

Plant lovers' corner

Protect plants from winter injury

NEWARK, Del. - Last winter caused extensive damage to many ornamentals in the state. Some varieties of holly, crepe myrtle, pyracantha, azalea, rhododendron, camelias and evergreen magnolias were badly injured.

These plants are somewhat borderline in Delaware, explains University of Delaware extension horticulturist Dr. Charles Dunham. When we have colder than normal temperatures, injury may be expected. For this reason,

plants of these species should be selected carefully to obtain the hardiest kinds. Ask your nurseryman about the hardiness of a variety at the time you're buying it.

Small and newly planted specimens are always more prone to injury than larger, established plants, reminds Dunham. So they should always receive extra protection over winter.

There are a number of steps a homeowner can take to protect plants against winter injury. The first is to make sure there's enough

soil moisture. So far this has been a wet fall, but if it should turn dry before severe weather sets in, water plants to ensure a good supply of soil moisture for them.

Soil mulches are one of the best means of reducing winter injury, points out the specialist. For broadleaf evergreens, put down mulches before the ground freezes. Use two to four inches of an organic mulch to insulate the soil against deep freezing. The mulch should be applied to the soil

underneath the spread of the branches, but pull it away from direct contact with the trunk or stems. In contrast, mulches for herbaceous perennials like chrysanthemums are applied after the ground freezes and should be put down over the top of the plant. Here it is best to use loose open mulches like salt hay or pine needles.

Small, newly planted evergreens can be protected

by covering them with an inverted peach basket. This may have to be tied to a stake in a windy location. A plastic bag inverted over stakes can also be used. Just be sure to punch holes in the top of the bag to prevent excessive heat buildup on sunny days. Again, tie the bag to prevent its blowing away. Some garden centers also sell plastic cones

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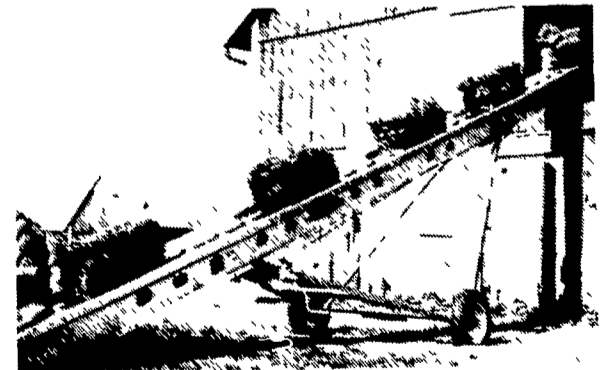
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