

Protecting Foundations by Dotty Woodson

While the drought conditions that plague Texas have taken a toll on crops, cattle and landscapes, extended dry periods may also cause shifting or cracking in the foundation of your home. When clay soil becomes extremely dry, the soil contracts and the foundation sinks. Unfortunately, when the foundation sinks, it sometimes sinks in different directions causing cracks. When soil is extremely wet, it expands and lifts the foundation, sometimes closing the crack. Many notice this shifting when doors are difficult to open and close or when you see cracks in walls particularly the corners. More severe damage occurs when foundation cracks cause pipes to break, chimneys to shift and brick veneer to crack or separate. Try to protect your foundation before this happens by watering your foundation.

Since dry soil shrinks away from foundations, walk around your house and look where the soil is against the foundation. You may have to pull back plants or even mulch to make this observation. If you do not see a gap between the soil and foundation, your soil moisture is good. If you see a gap between the foundation and the soil, you need to water your foundation. Do not pour water into cracks that appear between the foundation and the soil.

Use a soaker hose to water the foundation if necessary. Place the soaker hose around the perimeter of the house 8 to 18 inches away from the foundation. Before attaching the soaker hose to the faucet, make sure you have a backflow preventer on the faucet. Most new homes have backflow preventers on all outdoor faucets. A backflow preventer prevents water from backing into the house pipes if there is a huge pressure draw in the house while the soaker hose is running. Attach a faucet splitter on the faucet so the faucet is not tied up just for the soaker hose. Add a faucet timer to make timing and shutoff easy. A faucet timer only turns the water off. You will still have to turn the water on and set the timer. So if you want to run the soaker hose at night, you do not have to worry about turning off the faucet until morning because the timer will turn off the water. The first time you run the soaker hose, take off the end cap and run water through the hose to clean out any debris. Soaker hose run best with low pressure. You do not need to turn the faucet on full blast. Most soaker hoses will have a pressure restrictor (looks like a plastic disc) at the faucet end to prevent high pressure blowing geysers in the hose. If there is no restrictor, turn on the faucet so water slowly comes out of the soaker hose. Run the soaker hose for several hours

If you find cracks in the foundation, fill with foundation waterproofing, which is available in most hardware stores. Cracks also may appear in the concrete of a driveway, carport or garage. If there are cracks in the garage, you can usually assume that the cracks do not end there, but extend through the house. Call a foundation specialist for any large problems.