



Winter in Nebraska can be summed up in one word, unpredictable. No matter what the weather does this winter, break out of the house to complete a few quick and easy tasks in your landscape to keep your trees and shrubs in tip-top shape.

Open winters without snow may mean not having to scoop the drive, but it can also mean our trees and shrubs need a little help. Winter watering may give trees and shrubs that extra boost they need during an open winter with warmer than average temperatures. Winter droughts need additional water just like summer droughts do. During an open winter, water can be applied once a week anytime the daytime temperatures rise above 40 degrees. Apply the water slow enough that it can soak into the top 12 inches of the ground. Be sure it doesn't run off the surface or freeze around the plants' trunk or crown when the temperatures drop overnight. 'Root feeders' or deep root watering devices aren't recommended during this time of the year.

Snow and ice, isn't so nice. Do you know what to do to keep your trees from becoming a victim of ice breakage? Heavy loads of snow and ice on plants can cause limb breakage or splits and cracks. If ice does build-up on the branches, it is best to let it melt naturally from the limbs. If it is safe to do so, snow can be gently removed from limbs. Be sure to hold onto the limb from below and gently brush off the loose snow. Snow surrounding shrubs shouldn't be removed. Digging the snow away from the shrub removes the insulation and it can also lead to damage to the limbs. Hitting brittle branches covered with ice and snow is not only potentially hazardous to your safety, but it can also cause damage to the already fragile plants. If severe winter weather does hit and we get a lot of snow and ice, be prepared for some pruning.

If or when the weather gets nice out, see if there is any corrective pruning that needs to be completed. Pruning deciduous trees should be done when they are dormant. This allows you to see the branching structure of the tree without the leaves getting in the way and it helps the tree. Pruning should be avoided during the spring green up phase when sap is flowing, April and May, and from mid-August until leaf drop to decrease the risk of decay in the pruning wound. The top reasons for pruning include removing any dead, disease, damaged, or crossing and rubbing branches. Pruning wounds are best left open to the elements. Moisture can get trapped behind wound sealers and paint and the wood, making it a perfect environment for rot to take place.

Winter protection can also help to keep your evergreen trees and shrubs looking their best. Evergreens, like Arborvitae and Japanese Yew, can benefit from winter protection, especially if they are located near pavement where de-icing salts are applied or in exposed locations. A screen can be made out of canvas, burlap, or plastic screens on the south and west sides of evergreens or the side closest to the pavement. If burlap is used, be sure to keep the top open for ventilation. Anti-desiccants, like Wilt-proof, can also be used to protect evergreens on the windward side.

Preparing your trees and shrubs now for the upcoming season could mean less work and less damage in the long run.

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