

From The Roots Up

The Shrub and Tree Newsletter of Prestige Shrub and Tree, Ltd. ®
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Update your contact information

Please be sure to update your contact information so we have the most current email and phone numbers on file as well as your current maintenance day. If you live in a gated community, please be sure we are on your guest list so we can access your property.

This is our first tree and shrub care visit to your property for 2025. We will be fertilizing your trees and shrubs with a complete fertilizer to provide needed nutrients for spring growth and recovery.

Winter Weather

With Christmas behind us and everyone getting back to their daily grinds, we will start paying more attention to our landscape plants. Winter freezes can have a major impact on unprotected plants. Hard freezes can damage much of your plantings by causing severe desiccation from the windchill which produced a dappled effect on the leaves from the breakdown of the leaves' cells and even a complete burnt look. Depending on the length and severity of the freeze and the health of the plants,

plants can take well into spring to recover. Most plants will begin to drop damaged leaves and will replace them as spring arrives. Be sure these plants are staying hydrated as dry soil can cause root death and eventual plant death from freezing temperatures. Our round 1 fertilization will help ensure your plants have the necessary nutrients available to recover, but older plants or plants that were in drought stress from the dry fall may not recover. Remember, we had a very hot and dry June and August and no rain in the month of October. If your plants were in severe stress from these events in 2024, freezes this winter can severely affect them this winter possibly pushing them past the point of recovery. It will be a waiting game to see which plants will recover as we move into the spring growing season and which ones will require replacement.

It is important to understand and remember that plants such as camelias, Japanese Magnolias and Azaleas can be especially hard hit and in many cases will lose all their flower buds and trees such as the cherry trees will continue to show freeze damage even next year. The plants such as the Azaleas that set their buds in the fall may actually stay on the plant but, upon closer inspection, you'll notice that the flower bud is brown. Indica Azaleas will lose their top buds but retain their lower buds because the air temperature is usually warmer near the ground but, with excessive cold, it should be expected that no buds would be spared. The results of a severe freeze are a lot of flower buds that may or may not drop from the plant, and PLANTS THAT MAY NOT PRODUCE MANY IF ANY FLOWERS THIS SPRING.

In the case of warm winter spells, we may see some early leaf growth or bud swelling. Unfortunately those plants will likely be damaged when the colder weather returns. Dead plant material will need to be pruned out of the plants to help stimulate new plant growth. However, **do not be tempted to do any pruning until we are into the spring green up. Live plant material maybe misidentified as dead.**

The best preparation for reducing winter damage is to be sure the soil is well hydrated prior to severe weather which may not be an issue with adequate rainfall. Moist soil retains warmth much more efficiently than dry soil and consequently root damage is reduced. Also, a well hydrated plant will withstand severe temperature periods much better than one in winter drought stress. If we do not receive the consistent quality rains that keep our soil well hydrated, then we may see cold weather related root damage including a partial or complete die off of the plant's canopy.

Wait To Prune!

Winter is not the time to prune! Unless there is a critical need to prune, such as a house renovation where the plants are in the way of construction, it is not quite pruning time. **Due to our area's propensity for late freezes, we suggest you wait until late March or early April before you begin your pruning.** If you prune too early, you will initiate new growth which can easily be damaged by a late freeze. The UGA County Extension service has great information on pruning. You can access all of their publications on the web by following this link: <http://extension.uga.edu/publications> and

conducting a search for “pruning” or any other subject.

Proper Fertilization

During this visit we will be fertilizing your trees and shrubs and looking for any potential horticultural or cultural problems you should address. We will be applying a fertilizer mixture which consists of slow release nitrogen along with phosphorous, potassium, micronutrients and wetting agents. These wetting agents aid in soil penetration allowing the fertilizers to move into the root zones of the plants more effectively. This nutrient mix is activated when soil temperatures increase and root uptake begins.

Fertilization is critical to help the plants recover from winter injury and to give them the nutrients they need to produce the food and energy they require to flourish. With our fertilization program, there is no need to fertilize flowering plants just after they bloom. Our proprietary fertilizer mixture does not force growth or cause bloom loss, but instead it continues to provide nutrients all summer long. The nutrients and additives in our fertilizer mix help by providing the plant with the necessary building blocks to aide in the recovery from winter stress.

Our program is designed to help the plants recover from stresses such as drought, disease and insect damage, winter injury and improper care. The application method we use to administer our fertilizer mix to your trees and shrubs is a drench method that provides the correct amount of fertilizer proportionate to the plant size and is evenly distributed around the target plant and over the root zone. This drench method, along with the use of soil penetrants, has proven effective for the fertilization of plants with relatively shallow root systems. Most of our shrubs have very shallow root systems penetrating no more than 3”- 4” deep. The reason for these shallow root structures is that our clay soil can restrict penetration of water and become oxygen poor as depth increases. This lack of

oxygen and moisture restricts root growth and, consequently, roots stay near the surface where oxygen and water are more readily available. This fertilization technique provides the plants with the necessary nutrients for growth and places the nutrients in the root zone in a balanced, non-burning package which releases nutrients throughout the entire growing season.

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 crowns of your plants of any mulch or debris that may have accumulated. Clearing the crowns of mulch and debris insures proper airflow. Not clearing the crowns 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. 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” but bark can float and wash away during heavy rains making it unsuitable for some situations.

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.