January 29, 2010

USE CAUTION WITH DEICERS

When the driveways and sidewalks turn icy, often one of the first things we do is lay down a bag of deicer. Be careful, though, as the wrong kind of deicer can damage grass, plants and shrubs.

Many deicers contain sodium, which can leach into soil and cause the damage. The addition of sodium to soil can destroy soil structure, resulting in reduced water infiltration and decreased plant health.

When the soil is well-drained, the salt can be leached out with irrigation or heavy rainfall. When soil is compacted, the salt will continue to accumulate and increase the severity of the problem.

While shopping for deicers, don't grab the first bag you see. Instead, read the label. Look for deicers that say on the label they are kind to landscapes. Those include deicers that contain calcium chloride or magnesium chloride.

Deicers laid down on a driveway usually won't cause a problem if they stay on the pavement. The problem arises when they get close to the edge of the driveway and sidewalks. Some of the deicer will inadvertently get onto the landscape.

Homeowners will see damage in the form of brown turf and burning foliage and brown leaves this spring. Some turf and plants may not recover from the damage in the spring and replanting may be necessary after you have leached the sodium away. Gypsum is a soil amendment that reacts with the sodium and helps leach the sodium away in the soil profile with spring rains.

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