

As November draws to a close, I ask, “Is your landscape ready for the cold season? Although the list could go on with an assortment of things to be done, I offer a final four list. These things should be done before temperatures drop permanently for the winter.

1. Water all your plantings thoroughly.

Before the hose is rolled up and stored for the season, a good watering is necessary. Good soil moisture is essential for reducing winter kill to plants. Although plants are dormant during the winter months, they continue to lose small amounts of water through their leaves, stems and root crowns—a condition called transpiration. The drying out of plant tissue is called desiccation. This dehydrating danger is exacerbated with needled or broadleaf evergreen plants. Winter water loss in plants is hastened by bright sunny days, high winds, dry air, and often heat reflected from buildings.

Lawns are also affected by winter desiccation. Injury to turfgrass occurs most often when snow cover is not maintained through the winter. Drying injury is usually more significant on exposed or elevated areas where water surface runoff is greater.

Keep in mind, watering during the winter months can also help to minimize the effects of desiccation. If watering during the winter, do so only if the soil is not frozen and air temperatures are above 40 °F. Apply the water at mid-day, so it has time to percolate down into the soil before nighttime’s freezing temperatures occur.

2. Apply an anti-transpirant, particularly to new evergreens.

A timely application of anti-transpirant such as Wilt Pruf® before freezing temperatures set in can make a big difference in the amount of browning that occurs on hollies, boxwoods, azaleas and rhododendrons. Pines, firs, junipers and spruces planted this season, and especially those planted this fall, should be sprayed. Anti-transpirants are chemical compounds applied to plant leaves to reduce the transpiration of moisture. When evergreens have been exposed to extreme drying conditions such as frozen roots in the winter or hot drying



winds in drought-stricken areas, they might not have enough moisture in their foliage to survive without the help of an anti-transpirant.

3. Protect shrubs and trees from rabbits and other wildlife damage.

When the snow begins to fall, food sources for rabbits are reduced. Rabbits typically seek out young, thin-bark trees and shrubs for food and moisture. Many times gnawing and clipping of branches can cause significant damage to the plant. To prevent this, nothing works better than chicken-wire fencing. Bury it several inches into the mulch or ground to make it harder for the rabbits to slip underneath.

Deer injure and kill countless saplings. They damage tree trunks by rubbing or scraping their antlers against the bark. Bucks rub against trees to mark their territory and attract females. Unfortunately, this causes enormous tree damage. Protect young trees by wrapping the trunk with any number of materials including chicken wire, plastic piping, spiral wraps, paper tree wraps, or corrugated drain pipe. Any protective material should be kept a few inches from the bark of the tree to allow for proper air circulation.

4. Apply protective mulch to perennials.

Applying mulch in late fall insulates the soil throughout the winter. The main idea behind mulching for the winter is to keep the ground frozen by shielding it from the warmth of the sun. A steady temperature will keep the plant in dormancy and prevent it from triggering new growth during a brief warm spell. Mulching now will also help conserve whatever water is in the soil. Keep in mind that you'll need to remove the mulch in the spring or at least rake it aside.

Today marks the end of November. There is still time to complete the final four list before winter sets in. What are you waiting for?