

Figley from page 8D

"Give them a deep soak," he says. Damage during the winter season isn't caused by the cold, but rather by the loss of moisture that can increase with drying winds continuously blowing over them, or when they are growing in warm, sunny spots. The roots aren't able to take up moisture from frozen or dry soil to reconstitute the plant.

Alternative
Instead of burlap, Slezinski says, "We use Wilt-Pruf, an antitranspirant, and spray it on these plants to help them retain their moisture. We have found that it is also very effective on boxwood."

The antitranspirants aren't to be sprayed on arborvitae and some other plants, so be sure to read the label and follow directions exactly. It's best sprayed the first time around mid-November and then reapplied during our January thaw, when the temperature has been under freezing for 24 hours. Foliar gas exchange, needed for photosynthesis, shouldn't be a factor, because it is less critical in the winter, therefore, the antitranspirants are OK.

"It's best to not try to remove heavy wet snows, or ice from these trees," Slezinski said. "Just let Nature take its course." At this time the branches are brittle and may crack and break. Powdery snow can be shaken off.

If you find winter damage when spring arrives, remove only dead wood

on evergreens; it's not necessary to prune winter-injured needles. Don't drastically prune plants that aren't evergreens; wait until the buds open when dead wood can be readily seen. They will recover more quickly than one severely pruned or not pruned at all.

Plant of year

The Perennial Plant Association has announced that its choice for the 1996 Plant of the Year is *Penstemon digitalis* "Husker Red." This plant, with bronze-red foliage, is splendid when it blooms during July and August with masses of white flowers.

It prefers a sunny to light shady spot with well-drained slightly acidic soil and can be used as a mass planting in borders, an accent plant or a specimen. It is a fine cut flower. "Husker Red's" average height is 30 inches. Bare-root plants of "Husker Red" can be planted most any time during the season, from early spring until one month before a hard killing frost. Potted plants need to be planted at the same depth they were in the pot. Try it with plants with silver foliage such as *Artemisia* "Powis Castle" and *Achillea* "Moonshine."

Notice

To the gentleman who phoned about the Great Britain trip: Please call me at (810) 644-2178.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham.

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