

## IN YOUR GARDEN ORNAMENTALS NEED WATER UNTIL SOIL FREEZES

All ornamental plants, particularly broadleaf and narrow leaf evergreens that keep their leaves during the winter months, need water on a regular basis until the soil freezes.

According to James A. Fizzell, University of Illinois Horticulturist in Cook County, people often forget that these plants carry on the normal processes of plant life even during the winter months.

On bright sunny days, the temperature in the green leaves may reach 80-100 degrees F., much the same as summertime. This means large quantities of water will be transpired and lost from the plants. Since the roots may be frozen in the soil, water uptake to replenish this loss is very slow and winter burn often results.

Excessive desiccation kills bud and leaf tissues from the edges progressively inward. Damage is usually more severe on plants exposed to full sunlight and/or drying winds.

Pine needles damaged from winter burn turn yellow, then reddish brown from the tips downward. Branch tips of taxus, junipers, arborvitae, etc. may be killed outright.

Broad-leaved plants such as the azalea and rhododendron are shallow rooted, having most of their root system in the upper three to five inches of soil and dry out quickly.

Deciduous plants need water during winter too. While tops are dormant, roots continue to grow as long as soils are not frozen.

Fizzell says, you can reduce the likelihood of winter desiccation by providing enough water to the plants now. Many areas are very dry this fall in spite of excess water earlier this season, he says.

Thoroughly soak the soil by setting the hose at the base of the plant and letting it run slowly for an hour or so before moving it. If the season remains dry, the plants may need soaking again before freezeup.

Pay particular attention to newly established plants; large, old plants; and plants under overhangs.

Plants under the overhang of the house don't usually benefit from rainfall and need extra watering.

Big old trees are often neglected because they don't seem to show signs of stress as readily as small, new plantings. However, some of the problems we are now seeing in established tree plantings results from drought stresses. Be sure to water them too. Remember, their roots extend out as far as the branches. One inch or more of water applied every week or so over the entire area under the tree is sufficient. Set a sprinkler and let it run until you collect an inch of water in a container such as a coffee can under the tree. Newly set plantings have restricted root systems and will need regular watering until they become established.

Even with adequate water, some plants exposed to winter sun and wind may be injured.

Burlap screens, canvas or lath erected at least two feet away from exposed evergreens may be used to protect them from wind or sun.

A warning, says Fizzell:

Don't wrap plants in plastic. Temperatures inside will get high enough on sunny winter days to cook the plants. Better to just tie them up if they are in danger of being broken by snow and then spray them with one of the wilt proofing materials to reduce water loss, Fizzell concludes.

**James A. Fizzell, Sr. Extension Adviser  
Horticulture**

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