

## Q Should I mow my grass shorter before winter?

- Teton County

**A** The answer to the question is dependent on how much snow you get and how long it sticks around. The reason is snow mold. Snow mold is a fungal disease of turfgrass in Montana that is prevalent in areas that have a lot of snow and where the snow stays around for a long time and does not melt. Snow molds can be grey (*Typhula* spp) or pink (also called *Fusarium* patch) and they love cool, wet environments. Snow molds cause poor green-up in the spring and areas that look matted down, often with a growth of mold. The area can enlarge in the spring if the temperatures remain cool and there is timely rainfall. Once it warms up in late spring, the mold goes away, and oftentimes the grass recovers. If grass is cut tall before winter, it creates an even better environment for the fungus to grow. So, if you have considerable snow cover that lasts more than 60 days, mow it short (1" to 1.5"). However, if you are subject to "open winters," where there isn't much snow cover, keep the grass tall (3"), so that the grass will insulate the crown of grass roots, keeping them from getting too much frost winterkill.



## Q I have heard that you can paint the trunks of trees white to keep them from getting sun scald. Can you use white spray paint?

- Silverbow County

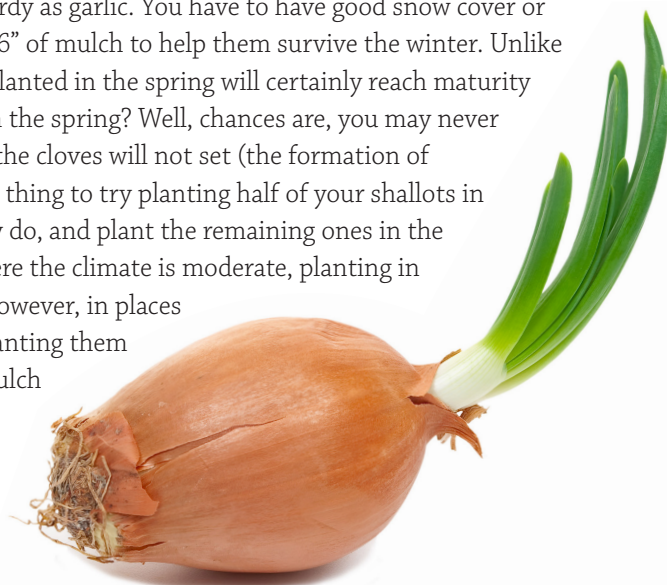
**A** We definitely recommend protecting your young trees and any smooth or dark-bark deciduous tree trunks in the winter from sun scald. However, I don't recommend spray paint. Sun scald and bark cracks on the west and south sides of the trunks of susceptible trees are caused by warm and sunny late-winter events, where the sun can bake the vertical surface of the trunk, causing the cells to start to metabolize. When a cell metabolizes after dormancy, it brings in water. On those bright sunny February and March days, the nights often drop to single digits, or worse, below zero. When that happens, the water in the cells freeze, and the cells are destroyed. If enough of the cells are compromised, the bark often cracks or sloughs off and this is where we see the injury. In Extension, we recommend wrapping susceptible deciduous trees or painting them with only white latex paint. Spray paints are not latex and can damage the tissue on the tree. Therefore, it is not advised.



## Q I always plant my garlic in the fall. I want to try growing shallots. Are they planted in the fall also?

- Gallatin County

**A** Shallots aren't as hardy as garlic. You have to have good snow cover or mulch them with 4-6" of mulch to help them survive the winter. Unlike garlic, shallots that are planted in the spring will certainly reach maturity by fall. Garlics planted in the spring? Well, chances are, you may never get good sized garlic, or the cloves will not set (the formation of cloves). It may be a good thing to try planting half of your shallots in the fall and see how they do, and plant the remaining ones in the spring. In Bozeman, where the climate is moderate, planting in the spring works well. However, in places with shorter seasons, planting them in the fall with lots of mulch may make more sense.



Do you have Master Gardener questions? Send them to: [extensionmagazine@montana.edu](mailto:extensionmagazine@montana.edu), subject: Master Gardener.

## Q When and how should I plant spring-flowering bulbs? – Gallatin County

**A** Spring-flowering bulbs such as tulips and daffodils should be planted in the fall, usually in September or October. Planting in the fall will allow the bulbs to establish their root system before winter so the plants will be ready to grow as soon as temperatures warm in spring, giving them a head start.

The second reason to plant spring-flowering bulbs in the fall is that the plants have a chilling requirement (i.e., a certain amount of time in the cold for them to initiate flowers). Without the cold, the bulbs will produce plants, but not flowers.

When planting spring-flowering bulbs in the fall, be sure to add complete fertilizer and organic matter into the planting bed if the soil needs it, which is best determined by having the soil tested. Bulbs can be planted with a tulip-bulb planter for individual bulb planting or in masses by digging out a larger shallow pit for several bulbs to be planted together. The depth at which to plant the bulbs depends on the species. Plant hyacinth bulbs about six inches deep; tulips about four inches deep; narcissus about three inches deep, and crocus about one to two inches deep. The general rule of thumb is to plant the bulbs two to three times as deep as they are tall; plant slightly deeper in sandy soils, and a bit shallower in clay soils.

Soak the soil to a depth of six to eight inches after planting. If you live in an area with less snow cover, mulch the ground after the soil freezes to keep the soil from thawing and refreezing again, which can cause damage to the bulbs. As soon as spring emerges, remove the mulch and enjoy your spring flowers.

## How is a cord of firewood measured?



*Peter Kolb is the MSU Extension Forestry Specialist. He heats with firewood, and manages the Forestry Program based in Missoula.*

Firewood can be referred to in different measurements. Learning terminology can help with decisions when gathering, buying or selling firewood.

**Full cord:** a full cord, or cord, is a tightly-fit together stack of wood that measures 4 feet deep, 4 feet high, and 8 feet long. Its volume should be 128 cubic feet.

- The amount will vary based on size of each piece and stacking method, with most cords averaging 85 cubic feet and remaining volume being air/space between the pieces). Even though a cord is the standard measurement, most firewood isn't sold in 4-foot-long pieces for burning in homes.

**Half cord:** a half cord of wood measures 4 feet deep, 4 feet high, and 4 feet long. It may be helpful to envision a half-cord size cube of stacked wood in the bed of a pickup truck to estimate a measurement.

**Face cord:** a face cord is a stack of wood 4 feet high and 8 feet long, while the depth of the stack is less than 4 feet.

- On average, a face cord length of firewood is 16 inches, which is one-third the depth of a full cord, and a reasonable length to fit in a woodstove. Some face cord lengths are 24 inches, or one-half the depth of a full cord. Clarify average length prior to purchase.
- Other terms for a face cord can include 'stove cord,' 'furnace cord,' or 'rick.'

**Thrown cord:** a thrown cord, or loose cord, is a rough measurement of wood thrown, not stacked. A loose cord's volume should still equal 128 cubic feet, and may take up approximately 30 percent more space than a stacked cord.

Be aware of wood sold by names like pile, truckload or pick-up truck load, as size can vary greatly. When purchasing, inspect firewood in person, and take a tape measure. Firewood value can also vary based on type of wood and if the wood is green, and unseasoned, or already split and dried.

Have a question for Ask Steward? Please send it to: [extensionmagazine@montana.edu](mailto:extensionmagazine@montana.edu).

