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Autumn arboriculture

The one thing we can count on in Colorado, each year is different. In 2008, we endured oppressing summer heat. July 2008 was the third hottest on record. There were 24 consecutive days over 90 degrees. Rainfall has been somewhat variable, but most locations were fairly wet in the spring and early summer. In fact, June 2009 was the second wettest on record with data back to 1872.

Spring's moisture and lower than average temperatures this summer have set us up for a lot of foliage diseases on our trees and shrubs. This is something we normally don't have to contend with. Our arid climate usually doesn't support fungal diseases on landscape plants. But what's normal about Colorado's climate? Nothing!

Late this summer, many trees with diseased leaves are already beginning to shed for winter. Diseased leaves on the ground and branches on the tree are a call to action. Bacteria and fungi (plant pathogens) will survive on both branches and fallen twigs as well as leaves throughout the winter. Debris, if left till spring, will be a pathogen source for 2010.

This year, it is especially important to clean your beds and lawns of fallen leaves and associated debris. This doesn't mean that you have to pick up the leaves when they fall as these leaves will be suitable for composting. But, it will be important that your leaves don't sit on the ground till next spring.

Once your landscape is bare of leaves, pruning needs will be much more evident. These needs include dead and broken branches as well as those weakened by plant pathogens. And, fall is the very best time to prune. Why? The trees and shrubs have the most stored energy in the wood than any other time of the year. Stored energy is important as this is the tree's defense against decays entering pruning wounds. Wood boring insects are dormant and settled in for winter. Freshly cut wood won't attract bark beetles and borers that come to infest and spread additional diseases.

Make time now to clean up your beds and lawn before the snow flies. Our Indian Summers are perfect for getting outside and completing those pruning projects. For large trees and projects too large to handle yourself, now is the time to schedule work with your tree care company (arborist). Book work now and it can be completed anytime during the fall and winter.

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