



## Don't Forget Your Trees This Autumn and Winter!

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Autumn brings to mind back-to-school activities, football, color tours and end-of-season yard and garden chores. Winter evokes memories of the holidays, snowmen, skiing, and for many yard enthusiasts, a longing for distant spring. The lawn mower sits idly in the back of the shed while the snow shovel is now close at hand. Nothing more to do outside in the landscape until spring, right? Well, if stately trees grace your landscape, the following items should appear on your autumn/winter checklist.

Michigan autumns can be delightfully cool and crisp, but may also be warm and dry. If the irrigation has been shut off, keep the garden hose ready until well into November to irrigate thirsty trees and shrubs when autumn skies are clear and blue. Plants, especially evergreens, should be well-hydrated going into winter to avoid winter injury.

Autumn is also the time to protect trees and shrubs against hungry deer, rabbits and voles now deprived of their summer food sources. Protection may include physical barriers such as wire fencing or chemical applications and treatments. Make no mistake, deer browse injury is an increasing concern as urban and suburban deer herds explode.

Other applications at this time of year may include anti-desiccants on evergreens and horticultural oils (dormant oils) on mite, scale and aphid-plagued plants (check labels to avoid oil-sensitive species). It is worth noting that mites are known to be cool-season pests! Populations often build well into autumn. White pine and hemlocks are often attacked, resulting in bronzed needles and an unhealthy appearance. Once these symptoms appear and the culprit is confirmed as spider mites or rust mites, act quickly to protect plants.

Fall is also an excellent time to deep root fertilize trees and shrubs. Fertilization provides many benefits, from accelerating growth in juvenile trees to aiding in reversing decline in mature trees. Soil samples can be used to pinpoint soil deficiencies and implement prescription fertilization such as Bartlett Tree's Soil Rx.

October is the month for arborists to resume pruning of oak trees. By this time of year, the insect vectors of oak wilt disease are no longer active. Pruning of this species can now continue until April. Autumn and winter is also typically the best time to prune elms and ornamental fruit trees such as crabapple. Fruit trees pruned this time of year will respond with fewer water sprouts and suckers than at other times of year.

Have your deciduous shrubs such as Viburnum and honeysuckle become too dense or otherwise unmanageable? Rejuvenation pruning carried out over three consecutive winters is just the answer. Simply remove the thickest one-third of the canes each year. Have you ever watched as your arborvitae pulled apart under the weight of snow or ice? Tie the crowns together near the top to keep them looking good.

From the perspective of an arborist, fall and winter clearly offer distinct advantages as client properties are scouted and trees are closely examined. Summer foliage can often obscure a thorough inspection of tree canopies. And attention-grabbing summertime pest problems can create a distraction from examining the whole tree. Leafless trees, on the other hand, allow an unfettered view of the structure and limbs. Dead limbs are now clearly seen. Limbs damaged in summer storms are noted for repair or removal. Weak branch and trunk unions are recorded for cable and brace rod installation. And most importantly, serious tree defects such as cracks, seams, splits, bulges, cankers and cavities are evaluated to protect life and property.

So, as autumn gives way to winter, don't forget your autumn/winter checklist for tree and shrubs. And keep an eye out for your friendly local arborist. He will likely be on-duty in your neighborhood this fall and winter!

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