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The roots of this drought go back further than you think

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Frank Matheson walked through dried corn fields due to drought conditions at his family's farm in Littleton.

By Matt Rocheleau

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The state's [drought](#) officially [began](#) at the start of July, but the unusually dry weather dates back

much further.

From January 2015 through the end of August, Boston received 55.06 inches of precipitation, a whopping 17.33 inches below normal.

During that 20-month stretch, precipitation was below normal in all but six months.

“Officially, the drought conditions began this summer, in July,” said Jonathan Yeo, director of water supply protection at the state Department of Conservation and Recreation.

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But “technically, we’ve been running a precipitation deficit for a while,” he said.

Last year was “not a great year” in terms of precipitation, he said.

“The low snowpack this past winter didn’t help, and starting in March and April, we had multiple months in a row of below-normal precipitation, and then just a terrible summer.”

Dry pattern dates back to early 2015

Precipitation totals have been below normal in all but six of the past 20 months in Boston.

Month	Precipitation	Monthly normal	Difference
Jan. 2015	3.57	3.36	0.21
Feb	3.37	3.25	0.12
Mar	3.05	4.32	-1.27
Apr	2.28	3.74	-1.46
May	1.22	3.49	-2.27
Jun	5.01	3.68	1.33
Jul	2.09	3.43	-1.34

Aug	2.19	3.35	-1.16
Sep	3.93	3.44	0.49
Oct	1.74	3.94	-2.2
Nov	2.07	3.99	-1.92
Dec	4.28	3.78	0.5
Jan. 2016	3.27	3.36	-0.09
Feb	4.17	3.25	0.92
Mar	3.16	4.32	-1.16
Apr	2.91	3.74	-0.83
May	2.83	3.49	-0.66
Jun	1.33	3.68	-2.35
Jul	0.87	3.43	-2.56
Aug	1.72	3.35	-1.63
Sep (so far)	0.69	3.44	-2.75

SOURCE: National Weather Service

What about that record-breaking winter in early 2015?

Those mountains of snow were deceptive. With cold conditions, the snow was light and fluffy, and a little precipitation went a long way. Consistently frigid temperatures — it was the second-coldest February ever recorded — prevented melting, allowing snow to pile higher.

Boston received 64.8 inches of snow in February 2015. But [when measured as a liquid](#), only 3.37 inches of precipitation fell, just a hair above the historical average of 3.35 inches for the month.

“It was a pain to deal with, and then it didn’t even help us so much,” Yeo said.

Although we’ve had some rain recently, it has done little to help.

Forecasters say that to get out of this drought, we’d need more frequent rounds of longer-duration storms, and ideally in manageable doses so there’s no flooding. The occasional downpours and



showers we've been getting aren't cutting it.

[Drought conditions are expected to persist](#) through at least the end of November, meteorologists say.

More than half the state is in "[extreme drought](#)" status, officials say.

But the data also show that our region has gone through worse droughts before.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [tracks data](#) showing that, for the state of Massachusetts, precipitation totals in 2015 ranked as the 30th lowest ever recorded and were the lowest since 2001, when the state saw its last significant drought.

The data also show that the first eight months of 2016 ranked as the 10th driest January-through-August stretch ever measured in the state, and the driest since 1995.

The [worst](#) drought that has ever been recorded in the state was in the 1960s.

"This drought is bad, but it's not the worst," said a [statement](#) from University of Massachusetts Amherst hydrologist David Boutt.

He said that one reason this year's drought has drawn a lot of attention is that it has come largely in the growing season — and [amid an abnormally hot summer](#) — affecting [farmers](#), not to mention residents trying to keep their lawns green and gardens in bloom.

Many municipalities have implemented [restrictions](#) on water use, including some communities that have seen their [reservoirs run so low](#) on water that they've had to tap into other supplies on an emergency basis.

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