

## **Mild Winter, Busy Spring Lack Of Extremes A Boon To Valley's Landscapers**

*By Tom Mitchell*

Jim Shreckhise, owner of Shreckhise Shrubbery Sales and Landscaping, plants a tree Tuesday in a client's front yard. Area landscapers are doing more work, thanks to the mild winter that kept plants that they grow and sell from dying.



**Photo by Thomas J. Turney**

HARRISONBURG - In the Shenandoah Valley, winter's reputation for harshness took a beating. Just ask people who grow things for a living.

A typically tough season showed a milder side and that softening made life easier for trees, shrubs and flowers, as well as for those who make the production and care of such plants a profession.

Area landscapers agree that a largely uneventful winter kept greenery that they grow to sell or plant from suffering from the elements, and enabled them to do more work.

Jim Shreckhise, owner of Shreckhise Landscape and Design Service in Weyers Cave, said the winter just past helped planters of shrubs in several ways.

First, Shreckhise said, planting that usually ends in the fall lasted well into winter. And a relatively dry spring, he added, has offered better working conditions.

"We were able to work into January, and we were a bit busier than normal," said Shreckhise, whose company specializes in planting trees and shrubs for upper-middle-class homes in the area. "This spring was a bit on the dry side - it seemed like we were getting a lot more work early, and we didn't have so much mud."

### **It's About Timing**

For merchants like Larry Newberry, winter's timing was everything.

Newberry, owner of Greenthumb Nursery on U.S. 11 north of Harrisonburg, said that winter's coldest temperatures arrived after some trees and plants bloomed, but before the next ones flowered. Because such dips in the thermometer did not coincide with bloomings, and because the Valley experienced no extended

cold periods, plants this spring sustained little damage.

“This winter was real light,” Newberry said. “We didn’t have real hard freezes late, and the temperature didn’t stay low. That’s where you get your damage - when it stays down for days and nights.”

Plant health is closely tied to continuity in climate, says Maria K. Ignosh, extension agent for agriculture, natural resources and horticulture in Rockingham County. This year’s lush greenery in the Valley reflects a mild winter that treated plants kindly, Ignosh said.

“If you have a warm winter that stays warm, it doesn’t seem to be a problem,” Ignosh said. “But if you have a warm stretch in the winter, followed by severe cold, sometimes you can see ‘burns’ on leaves.”

Plants that stay dormant - that is, slow their growth rate - in the winter are more apt to thrive until spring, she said. Unchanging weather, whether warm or cold, aids in that process.

Due to steadily mild weather this winter, trees and plants in the Valley fared much better than the year before, she said. Abrupt changes in temperature, said Ignosh, stress plants.

Mild winters, however, have one drawback, say landscapers.

“We experienced more of an insect problem,” Shreckhise said. “Cold kills a lot of insects, but, generally, a warm winter is followed by more insects. It’s something to watch for.”

## High Hopes

Buoyed by good outdoor weather in recent months, landscapers expect plenty of business. A broad need for their labor is clearly there, they say.

“Demand is great,” Newberry said. “There are a certain amount of retirees here, and they want work done.”

The market for landscapers is apparent to anyone who follows advertising, says Shreckhise, who adds having greenery to trim fills personal needs.

“There are definitely more full-time nurserymen, and the good ones stay busy,” he said. “Nowadays, people don’t take their homes for granted.”

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