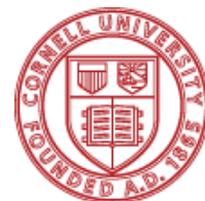




De-icing Salt in the Landscape

By Sue Gwise, *Consumer Horticulture Educator*



De-icing salts are a necessary part of North Country winters. The application of these products on roads, sidewalks, and steps can have an effect on nearby plants. Excessive soluble salts can build up in the soil causing root damage, leaf burn, wilting, and even plant death.

The most obvious example of salt damage to plants can be seen along highways, especially on evergreen trees. Roadside conifers are constantly being sprayed with road salt by snow plows. Since needles are present, they become brown and desiccated resulting in evergreens that are brown on the side that faces the road and green on the opposite side (see Route 81). In addition, all trees and vegetation along roads are affected by salts that leach into soil. The plants become drought stressed because the water in the soil is actually being pulled away from the roots.



This why I don't recommend planting evergreen trees on roadsides. Many homeowners like the idea of a cozy line of evergreens as a screen along the road. The trees will probably look great when viewed from the house, but the other side will be a different story. That is if they can even manage to survive high salt levels in the soil. Trees are not the only plants that can be impacted. Perennials, shrubs, and groundcovers are also affected by ice-melt products.

That being said, many plants are salt tolerant. Otherwise there would be no vegetation at all along salted roadways or even in seaside dunes. If you are going to plant adjacent to areas that are treated with de-icing salt, choose salt-tolerant plant species. There are many attractive options. Don't think that you will be stuck with boring plants! The chart below offers some appealing options.

You can protect existing vegetation by using plant friendly ice-melt products containing calcium chloride or magnesium chloride. Avoid using rock salt as it is the most damaging to plants and is only effective down to 15 degrees F. The more plant friendly options work well at even lower temperatures, down to -10 degrees F.

Regardless, nothing is 100% safe so follow label directions and keep any product away from planting areas as much as possible. Other safe options include sand and kitty litter which will provide traction, but will do little to melt ice. Also, apply ice-melt products *before* weather events in order to use less product.

SALT TOLERANT PLANTS

TREES	SHRUBS	PERENNIALS
European Alder	Bottlebrush Buckeye (zone 5 or warmer)	Bee balm
Eastern Redbud (zone 5 or warmer)	Siberian Peashrub	Daylily
Hawthorn	Summersweet Clethra	Autumn Stonecrop
Ginkgo	Bayberry	Butterfly Weed
Thornless Honeylocust	Bush Cinquefoil	Russian Sage
Crabapple	Beach Plum	Columbine
Northern Red Oak	Staghorn Sumac	'Karl Foerster' Reedgrass
Japanese Tree Lilac	Mugo Pine	Dianthus
Common Baldcypress (moist soils)	Lilac	Yarrow
Eastern Redcedar	Hydrangea	Creeping Thyme
Austrian Pine	Spiraea	Lady's Mantle

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January 2021

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