

ASK THE EXPERT

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When to plant evergreens

Problem: When does the planting season for evergreens like pines and spruce begin? How late can we plant in the fall? (Michigan)

Solution: Generally, evergreen planting can be started as soon as the early summer growth has become hardened. Plant pines and spruce when the annual growth is complete and has hardened, and the terminal buds are firmly set. During dry periods, it is better to wait until there is some good rain and soil moisture, usually in early September.

Most of the plantings should be performed from late summer to early fall or from early September to late October. Planting would be risky after this time because of potential injury to plant parts from exposure to low temperature. Evergreens such as rhododendron and azaleas should not be planted after the above planting periods. These fall planted plants require sufficient care and proper follow-up to ensure good recovery from transplanting shock. Provide proper water and mulch.

As a general rule, plant about six to eight weeks before the soil temperature reaches 40° F in the fall. It would be risky to plant without having sufficient periods of warm soil temperature for proper root development and recovery.

With proper plant health care, you could plant until the end of October. Remember that different plants respond differently to planting. Most plants do better and are easier to transplant in the spring. Some others do better when planted in the fall. Late planted perennials should be covered with 2 to 3 inches of mulch after the ground freezes.

Minimizing herbicide residue

Problem: In a residential property, a large number of shrubs and plants like rhododendron and azaleas were showing injury from lawn-applied herbicides. Symptoms appear to be caused by 2,4-D and/or dicamba-like material. Is there anything we can do now to minimize the injury from possible residue in the soil. Secondly, what can be done to the foliage? (North Carolina)

Solution: Improperly-applied lawn herbicides containing 2,4-D and dicamba mixtures can affect non-target desirable plant materials in the landscape.

The extent of damage may vary depending upon the rate, formulations of herbicide (amine vs. ester) and species involved. To determine whether the soil has residual herbicide, a soil test would be beneficial. In addition, plant a known number of radish seeds in the suspected areas for a bioassay. If there is any soil residual of suspected herbicide, the seeds will either not germinate or the seedlings will show growth distortion.

If possible, plant seeds in an unaffected area for comparison. If herbicide is present, incorporating activated charcoal into the soil would be beneficial. This material may be difficult to incorporate into soil near established trees. In this case, injecting activated charcoal using a liquid fertilization technique may be useful.

Prune and discard already affected plant parts. The new growth may not show the symptoms if the soil does not contain high doses

of herbicide. Often the affected plant parts can be left alone if growth distortion is not objectionable. The herbicide will gradually break down in plant tissues and not cause permanent injury.

Medicaps and vascular systems

Problem: Can medicaps damage the vascular system of trees? (Missouri)

Solution: Medicaps implantation can cause some internal tissue injury. I have seen cross sections of treated trees showing extensive bluish-black discoloration of wood, suggesting the possibility of injury to xylem tissue. However, we seldom see adverse effects on the tree crown.

If the plant is suffering from iron deficiency, the risk of losing that tree from iron starvation is more likely than losing the tree because of injury from medicaps. It is true that whenever we drill holes to implant medicaps, we can see injury.

We need to compare the risk vs. the benefit to the tree. Ideally, trunk implantation is used to correct an existing nutrient deficiency followed by soil treatments to prevent a recurrence.

On pH adjusting methods

I appreciate readers' comments in response to my request in the November issue. Regarding pH-adjusting comments we ran in the February and November 1991 issues of LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT magazine, we received the following comments from Dr. Walter S. Barrows, a consultant from California: "Use 5 lb. soil sulfur per 100 sq.ft. or 2-1/2 cubic yards of soil to lower 0.5 pH point over time. Or use aluminum sulfate at 1 lb. per 100 sq.ft. Soil must be leachable."

As I indicated in previous months, I am not familiar with these recommendations to lower or buffer the pH. Those who are interested in this should try this on a small scale and learn more about it before using in many areas.

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Questions should be mailed to "Ask the Expert," LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT, 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44130. Please allow two to three months for an answer to appear in the magazine.