



Evergreens Planting and Care



E. R. Hasselkus

Evergreens are popular landscape plants because they hold their foliage in winter and so can serve to screen unattractive foundations, objects, and views from sight all year long. Evergreens also provide cover for birds and other wildlife and are the best plants for use in windbreaks. In addition, evergreens add color to the otherwise rather drab winter landscape. For these reasons, many people are interested in planting and caring for evergreens. If you use the proper planting, watering, mulching, fertilizing and pruning techniques, your evergreens should look their best for many years.

Planting

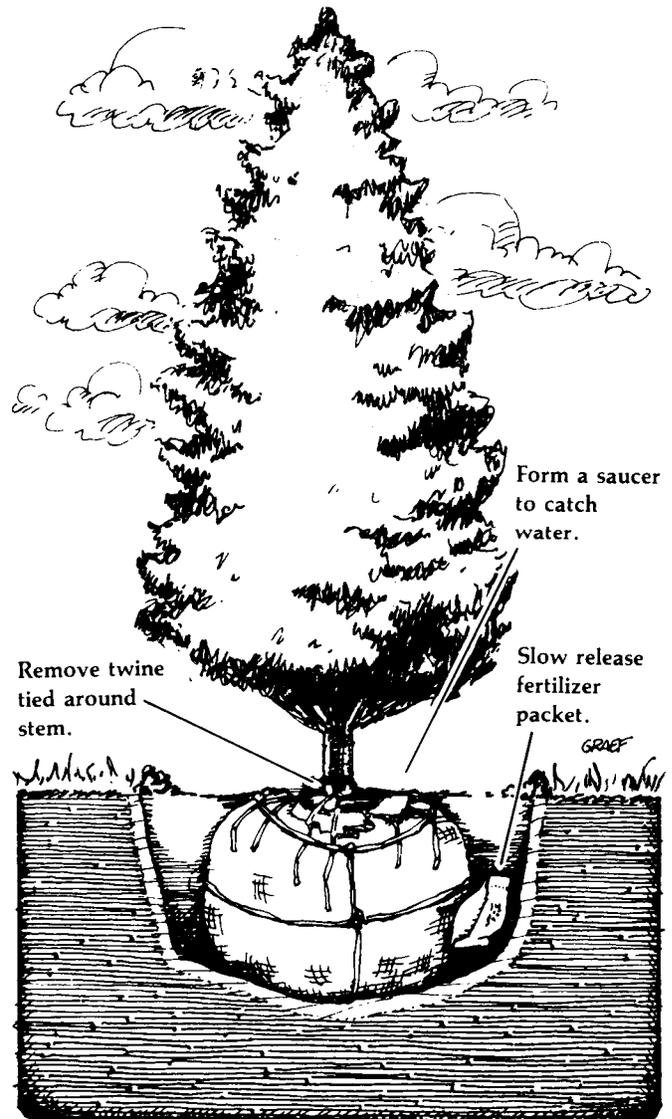
Plant balled and burlapped (B & B) or potted evergreens in spring, summer or *early* fall. Evergreens planted in late fall often don't have time to establish themselves and are injured ("burned") during the subsequent winter when their foliage loses more water than the roots can replace.

Dig a hole as deep as the root ball is high and at least one foot wider than the width of the ball. If the plant is in a metal, plastic or papier mache pot, slit the pot's side and carefully remove the root mass. If roots appear to be matted around the outer surface, fray the roots out with your fingers or even cut roots that may be wound in spiral fashion at the base of the container. This will encourage new root development into the surrounding soil area. Do not remove burlap from B & B plants, but be sure to take off rope or twine tied around the stem. Set the ball in the hole so the top of the ball is level with the surrounding ground. Then fill around the ball with backfill soil and tamp firmly. Use a ring of loose soil around the evergreen's base to create a shallow saucer and water well. No pruning is needed. Do not put fertilizer in the planting hole unless it is the slow release type in premeasured packet or pill form.

Pine, spruce, fir, Douglasfir and juniper must have a sunny location to do well. Arborvitae (white cedar) grows best in full sun but can survive in light shade. Japanese yew and hemlock will grow in sun or shade,

but the foliage may dry out and die during the winter if the plant is in a sunny, windy, exposed location. To avoid this "winter burn" injury, plant them in areas sheltered from winter sun and wind, such as the north or east side of a house.

Most evergreens need well drained soil. Arborvitae, though, will grow in moist low lying areas.



Watering

Water newly planted evergreens regularly during the first year after planting. A good soaking once a week during dry periods is usually enough. Sandy soils may need more frequent watering, while slow draining clay soils may need less.

