



We finally get to say ‘Good-bye’ to 2021 and ‘Hello’ to 2022. With this year coming to an end, find out what it takes to make sure your evergreen trees and shrubs stay in good spirits into the New Year.

Winter is often an overlooked season when it comes to watering in the landscape. Plants may be dormant during the winter, but they still lose water through their stems, crowns, and in the case of evergreens, their leaves. Desiccation injury happens when the plants can’t replace the water that is lost during the winter. The cause is often dry or frozen soils where the water isn’t available for uptake by the plant. High winds, dry air, warm temperatures, and reflected heat from buildings can all play a factor in the amount of water lost by plants.

Some plants are more susceptible to winter desiccation than others. Common symptoms of desiccation include brown, damaged foliage on one side of the plant. Damaged foliage is often found on the south side due to reflected heat or the northwest side caused by wind exposure. This often results in plants having areas of yellowish/tan colored leaves that are the most noticeable come spring. Woody evergreen plants with shallow root systems are usually the hardest hit. Spruce, fir, pine, arborvitae, yew, Oregon grape-holly (*Mahonia*), holly, and boxwood are some of the more common evergreen plants that would benefit from supplemental winter irrigation during extended dry seasons.

Providing supplemental irrigation during the winter months can help in several ways. With a little irrigation, sensitive plants are able to make it through the winter a little less stressed and with less winter desiccation injury. All evergreens can be irrigated as long as the soils are dry, not completely frozen, and the air temperatures are above 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Want to apply supplemental water, but short on time? Focus on those trees that are growing in sunny, exposed locations, focusing on the south side of the tree first. Apply water using a slow running sprinkler or a trickling hose. Root feeders or other deep watering devices often do not water thoroughly enough and can place the water below the root zone of the tree. Aim to get the top 8-12 inches of the soil moist and apply the water slowly enough to avoid run off to let it soak in. Be sure to allow enough time for the water to infiltrate and avoid freezing around the plants’ crown when the temperatures drop overnight. If we remain dry this winter, one or two deep irrigations per month might be needed.

Antitranspirants are another method that can be used to prevent desiccation. Antitranspirants, like Wilt-pruf or Wilt Stop, form thin films on the foliage and can minimize the water that is lost by the plants. They are commonly used on evergreen conifers and broadleaf evergreens that are growing in stressful sites in the winter. Select the right product for the plant species you are applying it to, as there can be some toxicity issues. Always read and follow all label instructions. Most products should be applied every six weeks starting in mid to late November through mid to late February. Apply enough of the product that the plant is thoroughly covered, but not so much that they become sticky or the needles become stuck together. To keep the product from ruining your favorite sprayer, be sure to have some warm soapy water nearby to clean the sprayers out immediately following the application.

It’s time to ring in the New Year with happier, healthier evergreens.

Upcoming Programs:

Extension Master Gardener- Nebraska Extension Office in Hall County will offer two training sessions. Contact Elizabeth Exstrom at, 308-385-5088 or exstrom2@unl.edu, prior to January 10th, 2022. More information, updated schedules, an application, and a brochure can be found at <http://hall.unl.edu>.

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