

Pruning, fertilization needed to repair cold damage

STATE COLLEGE, Pa.—This winter's record-breaking low temperatures, deep snow and ice storms took a toll on landscapes in many parts of the country, says Dr. J. Robert Nuss, professor of ornamental horticulture at Penn State University.

"(You) can expect damage from the cold and precipitation as well as injury caused by animals feeding on stems and trunks," says Nuss.

Plants are injured to some extent during all winters. "This winter, however, temperatures have dropped to -20° F or lower in many areas," says Nuss. "The deep snow has provided some insulation from the cold, but the hardiness limitations of many plants have been exceeded.

"During the past decade of mild winters, homeowners have planted more broadleaf evergreens and plants that may not have the hardiness tolerances for this winter's conditions. Don't be surprised if

these plants die," Nuss continues.

Low temperatures can kill leaf and flower buds, and destroy the tips of stems or the entire length of branches not covered by snow. Marginally hardy plants may be killed down to the soil line even though the stems and trunk may be snow-covered. In extreme cases, the root systems of delicate shrubs and trees may be destroyed.

Pruning is the only remedy for plant parts that have been chewed, broken or killed by the winter. Branches snapped by snow and ice should be removed immediately, and additional pruning can be done later in the spring to restore appearance.

"Don't try to prop broken parts back in place," says Nuss. "This only results in improper healing of the wounded area once growth begins in the spring."

Pruning low-temperature injuries must be done when buds fail to open. "Prune back to undamaged live wood, and if loss

of limbs and stems is severe, thin back remaining healthy stems to reshape the plant," says Nuss.

To reduce further stress and help rejuvenate surviving plants, give them a light application of a complete fertilizer early in the spring. Nuss recommends 5-10-10 at a rate of 1 lb./100 sq. ft., applied on the soil around the base of the plants, about six inches from the trunk.

"If it doesn't rain within a few days after fertilizer application, water the area well. Add a two- to three-inch layer of coarse textured mulch, such as shredded wood bark, over the entire rootzone."

Spring is also a good time to determine the quality of surviving plants. "Severely injured plants may never recover enough to be a useful landscape feature," says Nuss. "It may be better to replace them with new specimens or ones of a different variety."

Wisconsin eyes posting for homeowners

MADISON, Wis.—The Wisconsin Board of Agriculture on Feb. 22 began planning public hearings to allow cities to regulate lawn care pesticide applications by homeowners. Specifically, the regulations could require posting whenever homeowners (including a renter) make a pesticide application to their residential properties.

Posting would be needed to indicate homeowner pesticide applications to lawns, trees, shrubs and other vegetation growing in turf areas. Excluded are applications to houseplants, flower or vegetable gardens, greenhouses or nurseries. Also outside the scope of the regulations are: sub-soil injections, forest pest control, public health pest control, and injections to trees.

"In those municipalities that adopt ordinances, it will presumably increase customer demand for the free placards which pesticide dealers are currently required to offer persons buying landscape pesticides," says a memorandum from the Wisconsin Ag. Dept.

On Dec. 14, 1993, the state preempted most local government regulation of commercial pesticide applications, but homeowners weren't apparently covered by the state regulations. Stay tuned. That could soon change.

Paul Harvey continues pounding away at golf courses, 'pesticide poisoning'

CHICAGO—Radio commentator Paul Harvey, whose show is syndicated all across the country, again criticized golf course superintendents and their use of pesticides.

"Two years ago, you and I talked about the pesticide poisoning so many birds that our golf courses face a silent spring," Harvey began.

He then cited University of Iowa research (see last month's "Hot Topics"), drawing this conclusion from it: "Not only are golf course pesticides killing the birds, but they're killing golf course superintendents also."

Harvey finished his brief verbal assault with: "A moral needs to be underscored: we and the beautiful wild things live in harmony together, or we perish together."

Harvey's commentary, which was heard on flagship station WGN here on Feb. 8, drew an immediate response from RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) and the principal investigator for the University of Iowa study, both of which wrote letters to Harvey.

"Your commentary is inaccurate and misleading with respect to our study," Dr. Kross wrote. "I am very concerned

about your mis-representation of our study. The public does need to be informed about important environmental and occupational health issues. The media are important partners in disseminating accurate results of research studies. I request that you broadcast a corrected version of your commentary about our study."

The letter to Harvey from RISE dealt with some of the statements Harvey specifically made, but also issued a general response:

"You again make quantum leap assumptions regarding health and pest control on golf courses. Shame for using your popular program to raise unwarranted fears with erroneous and unsupported comments.

"What (the specialty pesticide industry) cannot welcome—nor should you be guilty of—are efforts to elevate highly preliminary unproven research into speculative assumptions that raise unwarranted fears among golfers—or any segment of our population."

The letter was signed by RISE executive director Allen James.

Harvey, as this issue went to press, had not yet responded on the air to Dr. Kross or RISE.