Foundation plants growing in dry soil under broad overhanging eaves may need to be watered regularly even after establishment.

Water the ground around evergreens thoroughly in November before the soil freezes to help prevent "winter burn" injury.

Mulching

Mulches can conserve soil moisture, reduce soil temperature extremes, help control weeds, and lend a pleasing appearance to the ground beneath evergreens.

To be effective, most mulch materials should be 2 to 4 inches deep around the plant.

Organic mulches have the advantage of being natural in appearance while adding organic matter to the soil as they decompose. Many organic materials can be used as mulches, including shredded bark, wood or bark chips, coarse peatmoss, hay, straw, grain or cocoa hulls, pine needles and ground corn-cobs.

Some inorganic materials that are also suitable for mulching include sand, crushed stone, gravel chips and pebbles. You must place polypropylene or fiberglass fabric beneath these inorganic materials to control weeds.

Feeding

Apply fertilizer to evergreens in early spring or late fall. Well-rotted manure is fine either as a surface mulch or dug into the ground around the plant. Or use a high-nitrogen commercial fertilizer such as 12-6-4, 16-8-8, or 20-10-5 at the rate of 1/3 pound (1/3 pint) per foot of height or spread of the plant, whichever is greater. For instance, a 6-foot evergreen would need about 2 pounds (2 pints) of fertilizer, while an evergreen with a 3-foot spread would need about 1 pound (1 pint). Dig the fertilizer into the soil around the base of the plant, being careful not to let it come into contact with any part of the plant. Then water well.

Large evergreen trees often need no fertilizer, but if you want to stimulate their growth, bore holes about 15 inches deep around the tree with a crowbar or soil auger, as shown in the illustration. Divide the amount

of fertilizer (1/3 pound per foot of height or spread, whichever is greater) evenly among the holes and fill the top portions of the holes with peatmoss or soil.

Apply fertilizer properly to help keep your plant's size within bounds and reduce the need for pruning. Within limits, the more fertilizer you use, the more plant growth you get. Thus when the plant is small and you want it to grow rapidly, apply fertilizer yearly. As the plant reaches desired size, reduce or eliminate fertilizing to limit growth.



Pruning

Most evergreens used around the house as foundation plantings need yearly pruning to keep them in good condition and at the desired size.

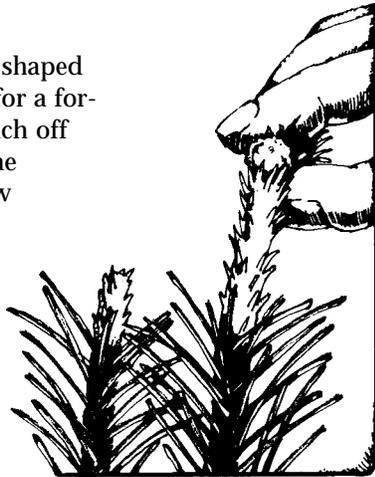
Prune all evergreens except pines before growth starts in the spring, or during the semi-dormant period in midsummer. Study the natural form of the evergreen. When pruning, follow the general branch pattern to preserve the character of the plant. Try to head back selectively the longest, most vigorous shoots to leave a natural feathery look. In most cases, selective pruning is better than shearing because shearing creates a formal geometric shape that looks out of place in naturalistic surroundings and becomes more and more difficult to maintain as the plant increases in size. Use a sharp pruning shears or knife to remove about two-thirds of the new growth.

Remember while you're pruning that most coniferous evergreens can't resprout from a stub or stump in the way that most deciduous shrubs and trees can. If you should happen to remove too much growth from a portion of the plant, you may create a hole in its foliage that won't fill in for years. Always leave plenty of green foliage and buds behind when you've finished pruning or shearing.

Pruning Specific Types of Evergreens

Mugho Pine

These are semi-ball shaped and may be sheared for a formal effect. Cut or pinch off about two-thirds of the lengths of the soft new growth (candles) during the growing period in late spring or early summer each year.



