



GUIDE TO GROWING BEAUTIFUL EVERGREENS

Evergreens are a great way to bring year-round interest, structure, and screening to your landscape. With their growing popularity and over-hyped easy-care qualities, we are beginning to see a lot of evergreens around that are suffering from neglect, environmental stress, and disease. Fortunately, this does not have to be the case. Planting and caring for evergreens requires a considerable investment of time and money, so it is important to make the right decisions when choosing and caring for these plants so you can enjoy them for years to come. Remember, the larger the plant you begin with the longer it takes to establish therefore the more time, money, and care will be required.

Site Selection – Right plant, Right place!

Properly siting an evergreen tree or shrub is the most important step in growing a healthy, damage and disease-free evergreen. It is important to understand that **different evergreens require different growing conditions**. Although you may have a specific tree in mind it may not be the best tree suited for your site. When evaluating and observing your site be sure to note light conditions, exposure to wind, what your soil is like, available moisture (how wet/dry the area is), deer, and how much space is available. Discuss these conditions with a nursery professional to help you make the proper plant selection.

- **Light** – most evergreens require ample sunlight (6 hours +). If you have an area that receives less sun than 6 hours your choices of what will do well become more limited. Planting a tree that requires full sun in an area that is more shaded will result in the dropping of needles, thinning, and an increase in susceptibility to pest and disease.
- **Wind Exposure** – Are you trying to create a wind block? Do you live at higher elevations that experience stronger winds? If so, this will be an important factor when making a selection. Exposed evergreens will be more susceptible to cold and drought than ones in more sheltered locations.
- **Soil/Drainage** – Different types of soils differ in their ability to hold moisture. Heavier clay soils tend to hold moisture and may even be poorly drained, whereas more sandy soils tend to hold less moisture and can be quite dry. It is also important to note the amount of soil compaction, as this will affect how much oxygen and space is available for root growth.
- **Space/Size** – Many evergreen trees get quite large, even if you plan on starting with small, young trees it is important to take into account their ultimate size at maturity. Not only will this be important for maintenance down the road but also plant growth may be impeded by surrounding structures or lack of space. Attention to overhead wires should be considered in site selection.
- **Deer** – most of us live in an area that is heavily populated with deer. During the winter months food becomes scarcer and deer will eat almost anything. Since evergreens retain their foliage throughout the winter months this makes them more susceptible to deer browse. If you are in an area that is heavily populated by deer, make sure to choose varieties that are less preferred.

Water, Water, Water

Evergreens need frequent watering, especially in their first year. If not properly watered, evergreens will be more stressed making them likely to suffer from wind burn, sun scald, pest and disease. In most soils a

good soaking once a week is usually sufficient, make sure when watering you are focusing on a long, deep watering to the root zone. Sprinklers **will not** sufficiently saturate the soil deep into the root zone, where the water is needed. We recommend using an open-ended hose on a slow trickle, a soaker hose, or gator bags, which will all provide a long and deep watering.

It is important that evergreens have plenty of water going into the winter months. This is often a huge mistake many make, as they are diligent about watering during the warmer months but once the temperatures drop, they stop watering. This time is crucial in making sure your trees are well hydrated, so water well through at least November. Once the ground freezes, water becomes unavailable, that combined with cold drying winds, and blasting sun can cause the needles to lose moisture, and turn brown - known as 'winter burn'. Therefore, plants that go into the winter months well hydrated are less likely to experience damage. Winter desiccation, particularly in the first year, is a frequent cause of plant death.

After the first year, trees will still need supplemental water, especially during the heat of the summer and again going into winter. The larger the tree to begin with, the longer it will take to establish a sufficient root zone to accommodate the above ground growth and may need regular watering for the first few years.

Mulching

Evergreens grown in nature are mulched by their own needles and other forest debris. In order to grow healthy evergreens, it is important to re-create these conditions. Mulch has a number of benefits including conserving soil moisture, reducing soil temperature extremes, suppressing weeds, and adding organic matter to the soil.

To be effective, most mulch materials should be a minimum of 2-4 inches deep around the plant but not up against the trunk. Make sure mulch is deep enough to suppress weeds as it is **not recommended** to use plastic weed barrier around evergreens. It is important to keep weeds clear from around the base of your evergreens – this will reduce competition (for nutrients and water), help with air circulation, prevent the spread of pest and disease, as well as prevent animal girdling. Mulch should be refreshed at least every other year if not annually.