Managing Ice & Snow Around Your Home!

With winter in full swing, it is a common practice to use deicers on our sidewalks and driveways to prevent falling on ice. With deicing agents, we need to be careful to not harm our plants when we use them and make good choices on what we use.

Choose Deicers Wisely - Deicers can cause damage to our concrete sidewalks and to our plants growing beside them. Many deicing agents contain salt substances, such as sodium chloride and potassium chloride. Because of the salt content found in these products, it can cause severe damage to our plants if too much is piled on them too often. Typical plant symptoms of salt damage are desiccation (drying out), include stunting, dieback, and leaf margin and tip damage that looks as though the leaves were burned by a chemical.

To avoid damage to the concrete, remove the salt as soon as you can. Deicers are meant to make shoveling easier, not to completely melt away the snow and ice. As soon as the salt melts through the ice and snow enough that it can be removed, go out and shovel it off of the concrete. When removing the snow, do it in a manner that protects the landscape plants growing in the yard. Do not pile the snow onto trees, shrubs, or flower gardens. If it has to be piled onto your landscape, move the salt onto the grass and try to do it in a manner that makes it more uniform on the grass surface. If too much salt continually gets piled up on the grass in one location, the turf can be harmed.

Sand is a Good Alternative - If you are very concerned with the effect the deicers have on your plants, you can use alternate products for melting the ice. Calcium magnesium acetate is a deicer that contains no salt. This is a safe alternative to the regular salts because it does not harm plants or animals and can be used on concrete because it doesn’t cause the damage that salt does. It is also less damaging to the environment that some of the other choices, but runoff of this product can degrade water quality in the surface water. You can also choose to use sand on your concrete, which will cause no damage to the plants in your landscape. Sand will not melt ice, but it will give you traction to walk on the sidewalk. Sand and gravel will not cause any harm to your plants and minimal damage to the environment but it will have to be swept away after the snow and ice melts.

Prevent Physical Damage from Snow and Ice to Landscape Plants - Another related topic is that of the snow and ice resting on your tree branches and on top of your shrubs. A light accumulation of ice or snow will cause no long term damage to plants, so it’s best to allow it to melt off naturally.

Very heavy snow or ice loads, however, can damage plants. Tree branches may break or develop internal cracks, which cannot be seen from the outside, but result in the branches never fully recovering to their normal position. Shrubs may be deformed by the weight of snow or ice pulling the branches. In the case of heavy snow loads, you can use a broom to very gently remove it. But remember that branches are more brittle under very cold conditions; don’t do more damage as you try to remove the snow. Removing heavy ice accumulation is very difficult and highly likely to cause further plant damage. Even though it’s hard, allow the ice to melt off naturally.

Written By Nicole Stoner, Nebraska Extension Educator - Horticulture
Add garden record keeping to the list of New Year’s resolutions. Make a note of which flower and vegetable varieties do best and which do poorly in your garden.

Use sand instead of salt for icy spots on the sidewalk.

Feed the birds regularly and see that they have water. Birds like suet, fruit, nuts and bread crumbs as well as bird seed.

Check young trees and shrubs for rodent or rabbit damage.

Prevent injury with fencing or protective collars.

Avoid heavy traffic on the frozen, dormant lawn. The crown of the plant may be severely damaged or killed.

Brush snow from evergreens as soon as possible after a storm. Use a broom in an upward, sweeping motion. Serious damage may be caused by heavy snow or ice accumulating on the branches.

Do not wait until late in the winter to order seeds. Many varieties sell out early.

Review your vegetable garden plans. Perhaps a smaller garden with fewer weeds and insects will give you more produce.

When reviewing your garden catalogs for new vegetable varieties to try, an important consideration is improved insect and/or disease resistance. Watch also for drought-tolerant types.

Analyze last year’s planting, fertilizing and spraying records. Make notes to reorder successful varieties as well as those you wish to try again.

Check stored fruits and vegetables such as potatoes and apples for bad spots which may lead to decay. Remove and use those which show signs of spoiling. Separate others into slotted trays or bins to increase air circulation and reduce decay possibilities.

To prolong bloom, protect poinsettias from drafts and keep them moderately moist.

Turn and prune house plants regularly to keep them shapely.

Pinch back new growth to promote bushy plants.

Check all house plants closely for insect infestations. Quarantine gift plants until you determine that they are not harboring any pests.

Source: Mary Jane Frogge, Extension Associate
Fruit Flies

Despite their diminutive size vinegar flies, more commonly known as fruit flies, can be a giant frustration in our lives. Fruit flies are commonly found in homes, restaurants, grocery stores, and even offices. As their name implies, these tiny insects are especially attracted to fruits but also like old vegetables, beer, sodas, and other fermenting items.

We end up with fruit flies by bringing in produce from the garden or store that has eggs laid on it. Adults may also fly through windows or doors and become your new roommate. Fruit flies are differentiated from other flies thanks to their small size (about 1/8th of an inch), their brown color, and their red eyes.

Fruit Fly Control:

If you want to get a handle on a fruit fly infestation, you need to focus on minimizing breeding grounds. Females can detect over ripened fruit or other fermenting items with their antennae and they will fly in from great distances to lay their eggs there. Your first step will be to find any over-ripened fruit or vegetables and bag them up in a plastic bag. Throw these items out into the trash bin in the garage or outside. A sealable trash can with a lid that fits tightly and stays closed when not in use will help to minimize fruit fly occurrences. With these steps you have prevented new flies from being attracted to your home.

However, some adults are probably still there flying around. To eliminate these stragglers you can construct a simple and cheap trap to catch them. Take an empty container (a baby food jar, a yogurt cup, a pop bottle, etc.) and remove the lid. Fill the container up about 1/4th of the way with apple cider vinegar. This particular kind of vinegar smells just like home to the fruit flies. You will want to add a drop of dish soap to break the surface tension of the vinegar. This is so the flies sink when they land on it. Cover the top of the container with a layer of plastic wrap and poke holes with a toothpick or fork. Now they enter but they never leave!

Once you take these measures the fly population will begin to diminish but complete elimination can take up to 2 weeks.

Written by: Dr. Jonathan L. Larson, Nebraska Extension

Wait to prune fruit trees until late February-March.

The best time for pruning fruit trees for fruit production is in late winter, into early spring, depending on the weather. See the following publication for more information on fruit tree pruning.

Pruning Fruit Trees, Nebraska Extension

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2035&context=extensionhist