



# Harmony Arboriculture

## 'Winter Tree Care Tips' by Harmony Arboriculture

*How to look after your trees when the cold sets in.*

Although well established trees may be used to cold weather, newly established trees may have difficulty dealing with the problems associated with winter. However, particularly savage winters or heavy snowfalls can pose problem to the young and established trees alike.

- **Salt damage**

De-icing salt can disrupt the tree's metabolic processes, resulting in a decline in health and even death. Repeated application of de-icing salt builds up the level of harmful sodium chloride in the soil, which then gets absorbed in the soil water by any trees in the vicinity. There are some species of tree that are more resilient to salt damage, but protection is advised.

- **Snow on branches**

Although it may look attractive and picture-postcard perfect, the weight of snow on trees can cause extra strain on the limbs, resulting in structural failure and the breaking and/or dropping of branches. Primarily a cause for concern in areas of habitation or pedestrianization, where valuable property may be damaged if a branch does fail, or where the snow has settled for a long period of time in the tree.

- **Frost and freezing temperatures**

Frost cracks appear when the wood shrinks as water is lost from the cells, or when the expanding wood cells try to swell when the bark is frozen. Potentially fatal to trees as it opens up a longitudinal wound through which harmful pathogens can enter. Also, should water enter the tree and freeze the ice will expand and expand the crack further.

Also of concern to evergreen trees during the winter is drought, whereby freezing temperatures or frost turns soil water into ice, making it unavailable to the tree. An additional cause of physiological drought is the water lost through the leaves by freezing winds can not be quickly replaced, leaving a water deficit within the tree.

Applying a thick layer of organic mulch may prevent the freezing of the soil around the tree, as well as adding important and well needed nutrients into the soil, ready for the following spring.

- **Grazing and animal damage**

As food becomes scarce during the winter period many animals may turn to the trees for food. Deer, horses, sheep, cattle and squirrels may strip the bark off trees to supplement their winter diet. Proper tree protection may prevent, or lessen, the damage trees sustain during this time.