



Article for Maier Forest and Tree
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Winterizing Trees

As you winterize your property, don't forget about your trees. Our harsh Minnesota winters can damage your trees, especially if they are young or newly planted. Thin-barked species are also susceptible to winter damage.

However, winter also provides the opportunity to improve the health and beauty of your trees through pruning.

Winter threats

Our sub-zero temperatures can damage your trees in the form of sun scald, browning, root injuries, and snow and ice damage.

Sun scald

On sunny winter days, sunlight can stimulate the cells under thin-barked trees to start growing. Then when the sunlight is blocked or night falls, the newly grown cells freeze and die. Young trees, newly planted trees, and trees with thin bark are in danger of sun scald. You can use light-colored material or purchase a commercial plastic tree guard or commercial tree wrap to protect susceptible trees. Contact a licensed Minnesota arborist for information about preventing sun scald or for treating trees that are injured from sun scald.

Browning

Coniferous (evergreen) trees can suffer from winter browning from a variety of causes. Like sun scald, sunlight can cause cells to become active only to be killed by the sudden drop in temperature when the sunlight is blocked. Also, harsh winter winds can dry out foliage and kill it. You can help prevent winter browning by covering your coniferous trees with burlap on the south and west sides. Covering the trees blocks sunlight and protects the tree's foliage from wind.

Root injury

Roots do not become dormant as quickly as the rest of the tree because the ground temperature is much warmer than above ground. However, if the ground temperature drops +10°F or lower, the cold can damage a tree's roots. Moist soil insulates better than dry soil, so you can prevent root injury by watering your trees in autumn. You can also insulate the roots of new trees by mulching them with 6 – 8 inches of wood chips or straw.

Snow and ice damage

The added weight of snow and ice can break branches and even bring down entire trees. However, proper pruning can help avoid breakage from snow and ice. Also, avoid shaking snow or ice from your tree branches because that can also cause breakage.

Winter: The best time to prune

Remember putting off pruning all summer long? It's a good thing you did because winter is the optimal time to prune your trees. With the foliage gone, you can easily see dead and broken branches. Furthermore, in the winter, your trees heal better from the wounds that pruning causes. Also, winter pruning protects your trees from infection from insects, fungi, and bacteria. If your pruning requires the help from a licensed arborist, the frozen soil will protect your lawn from any heavy equipment that might be used to reach high branches.



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Don't forget your trees

A little prevention can go a long way to protect your trees from the hazards of our harsh Minnesota winters. As you caulk your windows and doors, don't forget about your trees. Call a licensed arborist about the best way to protect your trees from the winter.