



WINTER MAINTENANCE

Landscape maintenance in California is a year-round industry and even though some maintenance routines are performed less frequently in the winter, there are still a multitude of tasks that are required. These tasks are performed to not only facilitate the transitioning of plants through the seasonal changes, but to also promote a healthy landscape in the coming spring.

Although weather patterns in our area can be somewhat unpredictable, winters are characteristically mild, which helps to broaden the landscape winterizing timeline. Many tasks therefore, can be carried over into the winter months, such as aeration, fertilization, monitoring moisture levels and adjusting watering schedules.

In addition, deciduous plants and even some evergreen plants enter a period of dormancy during the winter months, making it the best time to prune. It is also the opportune time to reshape hedges and shrubs and remove spent flowers and dead plant materials to encourage new growth in the spring.

An increase in moisture, mixed with sunny days and moderate temperatures, creates the perfect conditions for weed propagation, elevating weed abatement to the top of the maintenance list. This often occurs in early winter and continues well into spring.

Environmental Concepts also performs numerous preventive maintenance measures in order to minimize the impact of winter storm events. We continue to monitor site drainage to reduce excess runoff and erosion after we have cleared catch basins, cleared drain lines and placed down sand bags.

As always, our staff remains on 24-hour emergency notice in case there is a need for removal of debris and fallen tree branches caused by wind or rain to ensure public safety.



THE IMPACT OF CHANGING WEATHER PATTERNS

Weather is a temporary state of the atmosphere that is influenced by local conditions and a combination of global factors. It can change from day-to-day, hour-to-hour, and despite advances in technology is often described as being “predictably unpredictable.” Climate, on the other hand, is the average of local weather data measured over an extended period of time.

Changes in weather patterns can be subtle or they can be extreme, such as the record-breaking temperatures that were experienced in our area and throughout the state in July, 2018. The extreme heat, combined with state-wide watering restrictions, took its toll on a significant number of plant materials and trees.

A by-product of the high temperatures during the day was the absence of relief from overnight cooling, which also contributed to heat stress. Although temperatures returned to normal, the above-average high-low temperatures returned during this past summer. The effects of this trend have continued to impact plant life due to an increase in moisture evaporation and a reduction in the formation of dew.

Dew is the moisture that forms on your lawn or car windshield during the early morning

hours. It is an important source of moisture for turfgrass, shallow-rooted plants and some varieties of trees.

The importance of dew lies not in the total quantity, but in the frequency of its occurrence. It reduces evaporation during the time it is forming, cools the soil, and returns valuable moisture back into the soil.

Warm air holds more moisture (water vapor) than cool air. As temperatures drop during the night, the air cools and the water vapor particles condense. If the temperatures drop low enough, the cooler air cannot hold the moisture and dew is formed. The temperature at which the air molecules become saturated in order to form dew is called the dewpoint.

When overnight temperatures remain warm, which has been the current situation, evaporation increases and the potential for dew formation is compromised. It is necessary therefore, to supplement watering to cool down the soil and offer relief to the plant materials, especially during periods of high temperatures.

Tracking weather patterns and monitoring meteorological trends are therefore, important to ensuring a quality landscape. EC recognizes this as an integral component to our landscape maintenance and water management programs and practices.



ORNAMENTAL GRASSES: Winter Pruning

Ornamental grasses have become a popular alternative to shrubs in today's landscapes. They have a natural appearance, are water-efficient, and offer a variety of color and texture to any landscape setting. They are often referred to as having a "graceful" appearance, depending on the variety.



Some of the more popular varieties of ornamental grasses used in our area are Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum advena* 'Rubrum'), Pink Muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), and Deer Grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*), which is native to California. Several varieties of carex sedges are also becoming popular. Most tolerate full sun or partial shade, and are very drought-tolerant.

Ornamental grasses are generally classified as cool season and warm season grasses based on their growth cycles. Warm season grasses are mostly deciduous and go dormant in the fall and continuing through winter. They produce new growth in late spring when temperatures and the soil begin to warm up. They thrive on the heat of summer and flower in late summer into fall.



The majority of cool season grasses are evergreen and grow year-round. They begin to produce new growth in

early spring, flowering in early summer and again in the fall when temperatures cool down. Many grow slowly and appear to go dormant when temperatures exceed 75°F during the summer months.

Once established, ornamental grasses are largely maintenance free. They do require annual hard pruning however. Implementing special timing and pruning techniques are needed to maximize growth and to make them look their very best. Hard pruning is also

an effective method of avoiding overcrowding.

Warm season grasses turn shades of brown as they enter dormancy prior to the onset of winter.

Although dead foliage and spent flowers can be removed in late fall, most communities choose to enjoy the beauty of the foliage throughout winter. Hard pruning is normally performed in the spring, before new growth begins. Warm season grasses are customarily pruned close to the ground.



Also practiced in many communities is partial trimming in the fall and early winter months.

This is an alternative to waiting until late winter before removing any of the die-back material. It is a common substitute if the all-or-nothing, hard pruning approach mentioned above is found not to be desirable.

Cool season grasses also require hard pruning to remove the previous year's growth. Because they are not affected by winter temperatures, it is important to time hard pruning before the start of new growth production in early spring. Waiting too long can potentially be detrimental to the new shoots and the health of the plant. Cool season grasses are cut back leaving about one-third of the plant remaining.

Our experience has shown that a mixture of warm and cool season grasses establishes a

balanced, full-seasonal visual display. It also helps to minimize the absence of plant materials between seasons.



The Value of a Tree Inventory

When properly planned, managed, and maintained, the urban forest provides significant ecological, health, and economic benefits to communities. The benefits include improving air quality, enhancing aesthetic beauty, providing wildlife habitat, and increasing property values. A comprehensive tree management program is also a valuable resource for ensuring the integrity and sustainability of the urban forest.

The tree care industry has developed innovative programs to assist communities in the management of their urban forests. One such tool is a tree inventory. In a tree inventory, each tree is reviewed independently by a certified arborist, mapped and identified by its location, species, size, and hazard potential. The inventory presents an accurate assessment of the number, health and diversity of trees within a community and is essential for the development of a successful tree management program.

A tree inventory identifies and addresses the tree maintenance needs of the community. The data compiled from the inventory helps in the development of an operational tree maintenance budget and is a valuable tool for sound decision-making and for determining budget strategies. A strong maintenance plan also prioritizes the scheduling of tree care components and addresses public safety issues.

Our Tree Care Division specializes in performing tree inventories and assisting in developing tree management plans as additional services, which our customers have successfully used for preparing their tree maintenance budgets. We are also experienced in the coordination and implementation of these programs with boards, managers, and other outside agencies.

