

WINTERIZING YOUR TREES, SHRUBS AND HEDGES

Winter can be very stressful on your trees and shrubs. Extreme temperature fluctuations, strong winds, heavy ice buildup etc. can all take a toll. The most common threat to plants over the winter is water loss in their leaves/needles. When the ground is frozen and the sun shines on the leaves and needles of your trees and shrubs, they cannot obtain moisture through their root system, therefore, they obtain their moisture from the moisture stored in their leaves causing them to “dry-out” (desiccation). This is the damage you see on many Evergreens in early Spring (the browning of the needles). If the damage is severe, it will cause the death of the plant. Hedges, planted along the side of the road and walkways, which are heavily salted during the Winter can also be damaged due to the salt making contact to the needles/leaves, also cause desiccation.

In the past, a common practice was to burlap the plant material for Winter protection. However, this is very labour intensive and also can create a warm, protective environment for over-wintering insects such as Spider Mites. Anti-Desiccant applications are more commonly used now, as they are more effective and less labour intensive.

What are anti-desiccants? Anti-desiccants are compounds made of chemical polymers, when applied correctly, (sprayed on) slow the loss of water from plants. They create a thin barrier over the leaf stomata (the leaf’s pore) locking in moisture. They are especially beneficial when roots are unable to take up sufficient moisture due to a lack of available water (moisture) in the ground. Anti-desiccants are gradually washed and worn away over several months. Therefore, by the time Spring has arrived, it is gone from the plant. For this reason it is very important that an anti-desiccant is applied twice over the Winter. One application is applied in late November/December and then again in February as weather permits when temperatures allow the application to take place (above freezing). When initially applied it is “White” in colour while wet as it is like a wax; dries clear and does not cause any damage to property, it is just unsightly until that time.

Which trees and shrubs should have an anti-desiccant application? Broadleaf evergreens such as Azaleas, Rhododendrons, Boxwoods and Holly. Conifers such as Cedars, Yews, Junipers and Pines and tender stems such as Rose canes and Hydrangea stems.

I also highly recommend watering heavily into the late fall when possible, to provide the added moisture in the ground for the plants to obtain required moisture from the ground through their root system over the Winter. This is especially important for all of your newly planted plant material.

If all of these preventative measures are followed, Winter desiccation on your plant material will either be non-existent or minimal at the very least and more importantly will survive a harsh Winter.

If you are interested in having this application completed on your plant material, please contact us and we will be happy to provide you with cost factors.