

De-Icing Salt Can Harm Landscape Plants

Each winter, millions of tons of deicing salt are applied to state and municipal roads to keep the roads safe for vehicles to travel. Salt is spread near houses to avoid pedestrian injuries. This is necessary for safety, but did you know excessive salt can cause widespread damage to trees – possibly leading to permanent decline and even death?

According to the Tree Care Industry Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to the tree care industry, even severe salt damage might not be visible on a tree until the end of summer, leaving homeowners wondering what might have caused the problem. In some cases, decline might not be visible for years.

“Salt deposits migrate to the stems, buds and roots of trees,” explains Tchukki Andersen, staff arborist with TCIA. “This causes disfigured foliage, stunted growth and severe decline in tree health. Salt runoff washes from pavement into the ground, increasing salt levels in the soil.”

There are steps you can take to ward off tree damage from salt. The TCIA recommends taking the following measures:

- Avoid use de-icing salt unless necessary. Mix salt with abrasives such as sand, cinders and ash.
- Use alternative deicing salts such as calcium chloride and calcium magnesium acetate.
- Improve drainage of soils. Add organic matter such as activated charcoal or gypsum, and thoroughly leach salt residues from the soil.
- Erect barriers between pavement and plants.
- Plant trees in locations away from any type of salt spray.
- Plant salt-resistant trees in areas where high salt spray is inevitable.
- Provide adequate irrigation and mulching to reduce water loss.
- Prune properly and add fertilizers to correct nutrient deficiency.
- Control tree damaging diseases and pest infestations.

Find a professional

A professional arborist can assess your landscape and work with you to determine the best salt-resistant trees and shrubs to plant and to care for your existing landscape. Contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a 69-year-old public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA has the nation’s only Accreditation program that helps consumers find tree care companies that have been inspected and accredited based on: adherence to industry standards for quality and safety; maintenance of trained, professional staff; and dedication to ethics and quality in business practices. An easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the “Locate Your Local TCIA Member Companies” program. You can use this service by calling 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a ZIP Code search on www.treecaretips.org.

Editors: If you would like additional information or digital photos, please contact editor@tcia.org.