

Unique Garden Centre

WINTERIZING YOUR PLANTS

Our prairie winters have long been known to be harsh on plant material. It amazes me every spring to see the brave new shoots or buds emerging after a long cold winter. We all know that many plants simply can't put on enough woolies to protect themselves. Many of our "annuals" that we grow every year are naturally perennials in other parts of the world where it does not get quite so cold. Sometimes though, we can even cheat the zone rating for plants with a little extra care. Mostly, practicing good growing habits through the spring and summer followed with the right fall maintenance will give plants that extra warm blanket for when Mother Nature dishes out a particularly nasty winter.

PERENNIALS

Herbaceous perennials are not as vulnerable to our wild winters as are the woody trees and shrubs, mainly because they don't stick their necks out. The tops of most herbaceous perennials naturally die off each winter, producing fresh growth each spring. As long as the below ground parts are kept snug, all is well. At least some of the plant top should be left on during the winter to catch drifting snow. Exceptions to this rule are Peony, Iris and any items which experienced disease over the summer. Peony and Iris should have their foliage removed to prevent root rot from developing and diseased leaves should be removed to reduce the chance of disease organisms over-wintering and re-infecting



next season.

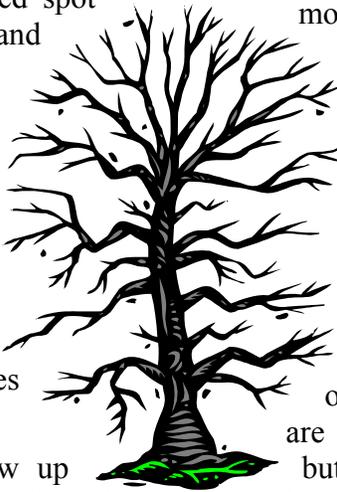
Where there is reliable snow cover throughout the dormant season, over-wintering of perennials poses no problem. But in places where snow cover is uncertain or where warm Chinook weather stays long enough to interrupt dormancy, you should protect the plants with material like flax or cereal straw, wood shavings or bark mulch. Avoid non-breathing materials such as plastic, or items like grass or leaves which mat down when wet. Place the protective covering after the soil has frozen down an inch. Once in place, the mulch will prevent significant temperature fluctuations at the root zone.

TREES & SHRUBS

The most important consideration in preparing trees and shrubs for the winter is the initial choice of those varieties which are hardy for the area, or if not entirely hardy, that they are planted in a sheltered spot with protection from severe winds and south exposures.

Proper spring and summer care will improve a plants ability to withstand winter injury. Begin watering early in the spring, watering deeply and regularly through the summer. Reduce watering after August 15th, but soak well before the ground freezes in the fall.

Fertilize early in May and follow up with repeat applications once a month until August 15th. Mulching shrubs and trees and providing deep and prolonged snow covering will reduce the severity and depth of freezing, allowing a portion of the root system access to moisture. Use mulch materials such as soil, straw, wood shavings, saw dust, peat moss or bark chips. Erecting snow fence or laying tree branches or



evergreen boughs to collect snow will improve wintering of trees and shrubs.

A soil high in organic matter does not freeze as hard as one that contains little and holds more water. Mixing peat moss, manures and compost with your shrub bed soil will increase the organic matter.

Wrapping the trunks and lower branches of fruit trees and thin barked trees such as Mountain Ash, Amur Cherry or Pincherry, will reduce the occurrence of sunscald on the bark facing west or south. Plastic reflective wraps are available from the garden centre, but any material which is reflective and can be wrapped around the trunk and lower branches can be used.

Rodent feeding damage will occasionally result in twig dieback or girdling of the bark on the trunks of young trees. To prevent this, place rodent repellent beneath heavily mulched areas in shrub beds, or wrap trunk bases with specially designed stem wraps or treat by painting liquid rodent repellants such as 'Skoot' or 'Rabbit Repell'.

EVERGREENS

All points discussed under trees and shrubs also apply to evergreens. Rodent feeding is less of a problem on evergreens than on the barks of trees and shrubs.

Sunscald and winter wind-burn are the most common reasons for winter damage on evergreens. Protective barriers against severe winds and the sun exposures of south and west will reduce winter damage. Burlap, canvas, cardboard or any material which will reduce wind velocity and reflect or reduce heat buildup can be used. Attach the covering to stakes, inserted in a triangle or box, around the plant allowing for an air space of 2-4", rather than wrapping the plant directly. Anti-transpirants are available under trade names such as "Wilt-Pruf", will also reduce moisture loss and reduce winter kill. They are sprayed on the foliage in mid to late October and are especially beneficial for cedars and junipers. See "Browning of Evergreens" info sheet.

