

Garden Club Horticultural Hints December 2021

Getting back to normal - through gardening!



Protect your plants from predators. There is no magic solution to protecting your plants from being ravaged by deer and other animals over the course of the next several months. But there are ways to make your plants unattractive to wildlife. The first step is to **spray with a deer repellent** (it also works on smaller mammals). The best of these products are the ones that contain putrefied egg and garlic. They smell terrible when sprayed on but, while the smell fades quickly from human noses, the taste remains and is bad enough to send deer elsewhere for up to a month. Respray monthly, but only if the outdoor temperature is above 40 degrees. Sometimes the memory of the taste will keep animals away longer, but always remember that a starving animal will eat anything.

Left: a commercial garlic and putrefied egg spray will tell predators your shrubs taste awful.



Right: use a clear mesh fencing around evergreens – not burlap, which limits sunlight and can harm the plants



Left: a roll of chicken wire around the perimeter of shrubs will keep deer and rabbits from gnawing on your prized plants as winter reduces the supplies of available greens and sends herbivores into suburban gardens.

A second line of protection is fencing. Most of us have no interest in surrounding our property with 7-foot or higher fences. Instead, fence the plants most likely to be eaten. Use the plastic mesh that has replaced chicken wire in gardening to invisibly wrap evergreens from the ground up to about 6 feet. The plant is not harmed and the deer cannot eat through the mesh. Why not use burlap? Wrapping evergreens in burlap limits sunlight getting to the live greens and can harm the plant.

Protect deciduous plants with an open framework of branches are best surrounded by a “stay-away” fence of chicken wire or burlap. Wrap vulnerable trunks of small or new trees with a paper or plastic tube designed to deter small animals from eating the bark. Remove the tube early in the spring to prevent any heat build-up as the sun gets stronger. Preventing animals from feasting on bark or leaf and flower buds, as well as tender branches, means a better spring for you and your plants.

Winter Protection for Roses. If you live where temperatures dip below 5°F, you need to protect your roses. Your goal is to lessen the effects of freezing and thawing, and to keep branches from whipping about, which in turn causes roots to loosen. Begin by reducing stress on roses going into the dormant season by watering deeply in late autumn. Hybrid tea, grandifloras and floribundas should be protected from winter damage *after* a killing frost but *before* the soil freezes. Keep an eye on the forecast: when it says your area is in for several nights with temperatures in the 'teens, that's the time to take action. Here are three ideas:

- Reduce breakage of tall canes by winter winds by cutting canes back to 24 to 30 inches and tying tips together. Remove dead and fallen leaves around the plants. Cleanliness now helps reduce disease next year. Mound soil over the center of the plants in broad, rounded mounds 8 to 12 high and 12 inches wide. Never use soil from the bed — you are robbing the roots to save the crown. You can cover the soil mounds with a mulch of leaves, straw, boughs or other, similar material.
- Some rose lovers use rose cones, baskets with bottoms cut out or burlap to wrap individual plants.
- To winterize climbers, remove them from their support. Lay them on the ground and cover with 3 to 4 inches of soil. If this cannot be done, gather the tips of the stems together, tie them, and wrap in straw with a wrapping of burlap over that. The base of the climber should be covered with 10 inches protection.
- When the first signs of growth appear in the spring, carefully remove most of the mulch and soil from around the bases of roses.

Protecting roses from winter damage

An unprotected rose bush can sustain serious damage from winter's cold



Trim branches to prevent wind damage, tie together with string, and mound soil or mulch around base of the plant



Or, encase the trimmed shrub with a loose wire mesh and fill with mulch, leaves or straw



Or, use a commercial rose 'cone'; a paper or styrofoam product that encases the shrub

Protecting perennials

now. One of the easiest ways to protect your perennials is to mulch the soil after the ground freezes. Once you have a covering of snow, it protects perennials from the damage of being thrust out of the ground during frost and thaw cycles ('January thaws'). A covering of three inches of compost, hardwood mulch or evergreen branches can take the place of snow during dry winters or prolonged warm spells. And, come spring, the compost or leaves will improve the soil.



Got evergreen branches? Put them down over your perennial beds after the ground freezes. You can also use hardwood mulch or leaves.

Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for December and throughout the year, please visit www.BettyOnGardening.com