

New year, new yard: An end-of-year checklist for your woods

Winter is a high-risk time for trees as they face harsh weather and wildlife damage. Whether you are protecting young saplings or planning for the next generation, December and January are the perfect months to set the stage for a healthy forest in the coming year. Use this checklist to make the most of this dormant season:

- **Bud cap your pine seedlings.** Bud capping is a technique used as a method to protect seedlings from deer browse and other forms of herbivory.
- **Insulate young evergreens.** For small evergreens (especially sensitive species like hemlock), you might choose to use snow as a natural insulator. If snow is sparse, consider burlap screens to prevent winter burn or desiccation.
- **Check fencing, tree tubes and wraps.** Make sure any protections you use are upright and secure; a heavy snowfall or high winds can easily displace them.
- **Inspect and prune deciduous trees and shrubs.** Because the trees are dormant, the risk of spreading certain diseases (like oak wilt) is significantly lower in winter. Pruning now also allows you to see the structure of the tree without leaves, making it easier to identify crossing branches or structural weaknesses.
- **Track wildlife.** Fresh snow offers a perfect canvas to see what critters are moving through your land. Keep a log of tracks to better understand your local ecosystem. And consider participating in the Christmas Bird Count. It's a great way to contribute to long-term conservation data while enjoying a winter walk.



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