

## Protecting Trees & Shrubs in Winter

In nature, trees and shrubs take care of themselves. The strongest survive and the others become part of the cycle of life. In our yards, we rely on our plantings to enhance and beautify our personal environment, but we often use plants that wouldn't naturally grow in that setting or in our climate. To help ensure that our trees and shrubs have a good chance of survival over the long winter months, we need to provide protection. Methods for protecting trees and shrubs varies during winter, depending on the type of damage you are trying to prevent.

**What causes winter damage?** Cold temperatures, ice/snow, wind, salt, and animals can all cause considerable damage to your trees and shrubs.

**What kind of damage is caused by cold?** If your plant is marginally hardy in our climate, cold temperatures alone can kill back the tender tissues.

**What is sun scald?** Even on the coldest winter day, the sun can reflect off the snow onto landscape plants and warm the tissue enough to thaw; then, the sun sets and the temperatures drop, freezing the plant tissue again. On young trees, this alternating freeze/thaw cycle can cause vertical splits in the bark on the trunk. This is a problem on most young trees, but is most common on maples.

**Can I prevent sun scald?** You can wrap the trunks of susceptible trees to prevent almost all splitting. There are several kinds of tree wraps available. The easiest and least expensive is a neutral brown color and comes in a variety of lengths. Simply, start wrapping around the base of the trunk and work your way up as far as you can reach or to the lowest branches. You can also get plastic tubes that can be slipped around the lower section of the trunk, but they may leave too much of the trunk exposed.

**When should I put on the tree wrap?** Tree wraps should be in place before the first snow and be taken off as soon as the snow is gone. Protect your tree every winter until the tree has begun to develop a thick bark, which may not be for several years.

**Is there anything I can do if the bark has split?** Splits usually don't cause any long-lasting damage. Carefully trim off any dead bark. It won't reattach itself and will be a site for decay. Wounds that are elliptical in shape, like a football, will heal the quickest. Unless the tree is an oak or elm, pruning paint or sealer is not recommended. The tree will form a callous around the edges of the wound that will grow toward the center.

**What causes evergreens to brown in the winter?** When it is windy and sunny in the winter, evergreen foliage can lose moisture that it cannot replace when the ground is frozen, resulting in browning. To help minimize this browning, be sure your plants have been watered well all season, right up until the ground freezes. Avoid planting evergreens in windy locations and/or where they might receive direct, afternoon sun in the winter.

**How can I protect evergreens from winter burn?** The only way to protect trees that are planted where they might be susceptible to winter burn is to put up a barrier. Loosely weaved burlap can be wrapped around the plant or stretched across stakes in the ground forming a screen.

**Still have questions? See us online or give us a call.**

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