

# CONSERVATION *Journal*

*A Conservation Education Initiative of Tri-County/City Soil and Water Conservation District*

## Snow ... it's not so bad

*Ellen Schwartz, Administrative Professional*

Here in central Virginia, we've experienced a lot of snow lately, and to say it has not been disruptive, would be an understatement for those of us who still have to walk our dog or get to work. Just navigating the distance between the car and the back door can be a challenge when ice is included in the mix. There are, however, many benefits of snow, so I'm looking on the bright side of the white landscape blanketing our area.

Snow is absolutely important for the health of our soil and groundwater supply. Without it each year, the lush green grass, tall corn, and thick soy beans would die. Water is important to all life forms, including plants. Once it melts, snow guarantees a fresh supply of water to the soil. Without this water, we would be without crops, plants, and trees.

Another major benefit of a good snow cover is that it



functions as an excellent insulator of the soil. Without snow, very cold temperatures can freeze the soil deeper and deeper. This could lead to damage of root systems of trees and shrubs.

The insulation effect of snow also helps protect perennials, bulbs, and ground covers from alternating freezing and thawing cycles. Without snow, milder temperatures and the sun could warm the soil surface, leading to damage from soil heaving, which can break roots and dry out plant parts. Snow

also helps conserve soil moisture over the winter.

There are also human benefits from a good snowfall. Many trees and shrubs ordinarily overlooked in winter's drab color pallet are more visible. Trees and shrubs with ornamental bark, like the red twig dogwood or river birches, look more brilliant. Evergreens look greener, especially when dotted with bright red cardinals.

We can rest, if we let ourselves ... pretend to hibernate. Many of the

usual demands of daily life somehow fade into winter's chill, and looking outside at the magical world of fairy-dust snow and architectural hoarfrost is somehow comforting when we're inside all warm and cozy. We can also use this quiet time for reading, enjoying steaming coffee or hot chocolate, and while doing so we may use this time to reprioritize the pieces of life that are most important.

Another benefit is that we get the chance to be kids again if we want to: sledding and making snowmen, snow forts, snow angels.

Oh ... and for me, winter is the perfect time to write. So while I cozy up with my spaniel, blanket, and laptop to write, I am grateful for winter and the opportunity to slow down and ponder the really important things in life.

Enjoy the snow ... it will be spring before we know it.



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