KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Snow is Good for the Garden”

March 26, 2019

March comes in like a lion, out like a lamb. It seems the March lion came a bit early this year and we are still reeling from a heavy snowfall while waiting for that fuzzy little Spring lamb. My mum tells me the good thing about all this snow is that it covers up all the gardening chores that need to be done in the garden come Spring so I guess we have a few more good weeks of denial. I’ve decided that being one with my snow shovel is not the Zen I am looking for. And though my aching back may not agree, recent heavy snows actually will be good for the garden and landscape.

Snow cover is good for your garden. Think of the snow as mulch for your plants in addition to creating a beautiful winter scene. A deep layer of snow will serve as an excellent insulator for your soil on days and nights when temperatures are very cold and winds are strong. Snow provides moisture as well as protection from cold and wind.

The extent of snow protection depends on the depth of snow. Generally, the temperature below the snow increases by about 2 degrees F for each inch of accumulation. In addition, the soil gives off some heat so that the temperature at the soil surface can be much warmer than the air temperature. One study found that the soil surface temperature was 28 degrees F with a 9-inch snow depth and an air temperature of -14 degrees!

Snow brings welcome moisture to many landscape plants, which will in turn help prevent desiccation injury. In Taylor’s Encyclopedia of Gardening, snow is called “the poor man’s fertilizer.”  As it falls through the atmosphere, nitrogen and sulfur attach to the flakes.  When the snow melts, these elements are released into the soil and absorbed by plants. Nitrogen is essential to plant growth.

Dormant plants continue to lose moisture from twigs in the process known as transpiration. Evergreen plants, which keep their leaves through the winter, are at greater risk of injury.

The insulation effect of snow helps protect perennials, bulbs, ground covers, and strawberry plantings from alternating freezing and thawing cycles. Roses are said to flower better after a hard winter, and apples and pears to set more fruit. Without snow, milder temperatures and the sun could warm the soil surface, leading to damage from soil heaving, which can break roots and dry out plant parts. Snow also helps conserve soil moisture over the winter.

On the other hand, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. Some evergreens will suffer from too much snow load. The weight of snow and ice can bend or even break branches, particularly on multi-stemmed shrubs, such as arborvitae. Remove snow gently by brushing away with a broom. Do not try to remove ice, since it is more than likely that you will break the stems. Multi-stemmed shrubs that are known to be susceptible to breakage can be bound with twine to hold branches together to prevent them from splitting apart.

Another drawback of too much snow in the landscape is small animals, such as voles and rabbits. These critters gnaw on tender bark at the base of young tree trunks and the stems of shrubs. Voles also will tunnel on the surface of lawns under the snow, making very visible winding trails as the snows melt in spring.

There are still a few more winter weeks to come before we’ll know how well our plants fare from the snowy days of 2019. And until that little fuzzy lamb of Spring has sprung.

For more information about on the goodness of snow in the garden, and other topics, go to our website at [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com) and click the KPOV tab on the orange bar. Thanks for listening to, Gardening- Get Good at it! on KPOV, The Point.

Resources:

Snow: A Welcome Sight for Farmers

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/snow_a_welcome_sight_for_farmer>s

Snow is Good for the Garden

<https://www.purdue.edu/hla/sites/yardandgarden/snow-is-good-for-gardens/>

The Benefits of Snow

<https://lancaster.unl.edu/hort/articles/2006/snow.shtml>