

**Yard and Garden - 01-19-2013 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant**

My best advice is remove it immediately, but be gentle.

Two thousand twelve was one of the driest years we've experienced. Unfortunately, the outlook for two thousand thirteen doesn't look all that promising. The fact is drought conditions have already taken their toll on many plants within our landscapes. Precipitation, whether in the form of rain or snow is much needed.

On December 19, 2012, Central Nebraska welcomed its first measurable snow storm for the season. That storm delivered six to eight inches of very wet snow within a period of less than twenty- four hours. I remember how thrilled I was looking out our living room window the morning of the twentieth and seeing the landscape covered in a blanket of white. Mentally I thought, "Finally, much needed precipitation has arrived. Rain would have been better, but



who's complaining." By mid-morning, I headed outdoors to start clearing the drive and walks. It was then I noticed many of our shrubs and smaller trees bending low to the ground due to the weight of the wet, heavy snow. By mid-day temperatures began to plummet and by nightfall, they dipped into the single digits and

remained there for nearly the next three weeks. Streets became ice- packed and the welcomed, heavy snow turned to ice, crushing vegetation.

Within the next few days, I began receiving calls from homeowners asking how they should go about removing the ice from their severely leaning and sometimes broken shrubs and trees. With continuing freezing temperatures in the forecast and with no immediate change in sight, my advice to them was, "Wait and see."

Fortunately, within the first week of January, temperatures climbed above freezing, and the ice began to disappear. Once it disappeared, homeowners were pleased to see that most of their shrubs and trees had returned to a normal upright position. Unfortunately, some witnessed shrubs and trees with broken branches.

With the potential of receiving more snow before spring arrives, I share with you a few tips on managing snow and ice removal.

In most cases, snow is a very positive thing for plants in our landscape. Snow is a great insulator, and it melts to provide much needed water for drought-stricken, thirsty plants. Even if it is deep, a blanket or windblown drift of snow is usually nothing to worry about. In fact, a blanket of snow acts as an extra layer of insulating mulch. Interestingly, most snow damage is caused by snowplows, shovels, and snow-blowers. Mechanically blown snow is dense and slow to melt, often resulting in broken branches.

Typically, there are two causes of damage to plants by snow and ice: excessive weight and careless snow removal. High winds compound the damage. Damage may take the form of misshapen plants or may actually result in broken branches and split trunks.

In the future, if snow or ice builds up on branches of deciduous trees and shrubs, do not hit the branches to knock off the accumulation. As soon as possible following the storm, carefully brush off the snow-laden branches. If the branches are covered with ice, avoid attempting to remove it, simply allow it to melt naturally. Trying to knock ice off may result in breaking branches. If the branches of evergreen trees and shrubs become heavily weighted with snow, this too can be carefully and slowly brushed off. However, as with deciduous shrubs, when it comes to ice, allow it to melt naturally. In most situations, if the weight of snow or ice causes branches to sag, as long as they are not broken, most branches are resilient enough to return to their normal position.

Although it would be great if any future moisture we receive this winter would be in the form of rain, more than likely it will be snow. When it arrives, welcome the much needed moisture. If, however, you see the weight of the snow bending your shrubs and trees low to the ground, remember — remove it immediately and be gentle.