

# Winter Plant Protection



- Applying a layer of **winter mulch** is one of the best methods to protect perennials, shrubs, and trees from wintertime heaving and damage. Use hard wood mulch, straw, or even evergreen branches to a depth of 4-6" after the leaves have fallen and the soil has had a hard, fall freeze (late November). Avoid using raked leaves because they eventually pack down and make a soggy mess. For beds in windy locations, lay sections of chicken wire over the surface of the mulch and weigh it down with bricks or stones.

- If they are not already **staked**, deciduous trees should be securely fastened to a sturdy, well-anchored pole to support them in high winter winds. Tie the trees loosely with cushioned, heavy cord to prevent any injury to the bark; don't use wire.
- Use vinyl, burlap, or paper wraps on all young deciduous trees to prevent sunscald. **Sunscald** occurs when the bark of the tree is warmed during the day by the winter sun and is subjected to freezing temperatures at night. This often results in weakened trees and splitting bark. The wrap not only acts as a protective barrier, but also protects the trunk from rodent and deer damage.
- Be sure to give special attention to all your evergreen plantings. They are very vulnerable in the drying, winter winds because they retain their foliage year round. Wrap them in burlap or erect a four-sided burlap screen around them, keeping the bottom of the screen a few inches above the ground for air circulation. With smaller evergreens, build a similar screen, but stretch the burlap down to ground level and fill the area directly around the base with leaves. Mophead and Oakleaf Hydrangeas also benefit from a burlap wrap.
- For added protection, apply an anti-desiccant spray such as **Wilt-Stop**, especially on broadleaf evergreens. Coating with Wilt-Stop prevents loss of plant moisture from drying winter winds, sun, and low winter temperatures. It can also help preserve rose canes, Hydrangeas, cut Christmas trees and fresh holiday greens.
- Water all new plantings thoroughly before the first hard freeze, and apply a three to four inch mulch around the base each plant after the ground freezes. This mulch will protect the plants from "heaving", (the alternate freezing and thawing of the soil that damages tender root systems), and can even force the plants right out of the ground. If a plant has plenty of moisture around its roots before the ground freezes hard, it will stand a much better chance of survival. Water evergreens thoroughly every month throughout the winter if able.
- For hardy perennials, shrubs and trees that have not been planted in the yard, and are still in a pot, store them in a cold garage or well-protected side of the home, mulch or cover with leaves (if outside) and water lightly once per month in winter.
- Small or slightly tender perennials, mini roses, and hydrangeas can be protected with an overturned flowerpot. When the pot is in place, bank some soil against its rim to hold it in place during high winds or place a brick or large rock on top. Leave the pot's drainage hole open for good air circulation.

