

View of Sustainability:

Christmas Wrapping: Winter Protection for Your Plants

By Sean James

Driving past gardens in winter can make a gardener cringe, seeing bare plants that should be protected, protected differently, and shouldn't be wrapped at all. With up to six months of wintry weather, it's important to make the garden look good in winter. Wrapping should be minimized.

Sheathing tall evergreens in burlap should not be done, because we want to see them in winter. We wrap them because snow can pull their branches open. The solution is to shear fluffy bits off upright cedars and junipers in the fall, to prevent that snow load.

Newly planted evergreens and those that are subject to salt spray are a different story. Newly planted evergreens don't have the root system yet to build up water reserves and pull up water to replace that lost to dry winter winds. Salt spray from a road will also pull water out of evergreen needles. White pine and hemlock are especially sensitive to both these situations. Cedar hedges along roadsides are also victims of salt.

Wrap in Burlap

To wrap trees, buy long rolls of burlap and start at the bottom. Two-inch nails can be woven through the fabric to hold it together. Galvanized nails may have a stronger grip, as may Ardox nails. Old rusty nails are my favorite. Space the nails every one or two feet. If the wind gets under, it'll pull your work apart. Overlapping by one foot is advisable. Wrap from the bottom to the top, curving up around the tree like a candy cane. At the top, leave

a couple of feet extra to fold over the peak and make a little hat. Make sure evergreens get plenty of water in the fall. Don't drown them but make sure they have adequate reserves to make it through winter.

Wrapping hedges along roadsides involves putting up tall stakes and attaching burlap like a wall, all the way along, and wrapping around the ends a bit.

Protection from rabbits is important for young deciduous trees, especially fruit trees and crab apples. Either paint stems with a product like "Skoot" which tastes bad to them, or wrap them with a plastic protective wrap. Ideally this should be taken off every spring to avoid choking the tree or having the wrap become a home for bugs and small animals.

Cover With Rose Huts

Roses are the next big protection issue. Many folks choose hardier types of rose such as shrub and ground cover roses which need no protection. The more classic hybrid tea and floribunda roses are not good at handling our winters. In a perfect world, roses should be planted with their graft union two inches below the surface of the soil. The graft union is the swelling where the stems which bear the flowers meet the roots, which are of a different, more hardy variety. In any case, they need to be covered in winter. In the fall, after the leaves have fallen off, cut the stems down to knee height to stop the wind from blowing them around and loosening the crown. The old way is to cover the crown, where the stems meet the soil, with a one-foot mound of soil.

The new, much easier way is to cover them with Styrofoam rose huts. Just cut the rose small enough to fit inside and set the hut on top. Put a rock gently on top to hold it down and pile an inch of soil around the base. Finished. Take it off before things heat up too much in the spring.

Late fall is also a great time to inspect trees for damage, dangerous situations, or branches that can affect buildings such as those hanging too close to rooftops. Look for double leaders that might be prone to splitting. All these situations can be remedied by a qualified arborist. It's worth spending the money since trees add thousands, even tens of thousands, of dollars to the value of a home, and they cool the home in the summer. Never let anyone "top" a tree, which is cutting it back at random to reduce its size. It will ultimately kill the tree and cost you more in the long run.

Finally, on the topic of winter preparation, it's best to leave perennials, other than those with leaf diseases such as peonies and summer phlox, standing throughout the winter. Not only do they provide food for birds and shelter for beneficial insects, the standing stems will also hold the snow,



▲ Kyle Pickering and Cory Mottram make sure there's a one foot overlap to keep winter winds out, protecting newly planted evergreens such as white pine, hemlock and silver fir. PHOTO BY SEAN JAMES

acting like a mini snow fence and protecting the plants from winter cold. It also looks much more interesting! Cut the perennials to the ground in the spring, mulch the cuttings with the lawn mower and return the mulchings to the garden as fertilizer.

Gardening doesn't have to be a lot of work. It doesn't need to be stressful or feared. It SHOULD be relaxing and fun. Do what you can. Learn in baby steps. Don't feel you need to be perfect at it right away. Enjoy it all...all year long. **NEV**

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