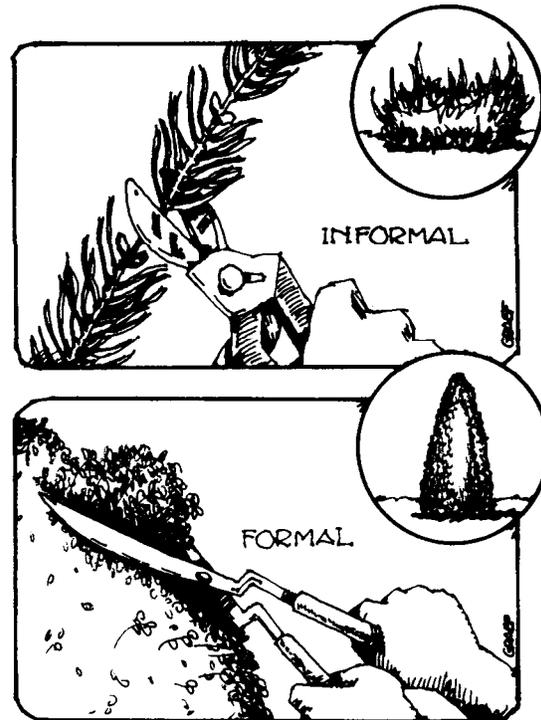
Juniper

Shear or selectively prune the upright forms at the sides and top to keep the desired shape. Overgrown specimens can be topped and reshaped.

Prune spreading and creeping types by selectively cutting back the most vigorous, longest branches to side shoots. Preserve the natural horizontal lines. Don't prune in a formal manner.

Japanese Yew (Taxus)

Shear or prune selectively depending on whether a formal or informal effect is wanted. Yews produce two flushes of growth yearly and should be pruned in spring before growth starts and again in midsummer.

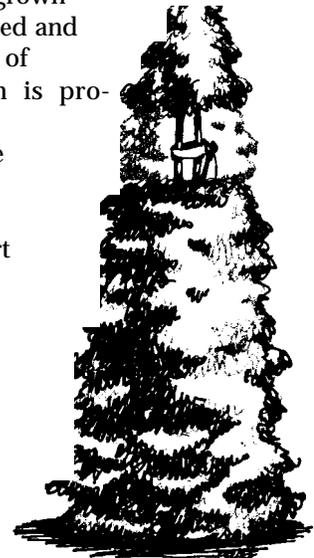


Informal (above) versus formal (below) pruning of arborvitae, junipers and yews.

Arborvitae (White Cedar)

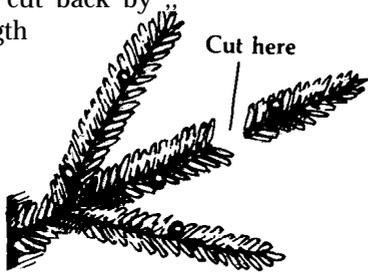
Shear along the sides and top to keep growth thick and the plant at the desired size. Prune in early spring or mid-summer. Over-grown specimens may be topped and reshaped over a period of years as new growth is produced from the green foliage remaining at the base of the plant.

Plants may split apart under the weight of heavy wet snow. To prevent this, tie the stems together with cloth strips or discarded panty hose in fall.

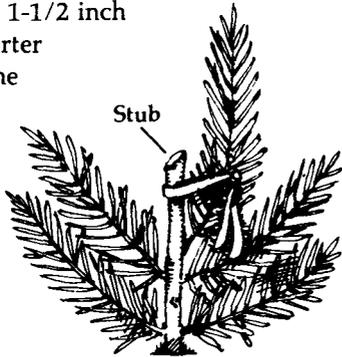


Evergreen Trees

Spruce, pine, fir and other evergreen trees generally need very little pruning. If growth is too rapid, an open space may develop between the whorls of branches which you can remedy with some light pruning or shearing. Unbranched tips of side branches on spruce or fir may be cut back by two-thirds of their length to keep the tree fuller and a little narrower. Prune tree-sized pines the same way as mugho pine.



If the main leader is damaged, cut it back before growth starts, leaving a 1-1/2 inch stub. Tie one of the shorter side shoots upright to the stub. It will become the leader. Remove the tie after a year. If two leaders develop, remove the weaker one.



Pests and Diseases

Many insects and diseases attack evergreens. One of the best controls for them is to keep the plant in good growing condition by proper planting, watering, mulching and fertilizing.

A dormant spray of either lime sulfur or dormant oil applied before new growth starts in the spring destroys over-wintering mites, scales and other pests. Use lime sulfur instead of dormant oil on yew, fir, Colorado blue spruce and Douglasfir.

Hose off arborvitae and spruce plants about once a week during the summer. Use a *strong* stream of cold water, making sure you get water through the center of the plant. This not only helps keep the foliage clean but also dislodges many pests. If washing doesn't control the tiny mites which often attack these plants during hot, dry summer weather and cause yellowing of the foliage, spray with a recommended miticide.

Male dogs can kill the lower branches of evergreens when they urinate against the plants. If restraining the dogs isn't practical, several dog repellents which give temporary protection are available commercially.

Yellowing or browning of the foliage on the interior of evergreens followed by sudden defoliation may be due to normal seasonal needle drop.

For more information about pest and disease control, contact your county Extension office.

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