

Winter Landscape Tips

The official start of winter is December 21, and the recent temperatures only remind us of the cold days ahead. Despite the weather, the following are a few landscape tips to keep in mind during the winter months.

Winter is the time to apply miscible oil sprays to kill overwintering mites, aphids, and scale on deciduous trees and shrubs. Spray miscible oils when temperatures are above 40 degrees F., but not within 24 hours of a freeze. Because the oil kills insects by suffocation, avoid spraying on windy days to ensure that all surfaces of the plant are covered.

When using salt to melt ice on walks and drives, spread it carefully to avoid damage to nearby shrubs. Damage to needle-type evergreens will be evident next spring by copper and yellow tones. Damaged deciduous plants will have bronze or reddish leaves. Consider using sand or sawdust instead.

Some plants that should be pruned in later winter or early spring are hydrangea, butterfly bush, Rose of Sharon, hibiscus and other summer-flowering shrubs that flower on new growth. Prune spring-bloomers, such as azaleas, right after they flower.

When pruning large limbs, always undercut first. This means to cut from the bottom up, one-third of the way through the limb, then finish by cutting from the top. The undercut keeps the limb from splitting and breaking off, which could damage the trunk and become an entryway for insects and diseases. Do not cut flush to the trunk, the collar or enlarged base of a branch produces hormones that help heal wounds.

To plant bare-rooted trees and shrubs, prune off dead or damaged roots, and plant in a hole large enough to accommodate the roots when spread in a natural shape. Contrary to earlier recommendations, it is no longer suggested that you prune the top to compensate for the loss of roots caused by transplanting. Research has found no evidence that this helps the plant, and there is a possibility that pruning removes carbohydrate reserves the plant could use to grow new roots.

Prune muscadines in January or February. If this job is left too late in the season, bleeding from cut ends will occur. If, however, you don't get around to pruning until later, don't worry. Bleeding of muscadine plants, contrary to popular belief, does not harm the plant.

Don't forget to water newly planted or transplanted shrubs. They will require a good bit of water after the windy days of a cold front.

Winter truly is a great time to get out in the landscape. Although it may be hard to break ourselves away from the fireplace, doing a few chores now will have our landscapes looking better this spring.