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## Winter Damage

Each winter seems to have its own unique set of weather conditions, which can change the predominant winter injury symptoms your customers see in their spring landscape. This winter a common problem will be broken or bent ornamentals buried under piles of snow and ice, made worse by frequent periods of high wind. Additionally, the build-up of de-icers may cause problems for plants within reach of treated paved surfaces.

Pruning will be required to repair many broken and bent ornamentals. We often get questions about whether severely bent branches will straighten out, and as most of you have observed, “it depends”. Arborvitae and other ornamentals that are susceptible to bending can be staked or tied to see if they will straighten out. Try not to injure bark more than is already done, and be patient. Branches that won’t straighten (or show other signs of winter injury) can be pruned later in spring. Inspect trees to check for cracks and weakened branches that might lead to hazards later on.

What can be done to reduce salt injury? Watch the precipitation levels in early spring as plants start to resume growth. Dry weather conditions favor plant damage, since the salts that accumulate in soil remain in the root zone. Rainfall will move the salts through the soil profile and reduce the amount of salt damage. If it doesn’t rain, be prepared to irrigate sensitive areas to reduce salt damage to plants. Virginia Cooperative Extension suggests applying 2 inches of water over a 2-3 hour period, and then repeating three days later. There’s still much interest in gypsum applications as a remedy for salt damage, but surface applications do little to help. If the area must be re-tilled, gypsum can be applied and worked into the soil. Ample water is more effective.

In landscapes where salt treatments cause perennial problems, replace salt-sensitive plants with more tolerant species. There are many lists of such plants and Morton Arboretum has a comprehensive one at: <http://www.mortonarb.org/tree-plant-advice/article/845/salt-tolerant-trees-and-shrubs.html>

Virginia Cooperative Extension has a good publication describing the factors and treatments for various types of winter injury. Read more at: <http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-500/426-500.html#L8>



*Euonymus alatus* damaged from excess salts in snow piles.  
On this site, a more salt-tolerant shrub could replace the susceptible burning bush.



Physical damage and salt damage occurs along walkways. If it doesn't rain enough in early spring, leach excess salts with water.



Bent or broken ornamentals will be common after this winter's snow loads and high winds.

