

REDUCING SALT INJURY ON PLANTS

Salt applied to roads, driveways and sidewalks is a useful tool for melting ice and providing good traction. However, it can damage landscape plants if excessive amounts come in contact with plants. The damage can range from browning to actual death of the plant, caused by desiccation. Salt damage may occur when salt melts into the ground, damaging roots.

Some evergreens, especially White Pines, may develop malformed clumpy growth due to salt damage. Sensitivity to salt varies from plant to plant. Generally, plants with thick waxy needles or sticky, hairy or sunken buds appear to be most tolerant to salt damage. Tolerant plants include Buckeye, Burning Bush, Colorado and Blue Spruce, Austrian Pine, Cottonwood, Jet Bead, Norway and Silver Maples, Serviceberry, Green Ash, Honey Locust, Sumac, and Juniper.

To protect plants from salt damage, build screens from burlap or other materials. Erect these screens between the plant and the source of the salt. If plants are tall, the screen should go up as high as possible to minimize damage from salt spray. In addition, minimize the use of rock salt whenever possible.

The best method of preventing salt damage is to use deicers that do not contain salt. Alternatives to rock salt are:

Calcium Chloride is very effective at extremely low temperatures. In high concentrations however, calcium chloride can dehydrate roots.

Potassium Chloride is a common fertilizer ingredient and works best in combination with other ingredients, such as methyl glucoside.

Urea is a form of nitrogen and works best at temperatures above 25 degrees.

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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