the damage that gravel has done," Rivera said.

Alternatively, pulls in more heat than concrete, Rivera said. That added heat can bake the soil beneath it, making it imperious to water.

He also worries that when the rains do come, the ground may have trouble absorbing it. Gravel, which has became a popular lawn
Lines of ants going up the tree. Ants often harvest tree pests' byproducts.

 Bark showing off the trunk excessively.

 Abnormal cracks in the trunk.

 Yellowing foliage and early leaf drop.

 Browning or dead twigs and branches.

 Signs of tree stress

 Put a 2- to 4-inch layer of organic mulch away from the trunk to the outer edge of the canopy.

 Create a soil berm around the perimeter of the tree.

 The tree's perimeter, not at its base.

 Water deeply but infrequently, using a sprayer hose or drip system. The water should reach a depth of 16 inches or more. Water at

 Be observant. Look for subtle changes such as leaf drop or browning needles.

 How to help trees through the drought:

 Drought conditions could potentially lose tens of thousands of urban trees.