



October Snow Is a Surprise for Gardeners and Landscapes

Last Sunday's snow was unseasonably early and it's always trouble for landscapes and trees when snow comes before plants have lost their leaves. It was also a wet heavy snow, compounding the problems. Many trees suffered damage, with branches breaking under the snow's weight. Most shrubs fared better, except where tree limbs fell on them. And many ornamentals, both annuals and perennials, suffered frozen foliage.



What should gardeners be doing now to minimize the storm's long-term impact on their landscapes and bring the gardening season to a close?

Trees & Shrubs

When branch damage has occurred and requires working up in the tree canopy, it's best to contact a professional arborist. Check the Yellow Pages or Google for certified arborists with either the International Society of Arborists, <http://www.isa-arbor.com/findanarborist/arboristsearch.aspx>, or Nebraska Arborist Association, <http://www.nearborists.org/>.

But many homeowners can handle damage in smaller trees, limbs that can be cut from the ground, or shrubs.

Use Good Pruning Techniques

When removing damaged branches, if possible, make cuts so only branch wood is removed and the trunk is not injured. If only branch wood is removed, wounds are smaller, the tree will be able to seal the wound more effectively, and the chance of problems with wood decay are greatly reduced.

To locate the proper place to make a pruning cut, first look for the "branch bark ridge" on the upper surface of the branch where it joins the trunk. This is a line of bark pushed up between the branch and trunk as they grow. (Some branch unions will not have this if they did not form properly. Instead the branch will simply press into the supporting stem, forming a sharp V-shaped union.)



On the underside of the branch look also for the "branch collar", which is a slightly swollen area of trunk tissue that wraps around the base of the branch. A proper pruning cut begins just outside the branch bark ridge and angles down and slightly away from the trunk, avoiding injury to the branch collar.

Remove heavy branches using the 3-cut method.

1. First, cut into the underside of the branch, approximately 8-10 inches from the tree's trunk, going less than half way up through the branch. This cut does not remove any of the branch - its purpose is to prevent the branch bark from ripping down the trunk when the branch falls away.
2. Second, make a cut an inch or two further out from the first cut (away from the tree trunk) removing the majority of the branch. The second cut should be made from the topside of the branch down.
3. Third, remove the remaining stub, also going from the top of the branch down. Be careful not to cut into either the branch bark ridge or the branch collar.

Wound dressing is not recommended as a standard practice anymore. Allow the cuts to dry off naturally.

Roses

Prune out any broken branches, then remove any diseased or dead canes. To reduce disease pressure next year, remove fallen leaves and mulch around the base of each plant. This is important, especially if disease problems occurred this summer, since leaves serve as a good source of overwintering fungal spores.

Reapply a 3-4 inch layer of wood chip mulch around the base of shrub roses for winter. Coarse materials such as wood shavings, chopped corn cobs, dry leaves and grass clippings, wood chips, loose compost, chopped hay or coarse sawdust provide small air spaces for insulating air, and insulate the rose crown best - even better than styrofoam cones which are not recommended for use with shrub roses, anyway. Manure and topsoil don't perform as well, because of their fine texture. Fine materials restrict air penetration, and hold excessive moisture, from rain or melting snow, around the plant crown.

Hybrid tea, grandiflora and climbing roses require additional winter protection. Preparing Roses for Winter, Nebraska Extension, https://lancaster.unl.edu/hort/articles/2002/roses_winter.shtml.

Annuals and Perennials

If annuals were frozen by the snow, within 1 or 2 days it would be easy to see. Affected leaves and stems appear glassy, limp, mushy or brown. If that's the case, it's time to pull them out and add them to your compost pile - making way for your fall decorations.

Many perennials suffered the same fate as our annual flowers, particularly hosta. Their leaves have become glassy green and mushy, so it's time to cut them back for the year. Any other perennials that suffered the same fate should also be cut back to the height you would normally use.

Tender bulbs that had not been dug up before the storm, probably didn't suffer too much since soil temperatures were still warm. Dig them up as soon as possible and allow them to dry for winter storage.



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Storing Tender Bulbs and Related Plants, Nebraska Extension Acreage Life blog, <https://acregenebraska.org/2018/10/16/storing-tender-bulbs-and-related-plants/>.

Protect New Fall Plantings

Fall-planted trees, shrubs and perennials haven't had much time to establish their root system, which puts them at risk of frost heaving this winter. Frost heaving occurs when soil alternately freezes and thaws. Plants with limited rooting can be pushed up out of the ground so the crown or roots are directly exposed to cold winter temperatures. Exposed roots dry out and die. An application of winter mulch reduces the potential of frost heaving by keeping the soil cold and reducing soil temperature swings.

With this week's predicted moderate temperatures, it is a great time to apply a heavier winter mulch for fall-planted landscape additions. Ideally, 4- to 5-inches inches around or over the crown of each plant after garden clean-up is completed. The coarse mulches mentioned above for use on roses also work well in perennial plantings, along with pine straw or evergreen boughs. This mulch should remain in place until late March to early April next year.

Your Suggestions are Welcome!

Is there a lawn and gardening topic you would like to learn more about? Sarah Browning is an Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension and can be contacted by phone 402 441-7180, by mail at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE 68528: or by e-mail sarah.browning@unl.edu.

Image 2- cold damaged coleus in a container from Sarah Browning

Dahlia image from Pixabay.



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