

Winter Mulch, Christmas Trees, Houseplants

We are getting to that point of the year where we will have to hang up our shovels, rakes, and pruners. It is almost the time where we can no longer do much yard work for the year. However, there are still a few things we can do quickly before the temperatures get too cold or the snow starts to pile up.

Winter mulch can be applied now, or within a few weeks when temperatures are consistently dropping down to the twenties each night. Winter mulch is the heavier layer of mulch we apply to plants like chrysanthemums and strawberries to keep them from having temperature fluxes in the soil they are planted in. Any plant that may be prone to frost heaving, the plant being pushed up out of the soil by a constant freeze and thaw condition, or plants that were just planted this fall could also benefit from winter mulching. This mulch can be up to twelve inches deep, which is much deeper than we usually advise but is needed for winter protection. It is better to use coarse wood chips or leaves for winter mulch rather than grass. This mulch can be held in place by a chicken wire fence circled around the plant. Remember to pull the mulch out about six inches away from the trunks of trees and other woody shrubs to prevent damage from wildlife, such as voles, during the winter months.

As we prepare for Christmas, we need to remember the care we should give our live trees throughout the season. Be sure to keep live trees watered throughout the holiday season, if they don't have water they will dry out quickly and be a fire hazard, especially with warm lights on them. Also, tree allergies do pose a problem with some people. If you bring a live tree in, it may have dust or mold spores on it from outside that you may bring inside. This can also be the case with artificial trees that are stored in basements all year. If you have allergies to dust and mold, store artificial trees in bags that can be removed to reduce the mold and dust brought out or wash off your live tree before bringing it indoors.

To keep your green thumb going throughout the winter months, purchase houseplants. There are many different types of houseplants, including many for the holiday season. Christmas cactus, poinsettia, and amaryllis are three plants that are typically grown as houseplants for blooming in the holiday season. These are all plants that show a wonderful bloom, or great color, in the later part of December. Be careful with children and pets being around these plants because Christmas cactus and amaryllis are poisonous if eaten and poinsettias can cause skin irritation or gastrointestinal distress. Be sure to remove the decorative wrapping from the pot when you get it home to allow for more drainage. Also make sure that you cover the plant with a bag when moving it from the store to your home.

Come and join us on Sunday, December 11, from 10 am to 2 pm for a 4-H Soup Extravaganza. This free will donation soup luncheon will be held at the 4-H Inc. building on the Gage County Fairgrounds in Beatrice and will feature four different soups and homemade desserts. There will also be a hog raffle with single tickets for \$1.00 or 6 for \$5.00, a silent auction, and a Christmas dinner shoot off where you can shoot an air pistol for a chance to win a free ham, turkey, or chicken. Proceeds will go to the 4-H Shooting Sports Club and 4-H Inc. to fund upcoming renovation projects.

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