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# It Has Been a Restful Winter for Northern Utah Trees

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## GARDEN NOTES

# IT HAS BEEN A RESTFUL WINTER FOR NORTHERN UTAH TREES

*By Dennis Hinkamp*

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Winter-03

It's still winter in Northern Utah and most trees are still sleeping. This is always a concern during February. What could happen if the trees begin to grow too soon and then we get an extremely cold spell?

According to Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist, trees are a lot like humans when it comes to rest. Each tree needs a certain amount of sleep before it can perform to its maximum potential. We rest at night, and most trees rest during the winter. This rest period is called dormancy.

"In Northern Utah, this period is during the coldest part of winter," Goodspeed explains. "In late fall, the trees acclimate to the cooling temperatures, becoming more and more hardy as the freezing temperatures approach. Eventually, they harden enough to be able to withstand below zero temperatures without dying."

To get their proper rest, most trees need temperatures to be between about 30 and 40 F. If it is too hot or cold, they do not rest well, or accumulate enough "chill" hours, he says.

"If a tree gets waken up too soon, much like us, it can become grouchy and cranky," Goodspeed says. "They show this ugly mood with a reduced amount of leaves and fruit, and a generally unhealthy appearance. This seldom happens here in Northern Utah, but it can when trees need a long dormancy, and we have a shortened winter."

He says a more common scenario occurs when the trees get enough rest accumulated by mid January, and then just wait for the weather to warm up so they can start their seasons growth. A warm February (or January) gets the trees all excited and their buds begin to swell as they awaken. As this happens, the sap begins to flow, and they start to loose some of their winter hardiness, making them more vulnerable to sub-freezing temperatures.

If our weather stays relatively cool, the trees should be fine. However, if the weather warms too much and then we get very cold again, it can kill some buds and tender wood on the trees, Goodspeed says. There is really nothing we can do to prevent this from happening. The good news is, most trees are resilient and recover quickly from some die-back.

"Fortunately, most of our trees are getting enough rest so they will wake in the spring

refreshed and ready to grow,” he says. “The trees I have observed this year also appear to be sleeping well and have not been affected by the relatively warm winter we are experiencing. Most buds are still tight and are not starting any spring swelling or growth. This should help them withstand most of the cold temperatures we will experience in mid to late February.”

Additionally, he says the warm weather and bountiful rain have replenished the soil for evergreen trees and shrubs.

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