

Fall Tree Care

Our trees have made it through another difficult Nebraska summer, but soon they have to face Nebraska's equally difficult winter conditions. You can prepare your trees for the coming winter by following a few simple steps. Small investments of your time and energy now can pay-off in a big way later on by yielding a healthy and structurally sound tree. Here are some important things you can do to winterize your trees.

- **Stop fertilizing.** Trees and shrubs need to become hardened off before going into winter. The succulent, new growth that results from fertilization is much more susceptible to winter burn and leaf scorch.
- **Remove or correct structural faults and deadwood that are clearly visible.** Try to make small pruning cuts that minimize the exposure of the central heartwood core on branches.
- **Remove damaged or dying twigs, branches, and bark.** Don't leave pests food and shelter for the winter.
- **Remove any 'water' sprouts or suckers** that have grown on the tree trunk, or along stems and branches.
- **In late November, spread a 3-4 inch thick layer of coarse organic mulch,** like wood chips in a 3 to 6 foot diameter area around the base of the trunk to blanket the soil. This helps conserve valuable moisture and minimizes harmful winter temperature fluctuations around the tree's roots.
- **Prevent sunscald on young, thin-barked trees** by shading the south and west face of the tree's trunk with a white painted piece of wood, pounded into the ground in front of the tree. Or use a section of black drain tile, slit down the side and painted white, then fit around the tree's trunk.
- **Protect trees from rabbit and vole damage** by wrapping the trunks with ¼ inch hardware cloth. The cylinders should extend higher than a rabbit's reach while standing on the expected snow depth, and stand 1 to 2 inches (2.5 to 5 cm) out from the tree trunk. Usually a height of 2-3 feet is sufficient. Bury the bottom edge of the cylinder 2-3 inches in the soil to prevent voles from going under it.
- **Monitor the amount of weekly precipitation we receive,** whether snow or rain. Winter droughts need treatment with water just as summer droughts do. Water as needed throughout winter when soils are not frozen, and there has been little precipitation. Deeply water trees with a slowly trickling hose or slowly running sprinkler left in place for a couple hours. Do not use 'root feeders' or deep root watering devices. Apply the water slowly enough that it can soak in and does not run off.

Winter is a difficult time for trees. Trees must stand in the face of cold, drying winds. Food reserves must be carefully conserved for the coming needs of spring. Any creature needing a meal chews and nibbles on the resting buds and twigs. Trees stand alone against all adverse circumstances the winter season can generate.

Trees are important investments in your landscape and they do require a small amount of care. For the sake of your tree's quality of life and your own, take a few minutes to winterize your trees.