Protect your plants during home renovations

Source: Rick Durham, extension professor, Department of Horticulture

Warm weather brings out the renovators in many of us. New sidewalks, a new deck or porch, new windows, even an addition to the house often happen while the weather is warm and dry. While your home may glow under the extra attention, your plants and trees might take a beating from workers, materials and equipment.

Workers can trample plants without realizing it. Even taking out old trees can damage plants beneath them if it’s not done carefully, not to mention removing the shade those understory plants might require. While some plants can survive abuse like this, it’s always best to take precautions before the work begins.

If you’re having a new roof installed or your house painted, often just covering the plants with a sheet can protect them from toxic chemicals or wayward materials falling on them. Sheets are light enough to allow light and air in. If your plants are particularly delicate, you can set up a temporary scaffold to hold the sheets.

Root damage often happens from heavy machinery, which can compact the soil. Also, getting machinery into a yard with mature landscaping can sometimes pose problems. Always discuss this with your contractor well ahead of the work commencing. It may be necessary to prune plants prior to the work beginning. This could even entail pruning the roots of some plants. Sometimes you might have to remove an entire tree or shrub to allow large machinery to enter the property. A certified arborist can help ensure that these tasks are done correctly. If the plant is too large to be moved, you can cordon it off with stakes and fencing. Try to protect as much of the area around the tree as possible from traffic to avoid damaging the root system.

If you have vines that will be in the work area, either tie them out of the way or, if they’re self-attaching like English ivy, cut them back. They’ll regrow.

You can dig up smaller plants and bundle their roots in burlap. If you keep the burlap moist, they can survive that way for several weeks. If you need to move larger plants, it’s best to bring in professional help to lift the shrub or tree and heel it into a prepared bed out of harm’s way.

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