

PREVENTING WINTER DAMAGE TO TREES

Princeton Township Shade Tree Commission

Autumn is a good time to take steps to prevent winter damage to your trees. Young trees that have been in the ground less than 3 years need to go into the winter with their roots well watered. Give them a good soaking and, if there has been no rain, continue to water them before the ground freezes solid. To keep the soil moist, apply no more than a three-inch layer of mulch. Keep the mulch 4 inches away from the bark; small rodents like to live in the cozy heat of the mulch, and often munch on the bark of young trees.

Protecting trees from deer is also important. This is the season when bucks start rubbing trees with their antlers to demarcate their territory and to attract receptive does. Rubbing also removes velvet from their antlers. Damage to the tree can be prevented by surrounding it with 6-foot-high wire mesh supported by metal stakes in the ground. Or try corrugated plastic drainpipe that is slit lengthwise and then wrapped around the trunk. Garden supply stores often carry special deer guards.

Some kinds of trees are more prone to bend or break in winter storms and snow than others. Multi-stemmed deciduous trees such as birch and serviceberry (amelanchier) are examples of such trees. Tying a strong cloth strip two-thirds of the way up will hold the trunks from breaking under the weight of snow and ice. Multi-stemmed upright evergreens such as arborvitae are frequently split in bad winter conditions such as those of last year. Tie heavy soft twine at the base of the trunk and then spiral it up loosely around the tree, reversing the spiral on the way down. This is especially helpful in dealing with larger trees that begin to open at the top.

Burlap can also be used to protect trees from drying out from winter winds and sun. Now, while the ground is still soft, hammer stakes in; the burlap can be wrapped around the stakes toward the end of December, leaving the top uncovered to admit necessary light. And talking about December, some people like to plant their balled and burlapped Christmas trees outside after the holidays. It's a good idea to dig the hole for the tree now while you can, temporarily storing the soil that is removed in a place that won't freeze. Dump leaves or mulch into the hole or cover it with plywood until you are ready to plant the tree.

Anti-desiccant sprays that reduce damage from drying winds, hot winter sun, and water loss are another option, especially for recently-planted evergreen trees (and shrubs). But first read the label on the bottle to make sure that the spray is

appropriate for your plants. Also, pay attention to the directions for temperature and moisture.

If you haven't done so in the past few years, contact a professional company to check your trees and make sure that branches overhanging your house or your neighbor's are safe and secure.

For further information, go to <http://www.mgofmc.org/bbfactsheets.html> where, under Miscellaneous, there are two helpful fact sheets about winter problems written by Mercer County Horticulturist, Barbara J. Bromley.