

PROTECTING YOUR LANDSCAPE PLANTS FROM FREEZE DAMAGE

The first freeze of the season is not usually the last one, so be prepared for it to happen again. Many plants and shrubs will survive, even though they appear to be dead, and will come back from the roots at the advent of warm weather. It is important to protect the area around the base of marginal plants with hay or pine straw. As soon as the danger of frost is over, remove the mulch so that it does not touch the stems or trunk.

If you do not have room in your garage for all of your tender container plants, move them close together near your house and cover them with a blanket or tarp. If the freeze is severe, placing a 60 watt light bulb under the tarp is helpful.

When using plastic tarps, be sure that the plastic does not touch the foliage. Brooms, rakes, ladders, etc., can be used under the tarps to raise them. If using plastic tarps, remove them as soon as the danger of frost is over.

Some people wrap the branches of trees with old fashioned Christmas lights. It does provide a little heat, and it's very pretty!

When the weather seems to be getting warmer, take a stroll around your property and assess the damage. For trees and shrubs, if they look dead, scratch a branch with your fingernail. If you see green, it has survived. If you don't see green, scratch a little closer to the main trunk, and if no green appears when you get to the trunk, it may be dead.

But don't be too hasty to take out the "dead" ones. It is possible that many will come back from the roots. If you don't see new growth by May, it's probably lost.

Now is the time to remove the wilted and blackened leaves from perennials. And of course, the dry and crisp ones, too. Many perennials may have died down to the ground, but they, too, may come back from the roots. While there should be no major pruning right now, the slimy, frozen foliage can harbor bacteria, fungi and insects, so it needs to be cleaned up.

Don't prune hydrangeas now. They always look dead during winter when they are, in fact, setting buds for next year's flowers. You'll know next spring where and if to prune. Lantana, too, looks dead in winter, but it should be ok come spring.

Hold on to this thought,----plants that succumb to the freeze make room for new and different ones in the spring.