

Ag Column

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### Deicers Can Injure Plants

The cold, damp, and dreary days of winter are here. In the next couple of months, we will likely have some significant snowfall. With a forecast of snow accumulation, homeowners will get deicer for their driveways and sidewalks.

One of the main components of many deicers is salt. Many of these salts are different than table salt. Due to the salt content, deicers can injure landscape plants if misapplied. If available, you may want to consider a deicer without chloride. One option to consider would be calcium magnesium acetate, which is a combination of dolomitic limestone and acetic acid. This is one of the materials applied to roads and before a storm to prevent ice buildup.

When deicers are washed into plant beds or onto your lawn, they can build up to toxic levels when applied frequently. High levels of salt in the soil can injure plants. Salts can also damage plants by dehydrating the plant cells resulting in leaf burn

There are some considerations that will minimize the “salt” damage to plants in our landscapes and possibly our pets.

- Be careful to not dump deicers in clumps or piles.
- Try to keep the deicer from being washed down storm drains.
- Sand or cat litter can help by providing traction and are safe for pets and plants.
- Avoid dumping snow on top of plants next to a walkway or driveway.
- Consider salt-tolerant plants adjacent to a driveway or sidewalk.
- If you’re concerned about the volume of deicer you’ve used during the winter, then leach the soil with water in the spring.

Just to summarize, if possible use a deicer that doesn’t contain chloride. Regardless of the type of deicer you purchase, remember to use deicers sparingly and be careful not to apply near a storm drain, which can cause pollution of a stream, lake, or groundwater. If you are applying a deicer after snow has already fallen, make sure you clear as much of the snow and ice as possible before applying the deicer.

If you have any questions, contact your local University Extension Office at <https://utextension.tennessee.edu/office-locations-departments-centers/> or [ext.vt.edu/offices.html](https://ext.vt.edu/offices.html).