

TREECARE FOR WINTER SURVIVAL

By Judith Siegel, Tree Advisory Board

WATER

During fall, if rainfall is inadequate, (less than 1 inch in several weeks) continue to water trees, with a slow, deep soaking on the root area, until the ground freezes and you have to drain your pipes or hoses.

Remove any tree watering bags.

PRUNING

Avoid fall pruning as it encourages new growth that can weaken the tree. Wait until trees are dormant to prune—late winter /early spring is the best time for pruning out weak or unwanted branches. Wounds heal faster in spring, and insects are still dormant then.

To avoid breakage, pruning dead, diseased, or damaged wood can be done any time.

Remove root suckers, and water sprouts-- those growing straight up from the trunk or branches-- as they appear.

MULCH

Apply two inches of organic mulch to as far out as the drip line, if possible, of each tree. Mulch helps regulate the moisture and temperature of the soil, as well as provide nutrients to the tree. Leave 2 inches of space between the tree trunk and the mulch. This avoids fungal infection and damage to the trunk. (Think donut, not volcano!) .

PROTECTING TREE TRUNKS

Consider wrapping trunks of young trees. This does several things: it prevents sunscald, which occurs below 15 degrees Fahrenheit when winter sun warms the south side of tree trunks, and cold night air freezes cells; it prevents rodents from chewing bark and killing young trees by girdling; it protects trunks from harmful salt spray.

MIMIMIZE SALT DAMAGE TO TREES

The most commonly used salt for melting ice, sodium chloride, is harmful to trees and other plants. Once carried into soil by melting ice, it concentrates there, and prevents uptake of water into tree roots, even drawing water out of roots if the concentration of salt is high.

As it breaks down into sodium and chloride, these ions are taken up by roots to buds and leaves, where arrest of bud opening, leaf scorch, and blocking of photosynthesis result.

Steps to take:

- Use alternative salts, **magnesium chloride** being the least harmful (and is effective to lower temperatures than sodium chloride: 5 instead of 15.8 degrees F). Use as little as possible, and apply it to walkways **before** the area freezes.
- Use coarse sand to help prevent slipping on walkways.
- Most damage from salt use occurs in spring, when root water intake is increased for leaf growth. Thus, in spring, before leafing occurs and once the ground has thawed, if spring rains are not heavy, flush the soil with plenty of water to wash the salt beyond the roots of trees.