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NEWS

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Winterizing Critical for Western Slope Trees

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. – When autumn arrives, homeowners often forget about their yards and focus instead on indoor tasks. However, urban trees and shrubs on Colorado’s Western Slope require a regimen of fall care to remain healthy during the colder months.

“Colorado winters are tough on non-native trees, especially those that have been planted within the last 12 months,” said South Area Community Forester Vince Urbina of the Colorado State Forest Service. “A number of maintenance items are necessary for recently planted trees as we head into the winter.”

Urbina offers the following tips to prepare younger Western Slope trees for winter:

- **Fall back on watering.** Cut back on regular tree watering to encourage trees to go dormant. Continued heavy watering going into the first major freeze may cause tree damage. But once the leaves have fallen off, give each tree enough water to wet the top 12 inches of soil around the tree before the first hard winter freeze.
- **Wrap the trunks of smaller trees.** In Colorado, thin-barked trees like honeylocust, crabapple, maple and linden are susceptible to sunscald and frost cracks because of the drastic temperature fluctuations in fall and winter. To prevent bark damage, guard the trunks of smaller trees up to the first branches using several feet of thin, light-colored plastic tubing or a covering of commercial crepe paper tree wrap. Wrap trees by early November; be sure to remove the wrap by early April to prevent the buildup of excess moisture in the spring.
- **Mulch.** Apply 2 to 4 inches of mulch near the base of each tree, but not against it, to reduce soil evaporation, improve water absorption and insulate against the effects of temperature extremes on soil. Organic mulches, such as wood and bark chips or composted leaves, are best because they improve soil structure as they decompose.
- **Hold off on pruning.** Autumn sometimes is considered a good time to prune, but Urbina says that pruning can stimulate trees to remain active. Instead, prune in very early spring when trees have not yet leafed and their branch structure is still visible.

The CSFS recommends watering all urban trees and shrubs about once each month over the winter to combat the effects of Colorado’s arid climate. The best time for winter watering is on warmer days, during dry periods when snow has melted off and it’s above 40 degrees.

For more information about tree care in Western Colorado, visit the Colorado State Forest Service website at csfs.colostate.edu or call 970-248-7326.