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### **What does a winter storm mean for your trees?**

These past few months have hardly felt like winter, but now we are seeing some cold temperatures mixed with snow and wind. While this can be an inconvenience for us, it can be a stress test for our trees.

When trees go into dormancy, they become cold hardy. They undergo various physiological changes that prevent low temperatures from causing damage. The trees slow down their growth, and develop winter buds on their twigs, which are a hard-shell coating that protects living tissue underneath from the cold. The tree also allows water to exit its tissue cells, so that cells do not freeze and rupture. This is what causes the sap in trees to become thick and sugary during the winter – which is why we harvest maple syrup in the winter!

This does not mean, however, that trees are immune to cold weather all the time. These protections from the cold are only present when the tree is dormant. Trees base their dormancy on both weather and daylight.

When we have periods of nice weather, trees may become less cold hardy. If freezing temperatures quickly develop after bouts of warm temperatures, that is when we see winter damage to our trees.

It can be hard to tell if your tree has suffered any damage until it starts to leaf out in the spring and you notice dieback on some branches or cracks in the bark. Unfortunately, on mature trees, there is nothing you can do to prevent this or fix the damage. On young trees with thin bark, wrapping the trunk with a light-colored plastic can help prevent sun scald that is associated with sudden movements between hot and cold temperatures. If you notice any damage, come spring, the best course of action is to prune out any damaged limbs to prevent them from falling on their own – which will leave a bigger wound than a controlled cut with a saw.

This does not mean you should panic. The vast majority of our trees will survive these winter storms. Some weaker, smaller trees may not make it through the winter, but most trees will simply have some branches die back if they are affected at all. If you have questions or concerns about your tree, please reach out to our office for more information.