



Hort Tips and News
Sandy Welches, Editor, MGV '05

White Pine Shedding

Q: Every year my white pine tree loses some of its needles, sometimes a lot of needles. What should I do?

A: If this occurs every year and usually happens in the fall, it's likely to be normal physiological needle drop. Pines are considered evergreens, but they don't hold onto their needles forever. All evergreens go through a period where they "shed" or drop their older needles. For instance, a white pine keeps its needles for two years and Scotch pines keep theirs for two to four years. The older needles fall off at the same time, making it a little startling for the homeowner.

If you look at the needles and find that they are all located on the inner portion of the branches, and all of the branches look the same, it's likely normal needle drop. If you start to see yellowing and browning of needles on the new growth, randomly scattered around the tree, you should be concerned.

Transplanting Perennials

Q: I have a few perennials that need transplanting and want to know the best time to do this.

A: It's best to transplant any perennial in late August and early September. If you transplant them later in the season, they don't have enough time to develop a significant root system for the winter. What ends up happening during the winter is that the soil heaves and pushes the plant up and out of the soil, exposing the roots to cold and dry temperatures. They usually struggle to survive. That said, I am guilty of transplanting and also planting (Who can resist the end of the season clearance sales in October?) late in the season. To help the plants make it through the winter, I cover them with at least 12 inches of mulch or compost to keep the soil temperatures moderated, thus preventing heaving. In the spring, before new growth begins, I remove the mulch and am usually pretty successful.

Bennett, Pamela (July/August 2015).
Ask the Garden Pros Ohio Gardener, p. 7



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