

Along with unpacking winter coats and checking the antifreeze, wise home gardeners also prepare their trees for winter. Apply mulches, three to six inches deep, to broad-leaved shrubs and newly planted trees when the ground freezes.

Cold, drying winds are especially damaging to broad-leaved evergreens and also can be a hazard to needled evergreens, such as pine and juniper. Anti-desiccant sprays can help reduce the drying. They form a film on leaf surfaces. Spray once in November and again in January or February.

Unless the fall was especially wet, February also is a good time to give evergreens a thorough soaking. Those on the south and west sides of the house are the first to suffer because they are exposed to the sun longer and the frost comes out of the ground faster on those sides. Turn the garden hose on slowly so only a half inch of water spouts up when you hold the hose upright. Or use a water lance to put water to root zone. Let the water run near the evergreen's base for four hours or up to all day--until the soil can't absorb more water.

Snow may look lovely piled on tree branches, but it can kill evergreens and young trees. Bind branches of small trees close together to prevent accumulation. Knock snow off larger ones.

An ice storm calls for a quick survey of damage. Quick-growing trees (such as poplars, willows, elms, and maples) and older ones are susceptible. Trim broken branches so they're flush with the main branch or trunk. If the weather is above freezing, treat the wound with shellac or tree asphalt paint.