

## DEICING SIDEWALKS

In icy weather, it is often necessary to take safety precautions against slippery walks or drives. Excessive rock salt on pavements, however, can cause future die-back or salt burn on nearby plants. As the snow melts in the spring, the salt runs off into the surrounding soil, building up to a toxic level. This causes water to move out of plants instead of into them, resulting in drying, browning or even death. Some alternatives to using rock salt follow.

A slow release fertilizer will melt ice because it is basically made up of salts. The salt in these fertilizers is in a form that plants can absorb. This will provide a nutrient source for plants in the spring. Although fertilizer does not melt ice quite as fast as rock salt, the granules provide more traction as they work. Please note that too much fertilizer may cause as much damage as salt if over used. Avoid this dilemma by alternating fertilizer with other control methods such as sand and sawdust.

Sand does not melt ice but does provide traction, making it possible to safely walk or drive over ice. Sand is usually fairly inexpensive and available at most nurseries and hardware stores.

Sawdust also works by providing good traction on the ice. In the spring, it will be broken down by soil organisms, adding organic matter to the soil, increasing the water holding capacity and overall quality. Sawdust is also usually very inexpensive or even free at local sawmills or lumber stores.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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