

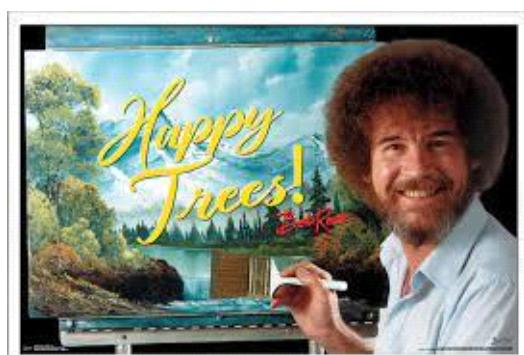
WINTER WATERING by Luke Killoran City of Lakewood Forestry Supervisor

Water is vital to plants. Without it we wouldn't have any trees or shrubs. This is especially true in Colorado. Did you know that most of the Front Range is considered a high plains desert? What exactly is a high plains desert? It's a cold, semi-arid environment that receives up to 20" of rain annually. It is also common to experience huge temperature swings. Combined with wild weather events, this creates an extremely stressful environment for our trees and shrubs to survive. This is exponentially true during our warm, dry, windy winters. One easy solution to help our trees and shrubs thrive during the winter is by winter watering.

What is winter watering? It's exactly what you think it is. It's watering during the winter months. Often people ignore or forget about their trees and shrubs during the winter. This is problematic because when temperatures are above freezing, roots are still actively growing. Without watering during these times, our trees and shrubs are more likely to become stressed or serve as a magnet for insect and disease issues. Watering now can also help to prevent dieback, winter burn, and winter desiccation damage. Proper hydration is critical for caring for your trees and shrubs during these winter months. The simple task of winter watering can yield you huge benefits throughout the future growing season.

How do you engage in winter watering? To begin, winter watering should only be applied when the soil is not frozen and when temperatures are above 40 degrees. Watering should be done early in the day so that trees and shrubs have ample opportunity to absorb this moisture. If watering is done later in the day, it can pool and freeze on the surface, becoming unavailable to the tree or shrub roots. How much water should you apply? It's recommended that for every 1" DBH (diameter at breast height) to apply at least 10 gallons of water. Watering can be done either using a water needle, directly from a garden hose or just using a bucket. It's debated which application is better, but the objective is simple: just get water to the roots. Your trees and shrubs will thank you greatly.

With warmer temperatures, drought, and mild winters becoming more frequent, we must be considerate of our tree and shrub watering needs. When a tree or shrub's thirst is quenched, it cannot actively grow and produce healthy defense mechanisms to protect it from pests and diseases. Be aware that root systems can vary between different species, age, and soil types. I encourage you to get out the hose or water bucket and give your trees and shrubs a big gulp of water at least once a month or as needed. Hydration is essential to maintain happy, healthy trees.



Don't know if your area is in a drought? Check the U.S. Drought Monitor website [here](#).