

Winter Preparation

Every year, I try to time this article about winter preparations with when the cold is going to hit. There has been no less than three times in the past month in which I thought, "This is the last time we'll be seeing 85 degrees until 2012!" Each time, I was mistaken. Will we have a warm fall? Your guess is as good as the weatherman's. Either way, winter will come and we will need to make preparations for it. Why not now?

If we are prepared, we can realize a real cost savings by not having to spend money in the spring fixing or replacing various items. We can also reduce the number of insects and spiders that find refuge in our homes. I can be seen most days with a fly swatter in hand frantically chasing the onslaught of flies looking for warmth against our cool nights.

In this region of Montana, frost is typical by the middle of September - September 15 is the average for 32 degrees. We saw 25-30 degrees September 21 across the County. With cooler nights upon us, garden tools and hoses seem to be the first victims. I learned that a little maintenance in the fall with things like hoses goes a long way come spring. This year, I pulled out my hoses in the spring and found that I had several leaks. I waited too long a couple of years ago to put them away and had to replace a few.

High heating bills affect us all, so how can we reduce the cost? There are several things you can do to help even if you have an older house. One quick cost saving idea is to caulk or re-caulk around windows and door seals. Better seals around doors and windows will stop any drafts and allow the room temperature to remain more constant. A tremendous amount of heat is lost through these small openings. Window coverings and door seals also help to keep heat in.

During these cooler times, spiders, house flies, beetles, and other small insects seek heat, as we are already seeing with cooler nights. These openings are perfect opportunities to come into your home. I get several calls from all over the county about unwanted visitors this time of year. Now is the time to be spraying for insects and spiders. While there are many options, exclusion of the pests into your home is always the best. There are also many chemical options. Perhaps the most effective is Tempo or Power Force Insect Killer by Bayer (active ingredient Cyfluthrin), which can be sprayed both inside and outside your home to create a barrier against insects. Read the label before you apply for mixing instructions and directions on how to get the best results. Tempo/Power Force has a long residue, so spraying now should keep most of the bugs out until winter sets in.

Lawns and gardens will start to go dormant soon. Be sure to pay special attention to equipment used to care for your yards. A properly stored mower or trimmer will add life to the engine. Tools should also be brought inside and stored to prevent rust damage. The winter is a great time to service your equipment to reduce down time next summer. Well

pumps also benefit from a little attention. I use RV antifreeze in mine to protect it during the winter. I then drain out the fluid in the spring and save it for the next fall.

Now is also the time to prepare the evergreen landscape for winter, a task often left until too late (just like putting up Christmas lights). Winterburn on evergreens is reduced by providing adequate water in August and September so they do not enter autumn in a stressed state. Watering now, just before freeze-up, while helpful is not nearly as effective. However a couple of tasks that probably should be completed by *November* include:

- **Wrapping evergreens prone to winterburn.** Some evergreens such as arborvitae and Alberta dwarf spruce are very susceptible to winterburn and even winter-kill when exposed to winter sun and wind. To prevent this desiccation injury, and splitting under heavy snow loading, these evergreens can be wrapped with burlap and tied with twine. Check farm and ranch stores for burlap. You could possibly use breathable fabric weed guard – the kind you use lay around planters to keep weeds out. Obviously this does not lend itself to an attractive winter display but it does increase winter survival. The wrap should be placed on in November once it gets cold and stays cold and removed in early April.
- **Spraying evergreens with an anti-transpirant such as wiltpruf or transfilm.** These products, also known as anti-desiccants, create a waxy coating on the foliage that reduces water loss during warm and windy winter days. Since most of our winterburn actually occurs in March when the temperatures are above freezing but the soil is still frozen, the product will need to be reapplied during our January thaw. A few other points regarding the use of anti-transpirants; first read and follow label directions. Some can become phytotoxic and do more damage to the plant than winterburn. Second, anti-transpirants do not protect against salt damage; in fact, de-icing salts carried to the foliage will dissolve the anti-transpirant.

Now is a good time to take a look around and see where you need to prepare. Before we know it, we will be shoveling snow and scraping sidewalks! MSU Extension has quite a few publications that might help in preparation and with lawn and garden hints coming up. Feel free to contact me at the Extension office if you have any questions. Good luck this fall!