

DIG THIS by Peg Tillery (for 12-12-07) Soggy Plants and Winter Storms © 2007

Let's hope we don't experience a beginning of December like this again. Let's talk a bit about our plants and how they will hopefully weather the wicked and very wet weather we had.

Check up on your containerized plants within the next few days to make sure the soil isn't absorbing or holding too much water. If the containers are sitting in saucers or liners remove these saucers and liners. You will not want your containers sitting in water constantly, particularly in winter time. If your pots do not have drainage holes you'll want to tip the containers over to let the water drain out. Regularly monitor these plantings. Don't allow water to remain. Hopefully all your containers do have drainage holes.

In spite of all the rain we've had, check all containerized plants located under the house's eaves and in other locations in your garden where rain doesn't reach (like under overhanging trees). Throughout the winter you'll want to check to make sure these plants have sufficient water (at least several times a month, depending on the plants and how fast the containers drain).

When weather reports predict snow or low and freezing temperatures make sure containerized plants have soil that isn't too dry. Water all of the containers when we haven't had rain and when snow and freezing are predicted. The moist soil helps insulate the plant roots so they can withstand drying and chilling temperatures and weather. Some gardeners add winter blankets of leaf mulch, bark mulch or straw to the top of their containerized plantings to help protect and insulate plants. Other gardeners collect conifer debris, such as fir trimmings, and place these bits of greenery over the top of their container plantings to insulate and protect the plants. Many group all their potted plants together in one location, usually a sheltered location, to more easily monitor and water the plants.

If we have additional heavy snowfalls, make sure to shake the snow off your prized shrubs and small trees if possible. It's the very heavy coverings of snow that sometimes break and split portions of shrubs and trees. If you do have breakage and splitting trim off the damaged portions and the plant will usually recover. You will not want to leave stumps of woody material sticking out; follow usual pruning practices if possible. Some small shrubs and small trees will uproot during heavy snow and sometimes in the flooding and erosion. If possible, you can try replanting these uprooted woody plants and they may weather the storm just fine. But you'll need to do it as soon as possible.

If you have plants sitting in standing water, try to drain the area, rerouting the water. Plant roots need oxygen to breath just as we do and if roots are covered by too much soil and are sitting in water, they could be compromised or the plant could be die. It's always a good idea to wait several months, before concluding that your plant is no longer living; especially this time of year when plants are dormant.

Remember, too, you can call the WSU Extension Office Master Gardener Hotline at 360-337-7158 and the Master Gardeners on duty will offer assistance and answer your plant questions. Monday and Tuesday is the best day to call during winter, but if you leave a message the volunteers will get back to you with an answer as soon as they can. Make sure to leave your mailing address too on the voicemail.