

Winter Tree Care For Central Texas

Trees require care before and during the winter to remain in top health

“Homeowners are doing their trees a huge favor by preparing them for cold, winter conditions, and making them healthier for the next growing season,” recommends Fred M. Hall, Williamson County Extension Agent.

The following tips will help prepare Williamson County urban trees for winter:

- **Wrap the trunk.** In Central Texas, thin-barked trees like honey locust, ash, maple and linden are susceptible to sunscald and frost cracks because of drastic winter temperature fluctuations. To prevent bark damage, guard the trunks of younger trees up to the first branches using commercial tree wrap. Leave the wrap on until danger of frost is over.
- **Mulch the base.** Apply two to four inches of wood chips, bark or other organic mulch near the base of the tree, but not against it, to reduce soil evaporation, improve water absorption and insulate against temperature extremes. Check your community recycling program, as some programs provide wood chips free of charge.
- **Recycle leaves.** Instead of disposing of autumn leaves, consider layering them around the base of each tree as mulch, or blend them into the yard with a mulching mower to retain nutrients.
- **Prune while trees are dormant.** Late winter is the best time for pruning most tree species, but it can be done whenever trees are dormant over the winter months. Common reasons for pruning are to remove dead branches and improve form. Always prune just outside the branch collar; the point where a branch joins a larger one, and don't remove any branches without good reason. Remember to always paint wounds when you trim oak trees.
- **Give them a good drink.** Rather than simply run a hose at the base of each tree, instead water in the area from just outside the trunk to the extent of the longest branches. Water slowly, with a sprinkler or soaker hose, at the rate of 10 gallons per inch of tree diameter.
- **Focus on younger trees.** With less extensive root systems, they require the most care.

Hall notes that urban trees will also require additional, regular watering over the winter. During extended dry periods provide supplemental water per the guidelines above. The best time for winter watering is on warmer days, when the temperature is above 40 degrees.