

# BRANCHING OUT

## Winter Burn

*Undoubtedly, everyone is looking forward to Spring this year!*

Chances are, if you have inspected the evergreen shrubs in your yard and landscape lately, there may be some that aren't very green. As the weather warms, evergreen shrubs and small trees are showing signs of winter damage. Their needles and boughs are showing severe discoloration that ranges from bright yellow to rust color brown.

The problem is created during the winter months—but often starts in fall. During this time the Evergreen plants are still growing—so the leaves are still transpiring, which means water is still moving through the leaf tissue. As the days warm and become sunny, this in turn causes the plant to use and lose more water through evaporation. With the ground frozen, water cannot be replaced. As this process occurs, the foliage begins to wilt to brown. When severe, the branches will die. This will usually occur on the south and west sides of property, where the sun and wind affects it the most. Generally, this will be more noticeable later in the Winter.

This year seems unusually bad due to the early snow cover and bright sunny days which helped reflect the sun. In addition, the severity and duration of very cold temperatures resulted in an increased depth of frozen soil. These conditions, along with the lingering affects of the drought of a few years ago, have worsened the problem. Some plants began the winter season at a deficit.

The best way to prevent or minimize the problem of winter burn is to water evergreens well into to the late fall. Planting “hardy” (zone 5) varieties of plants is important and choosing proper plant location will help. Don't plant evergreens too late in the fall, as there will be a lack of an established root system to take up water. Erecting burlap screens and wind blocks may also help cut down on damage from drying winter winds.

Things that we can do to treat winter damage are very limited at this time. The majority of the plants will survive, but may need some help getting healthy again. Wait and see if the plants respond in the Spring by pushing new growth out. Water as soon as all the ground frost has melted. Fertilize with a very light application of slow release fertilizer once active growth begins. Provide a layer of mulch around base of the plants to help conserve moisture loss.

If new growth appears, then remove brown and dead branches before they become targets for insects and diseases. ***Have a healthy and green year!***

