

Winter Weather: Selling More Than Plowing

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[dropcap]W[/dropcap] all know that a heavy snowfall can do more than just make roads and sidewalks impassable. For property owners, the weight of the snow, the ice, and the water can cause real damage to roofs, basements, and existing landscape trees and plants. In fact, each cubic foot of drifted, piled or compacted snow contains two to three gallons of water, writes Ken Hellevang, professor at North Dakota State University in "Preventing Snow Melt Water Problems." That means a 1,000 square foot roof with one foot of snow on top contains about 2,500 gallons of water. A 10-foot high pile of snow, 20-feet in diameter, contains about 2,600 gallons, says Hellevang. This amount of water accumulated in a short period of time (such as during a storm) can begin causing problems immediately and be a real headache for your clients. As a result, this is where your company has an opportunity to upsell a plowing contract. Here are a few recommendations for additional cold weather tasks you can perform for customers to help them and their property survive the winter:



Employees of Outback Landscape in Rexburg, ID, clear snow from a flat rooftop to prevent damage.
(Photo: Outback Landscape)

In Early Winter

- Check sump pump discharge hoses. Does your client have a sump pump? Ensure that the discharge line on the property carries the water several feet away to a well-drained spot. Ideally, the line should run down sloped ground to increase drainage and prevent freezing.
- Check and clean gutters. Clogged gutters mean water isn't being diverted properly away from the client's house, a key problem after a storm. Extend downspouts where necessary.
- Check that any new raised beds on the property won't create dams that redirect water toward the client's residence.
- Once the ground freezes, apply a two- to four-inch blanket of mulch around landscape plants. Extra branches and greens from evergreens can also help blanket landscape plantings before a snow. Wrap young or vulnerable plantings in burlap or landscape fabric.
- Prune trees in the dormant season after leaves fall. Not only does this make it easier to identify diseases, but creating a strong tree structure will help it withstand storms and breakage.

After A Heavy Snow

- Move snow away from the house or building foundation. If the ground is sloped even one inch per foot near the house, moving the snow just three to five feet from the house will reduce problems, say experts. By the same token, avoid piling snow near the building when plowing or snow blowing the driveway or sidewalks.
- Clear snow from all stairwells, window wells, and egress exits.
- Ensure that any drains are clear of ice or debris.
- Remove snow from roofs with a roof rake.
- Address any ice dams. An ice dam forms when snow on a roof begins to melt then refreezes as a blockage of ice on the edge of the roof, according to experts at ARS Restoration Specialists in Newton, MA. This built-up ice prevents additional melting snow from draining properly and causes it to back up on the roof. Getting an ice dam melted quickly is key. It may sound silly, but try filling a pair of old pantyhose with a calcium chloride ice melter and throwing it up on the roof where the ice dam has formed, recommends ARS.
- Remove debris such as broken tree limbs, garbage, etc.
- To remove heavy snow from branches, gently push branches up from below with an extension pole, but do not shake the limbs, says John Lang of NJ-based Friendly Tree in "Caring for Your Trees After a Heavy Snowfall." He writes, "Branches are actually more flexible than they look, and trying to knock off snow can cause them to snap back and damage the tree's circulatory system." If the branches are covered in ice, wait for it to melt naturally.
- Address broken tree limbs with careful pruning, adds Lang. He recommends: If healthy branches exist between a break and the main stem, the branch should be pruned back to the healthy branches. If the tree looks unbalanced with more branches missing on one side, resist the temptation to over-prune. Trees will naturally fill in bare areas over time. Also avoid leaving "coat hangers," or short sections of branches

left along the main stem that are long enough to hang a coat on. These will eventually die and serve as an entry point for pests and pathogens to enter the tree. Finally, never top your tree. Tree topping – or cutting back all of a tree's structural branches – weakens the tree over time and can make it structurally unsound.

- Quickly cover any exposed roots of young or newly planted trees if they have been uprooted after a storm. Trees with trunks over 10 inches in diameter with more than a third of their roots exposed will not recover and should be removed, according to Lang.

After The Last Snow

- Check and remediate snow mold. What are those dead looking circular patches on your client's lawn? It could be snow mold, a cold weather fungus that appears in the spring when the snow melts. Snow mold occurs when a thick blanket of snow falls on susceptible grasses, primarily cool-season grasses, before the ground has the chance to freeze. It has two types, characterized by gray or pink spots (the more severe variety). Unfortunately, a spring fungicide application won't work. Instead, gently rake to loosen the affected areas and help the area dry. If necessary, reseed or add new sod. (Next fall: make the last lawn cut one to one and a half inches shorter than usual; don't let leaves pile up; dethatch; go easy on nitrogen; and apply a preventative fungicide if necessary.)
- Repair other damage. First, ensure the ground is thawed. "Taking an aggressive approach to removing damaged sections of the landscape could result in patches of lawn being torn away or flowers being uprooted, due to the root systems not having enough time to recover," according to Blue Tree Landscaping in Skippack, PA. Then gather debris, rake, weed, and fill holes left by winter weather.
- Perform any drainage or grading work that needs to be done. Once the snow is cleared and the soil is thawed, check clients' properties for pooling water from snow melt and spring rains. Despite the actions listed above, some properties need more complex drainage measures that can only be performed once spring arrives. Solutions such as catch basins, dry streambeds, French drains, swales, dry wells, rain gardens, tree placement, and more are all landscaping solutions that can help address weather's wrath. For more on this topic, see "Drainage Solutions For Water Woes," by Chris Speen of Twin Oaks Landscaping in Ann Arbor, MI.

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