

# From The Roots Up

The Shrub & Tree Newsletter Of Prestige Shrub & Tree, Ltd.  
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This is your first insect/disease spray visit for the year. Just a reminder, be sure to turn on your irrigation and check the system at least by the end of March. Do not wait until after we become dry but do be mindful of late freezes.

So far, the weather has provided us with an adequate supply of rainfall though January was a little short from our average rainfall amount. Regardless of what our rainfall totals may be, be sure to turn on your irrigation system by late March if it has been off for the winter season. We may be getting adequate and in many cases too much rainfall, but this can quickly change and you should be prepared to provide adequate irrigation when the rain becomes scarce.

## Look Out For Late Freezes Causing Damage

Plants such as camellias and Japanese Magnolias can show swollen buds as early as mid February depending on our temperatures. This can be problematic if we have a harsh late season freeze. If we do have a late season freeze event, you can expect a less than a heavy flowering this year. This can also heavily damage the azalea buds.

This damage to buds and the plants themselves may not be obvious for multiple weeks after the freeze episodes. In most cases, the plants will recover but some may be so severely damaged they may need to be replaced. If you

see burned leaves **wait until mid to late March to prune** the damaged plants to avoid stimulation of new growth before we are past the chance for freezing weather.

## When Should I Mulch?

As far as mulching, you should replenish your pine straw whenever it is thin but optimally **after** you do your spring pruning. (You also need to replenish your mulch each fall and if done correctly your fall mulch layer should be adequate until spring.) **By waiting to do your mulching after you prune, you can cover any small pruning debris left over from the pruning operation.**

During the pruning, it is important to clear the base or crown of your plants of any mulch or debris that may have accumulated. Clearing the mulch and debris allows for proper airflow. Not clearing the base of debris buildup can result in insect and disease activity, and subsequent damage and eventual rot and decline. Crown rot has killed more plants than drought. **Thick layers of rotted mulch should be removed before installing the new mulch to prevent hair root growth into these organic layers.** If excessive hair root growth occurs in these layers, the root system and plant decline will result, especially in boxwoods and azaleas. I can personally attest to the importance of removing matted mulch layers.

had to remove 3 big ball arborvitae after they died due to “drought conditions”. While we did not experience much drought last season, the matted mulch created a water proof barrier creating a drought situation and eventual plant decline and death. To replenish your mulch layer, use about 3” of fluffed pine straw to yield a final layer of 1½”. Or, about 1” of bark mulch should be used to yield a final layer of ½”. Bark can float and wash away during heavy rains making it unsuitable for some situations.

## Winter Bronzing

Each year we see bronzing on the boxwoods, cryptomeria and arborvitae. While there has been ample rainfall this winter and root damage from dry roots should not be a problem, plants with poor drainage can develop root damage from rot and lack of oxygen. Root damage from root rot or freeze damage can cause winter bronzing. This is especially true with boxwoods. **Bronzing is usually related to root issues caused by poorly drained or excessively dry soil conditions though it can also be related to the decline at the base of the plant as well.**

The cryptomeria and arborvitae are more affected by the extremely cold weather but can also be predisposed to additional winter injury and bronzing due to wet or dry soil conditions. If the bronzing is cold related, these plants should be fine but the discoloration **may**

**last into the late summer.** If, on the other hand, the problem is drainage related or due to a damaged base that issue must be addressed and corrected before any improvement can be expected. **In boxwoods especially, keeping those crowns clear of debris will help reduce damage,** though it is important to be sure the plants are correctly installed at the initial planting. Periodically cleaning the debris out of the base of the boxwood will help ensure they do not develop aerial roots that can permanently damage boxwoods. It is always a good idea to clean debris that can accumulate in any of your plants to help avoid premature deterioration of the plant's base and ultimately the plant itself.

### Sucking Insects and Sooty Mold

Scale and aphids feed by sucking on the plants and extracting the nutrients but do not utilize the plant sugars and water. This "honey dew", which is the plant sugar solution, is then excreted coating the leaves and stems of the plants being fed upon or, in many cases, the plants that are below the infested plants or trees. The sooty mold is very noticeable and can be an indicator of aphid or scale activity somewhere. However, the presence of sooty mold does not necessarily mean **your plant** has scale or aphids. Often we find that the trees overhanging your planting are actually the location of the insect and the honey dew is simply raining down on your landscape plants. By the way, that "sap" that falls on your windshield and patio furniture is actually honey dew! A major contributor to the honey dew is from the hackberry aphid, an

invasive aphid that was introduced to the United States in the late 1990's. If you have a hackberry tree, then you definitely have this aphid.

The remedy for this is to treat the large over-story tree (we can provide this service at additional cost if you are a full shrub and tree customer). Simply hosing off the under-story plants also reduces the problem. During years of consistent rainfall, the honey dew is less of a problem due to the rinsing effect of the rain, so you are **less likely** to have the problem.

Sooty mold does not need to be treated as it does only cosmetic damage to the host plant. Even if treated, the sooty mold coating will only diminish with the passing of time.

### Plant Spotlight: Forsythia

In this plant spot light we will be focusing on the forsythia plant. Many times this plant is overlooked except at this time of year when it is full of bright yellow flowers. We then remember that we do, in fact, have a plant there. Due to forsythias being devoid of leaves at this time of year it can be quite inconspicuous .

Some of the different varieties of forsythia plant go by names like Goldilocks® (dwarf variety), Northern Gold being more cold tolerant (down to 30), Lynwood Gold, and the largest and grandest Beatrix Farrand that provides the best flower color and larger flowers measuring almost 2" in diameter. All varieties produce the yellow flowers and don't have any variation of color except a white forsythia, which is actually a completely different plant. Forsythia varieties can be used in the same plantings to provide an extended bloom. Most of the

forsythias bloom in early spring and only for 2-3 weeks, but you can create a landscape with a longer bloom cycle by including the Karl Sax variety which blooms 2 weeks later than other varieties.

The forsythia plant should be planted in rich and moist but well-drained soil in an area that will get full sun or partial shade providing at least 4 hours of direct sunlight per day. Planting them 4-6' apart will create a hedge or they can be planted alone anywhere their bright yellow flowers will be enjoyed. Keep in mind, depending on variety, this plant can reach a height of 8-10' with a spread of 10-12' when fully mature. To keep this plant's voracious growth in check (can put on 2' of growth per year), pruning back the shoots can keep the plant in a smaller shrub stature. Pruning should be done directly after blooming as the flowers bloom on old growth. Pruning too late in the summer or fall can limit the amount of flowers seen in the spring.

Forsythias are relatively hardy plants that can withstand a lot of environmental stresses. I have a forsythia on the corner of my house that does quite well in spite of being next to a downspout and on a wind swept corner. Since I have no in ground irrigation, it relies on that downspout to be watered and even over watered. At times, the forsythia will flag its leaves during hot/dry times during the summer, but it has always provided the first color of the year. As far as pests and diseases go, there really isn't much to worry about. Weevils can be an issue, but can be treated for with our shrub/tree care program.