

Caring for Plants in the Winter

By Tina Graver

When the leaves fall from the trees, and lawn mowing is a distant memory, most homeowners put their yards on the back burner until spring. However, there is a lot that can be done to assure that spring doesn't bring some unpleasant surprises when it comes to your favorite plants due to over-wintering insects, harsh weather conditions and deer.

Dormant Oil Sprays

control overwintering pests

Anti-desiccants

protect from winter-burn

Deer repellent

protect from chewing and rubbing

Dormant oil sprays

Horticultural oil is a material approved by the Organic Material Research Institute (OMRI) and poses few risks to people or most desirable species, including beneficial insects such as lady bugs. Horticultural oil works by coating the air holes through which insects breathe, causing them to die from asphyxiation and is excellent at safely controlling certain types of over-wintering pests. Armored and soft scale insects are target pests, as well as mite and aphid eggs that overwinter in cracks and crevices of woody plants. The ideal time to apply is in late fall or early spring when day-time temperature hover around 55 degrees.

Anti-desiccant sprays

Anti-desiccant sprays protect plants from excessive water loss through the leaves and soft buds. The combination of cold drying wind, fluctuating temperature from very cold to warm and sunny causes what is known as 'winter burn.' Plants suffering from winter burn will have brown needles or leaves. An important point is that anti-desiccants do not protect the plants from freezing. Vulnerable plants include most broadleaf evergreens and shrubs such as hollies, boxwood and nandina. The spray coats the foliage, preventing moisture loss. The coating should be applied when temperatures are above freezing for at least 24 hours. The coating wears off at temperatures above 50 degrees and may need to be re-applied throughout the winter.

Deer repellent

While deer can be an issue all year round, they can cause significant damage in the winter months when food sources become scarce. There are many methods for protecting plants from hungry deer. One option is to install temporary deer fencing or trunk wraps to act as a physical barrier. This kind of barrier may be used alone or in conjunction with deer repellent sprays and bittering agents. Deer repellent sprays are often derived from predator urine such as coyote. These sprays tend to be offensive to many customers and we will often recommend a bittering agent instead. A bittering agent is sprayed on the foliage of the deer's favorite plants. The deer may sample one of these plants but will leave it alone once they taste the product.