



Take Care of Your Evergreens

Chicago area winters can be hard on evergreens. Wind, snow and ice adversely affect evergreens by drying them out and breaking their branches. Prepare now to protect your valuable evergreens.

To prevent your evergreens from drying out due to low humidity and high winds during winter, continue to water now until the ground freezes (sometimes mid-January these days). Young evergreens especially can suffer from desiccation (freeze drying) but mature plants can feel the effects of prolonged sun and wind as well.

Throughout the Fall months, be sure your evergreens receive adequate amounts of water and don't assume that rainfall is enough. On those occasional warmer days of winter, check the soil around your evergreen; is it dry or dusty? If so, pull out the hose or watering can and water well.

Mulch around your evergreens to help conserve moisture during the winter months. Organic mulch, such as shredded hardwood bark and leaves, will insulate the ground around your evergreens and help retain water in the soil. Spread mulch to the depth of 2-4" keeping it away from the trunk and lower branches.

If your evergreens, especially broad-leaved types such as hollies or boxwoods, are in a warm or windy location, screen them from the drying effects and from deer by setting up burlap screens or shade cloth shelters. Use three or four wooden stakes and then wrap the entire plant with the burlap cloth. Not the prettiest thing to look at, but very effective in protecting desirable plants.

Snow can devastate evergreens - especially wet, heavy snow. Piled on evergreen branches, snow can break both major and minor limbs. Periodically during a snowstorm, knock the snow from the bottom branches first and work upward. Then, gently grasp the main trunk and shake lightly to release the remaining snow from the branches. Dry, light snow is rarely a problem, but heavy, wet snow can permanently damage an evergreen's form.

An important note: If branches are bowed by ice, don't try to free them. Let the ice melt and the branches will be released gradually from the icy grip.

Reprinted from **MODE Landscape Design Vol 5: Prepare Your Garden for Winter**, November 2010