

# PLANT LAND

GREENHOUSES • NURSERY • GARDEN CENTER

## Fall Watering Guidelines

It is easy to get confused about watering your trees and shrubs in fall as winter approaches. Too much water at the wrong time can cause winter damage and too little can simply kill a plant by drying it out. You have to provide your plants with enough water to survive but also provide some extra to get through winter.

As the growing season winds down in August, your plants do not need as much water as they did when they were actively growing in June and July. You should see new tender water filled growth begin to harden off to woody growth that requires less water. At this time, your watering schedule should begin to slack off. Its hard to say exactly how often you should water. A lot depends on the weather, your soil and your water delivery system. We generally say that at this time you should be watering your plants only when they need it. This means checking your plants frequently and making sure they do not have dry soil more than one inch down. You will start to get a better feel for each plant's needs over time. This decreased watering in August is very important for your plant to get through winter undamaged. You are signaling your plant to stop producing new tender growth and to start hardening off new growth for winter. In our hot dry Augusts, though, you most likely will be watering several times a week.

Fruit trees such as apples, plums and pears that ripen their fruit in late summer and early fall will need more water to help develop sugars in the fruit but be careful not to over water fruit trees too late in summer. The next step is very important for fruit trees.

When the leaves have fallen off the plants are dormant. They cannot make soft growth but they can still store water to see them through the winter. After the leaves have fallen and before the ground freezes is the best time to water your woody plants deeply. Give them an inch of water a week until the ground freezes. Because the roots and trunk/stem transport systems are still active in fall the plant will send the water to the crown and trunk and store it to replace water lost over winter. Put simply, you are trying to make sure the plant goes into winter with all its water reservoirs brimming full. You may have as much as a month or month and a half to deep water your trees and shrubs and should do so without fail every week. This is even more important with evergreens because they tend to lose much more water over winter through their needles. Deep fall watering is the best insurance for healthy evergreens year round. Fruit trees really benefit from deep fall watering as it helps them to store moisture they will need to set flowers and fruit in the spring.

You can also water your lawn up to when the ground freezes but be aware that this will cause it to actively grow and you must be able to mow it before the snow flies. Long grass under snow cover is an invitation to disease. Many cool fall season grasses that suffer during the heat of August will green up nicely again in fall and appreciate water.

This period of deep fall watering also offers a good chance to apply fertilizers to trees and shrubs. Use granular quick release types such as 16-16-16. Apply them right after leaves have fallen off to allow them to be taken up with all the weekly deep watering. Do not use slow release types because they will not release before the plant goes fully dormant and will just be wasted under winter snows.

The Plant Land staff is happy to answer any further questions you may have.