



TREE NEWS

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YOU CAN USE

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TREES AND WINTER WEATHER

Winter can be a tough season to weather. Not only for us, but also for many trees and ornamental plantings. While we have the ability to move indoors to a more suitable environment, trees must deal with the weather events they are dealt. As a result, damage to trees during the winter can come in various forms, from the obvious damages caused by snow and ice buildup, to more discreet issues such as desiccation (drying out) as a result of deicing salts. Managing your trees during the winter is important for their long-term survival.

In Tennessee, our dormant period typically runs from late November to early April, though true dormancy varies by species. Winter can also be particularly harsh for plants that are not cold hardy for our planting zone. For arborists though, winter can prove quite beneficial, providing an opportunity to better view the overall structure of the tree and to look for any signs of defects. This can help arborists quickly identify potential problems and prune them in the most minimalist way.

While most newly planted trees (planted in the previous fall) are typically able to withstand our winter months, it is important that they establish good root-to-soil contact prior to our coldest temperatures (hard freezes). Should cracks or fissures remain in the soil following planting, this air space can expose the tender, newly formed roots, leaving them vulnerable to desiccation, and ultimately damaging or even killing these small roots. Further, other plant parts, such as buds, branches, and bark, on newly planted trees can also be vulnerable to winter damage.

Winter in Tennessee typically brings adequate rain and/or snow fall for most established landscape trees, but it is possible for soil moisture deficits to occur. Watering during dry periods can help to reduce overall stress on the tree. Unfortunately, the effects of root loss during the winter may not be immediately obvious. Signs of loss may not appear until much later in the season, during the hottest months of the year.

So how can we best prepare our trees for winter? Monitor your trees and soil moisture closely, especially newly planted trees. Ensure that an appropriate layer of mulch has been applied to help maintain consistent soil temperatures, and water as needed when soil temperatures are above 40° F; lower soil temperatures will inhibit root growth. Lastly, remember that bare trees, once hidden behind a veil of leaves, can still generate great interest even during the winter months, bringing textures into our landscape before we transition to warmer days!

Common Damages Caused in Winter:

- Cracked and broken limbs from snow and ice buildup
- Browning of needles on evergreens (i.e., windburn)
- Wildlife damage through girdling
- Desiccation from deicing salts applied near trees
- Frost heaving (freezing/thawing of soil)
- Sunscald
- Root damage (through exposure)

Heads up!

Tennessee Arbor Day is March 5, 2021!

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