



Fall Tree Care: Preparing trees for winter

As homeowners begin fall cleanup in preparation for the coming North Dakota winter, certain steps can be taken to help trees make it through the challenging season in good health.

Fall watering: Watering trees from mid-September through early October can help trees take advantage of the fall root growth period. Fall watering is especially beneficial for young trees planted within the past five years. Older, established trees are typically able to obtain sufficient water from their more extensive root systems. It is recommended to provide between five to ten gallons of water per week, per inch diameter of your tree (for example, a tree that is three inches in diameter should get at least 15 gallons of water per week). Tree roots will continue to absorb water until soil temperatures drop below 40 degrees for a consistent time period, so watering after trees have dropped their leaves continues to be beneficial. Areas of the state receiving above normal moisture in the late summer and early fall may require little if any additional watering. Additionally, spreading a four-inch-thick layer of organic mulch around the base of newer plantings helps maintain soil moisture.



Raking and pruning: Collecting and properly disposing of dead leaves, branches and other plant material in fall is key to reducing the potential of leaf and canker diseases that can harm the health and reduce the aesthetics of your trees. By landfilling, composting or burning (where possible) this year's leaves and twigs, the sources of next year's infections can be effectively reduced from your yard. Dead wood can be pruned out of a tree at any time of the year and reduces the amount of overwintering sites for certain fungi and some harmful insects. Late-fall is often a convenient time to prune trees to improve their form, structure and remove injured or diseased branches.

Figure 1: A properly mulched, newly planted honeylocust tree receiving some early fall watering.

Protect and shade your trees: Wrapping the trunk of younger trees with a light-colored tree guard not only prevents sunscald (bark cracking and injury from intense sunlight that often occurs in late-winter), but also protects trees from rodent feeding damage that can girdle and kill trees. Protecting the bottom three feet, starting from the soil level, is often sufficient for protection from rodent feeding. Although, as snow drifts and piles around smaller trees in winter, rabbits may be able to access higher areas of your trees.



Figure 2: A newer birch planting with a simple paper-like tree wrap. A plastic tree wrap is pictured in the bottom right corner.

Thus, it is important to periodically monitor your trees in winter as you would during the growing season. Preventing winter burn in conifers (drying out of fine branches and needles) is important for preserving tree health. Small ornamental conifers planted next to homes are especially prone to winterburn. Such damage on small conifers can be prevented by loosely wrapping the trees with burlap. Winterizing your trees according to the advice above will help maintain the health of your trees and ensure another year of valuable tree services like summer shade and beautiful fall foliage.

For more information, contact your nearest North Dakota Forest Service office or contact Aaron Bergdahl at (701) 231-5138.

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