

Before and After the Cold

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With all of the cold weather that we have had so far there is a good chance some of us will have a freeze or two this winter. If a freeze does occur there are precautions that can be taken to protect sensitive plants and things to do after a freeze for any plants that may have been damaged. The good news though, is that we usually get plenty of warning before a cold front hits.

Here are some suggestions of things to do before a freeze hits!

- Turn off your irrigation timer!! If your sprinklers turn on and then off (either just before or during the freeze) more damage will occur than if the irrigation had never turned on at all.
- Water the entire landscape with an inch of water a day or two before the freeze is forecasted.
- Make sure sensitive plants (actually all plants for that matter, will benefit) are mulched with a two to four inch layer of mulch. The only exception to our mulching rule is for citrus. Just make sure the mulch is at least six inches away from the base of the trunk.
- Young citrus trees can be protected by quilts and blankets or placing a mound of soil around the base of the trunk (this is called banking.) Just make sure the soil is up over the graft. If the weather warms up the next day remove the mound of soil from around the trunk.
- Spray sensitive plants with seaweed or kelp a day or two before the freeze arrives. Spray both sides of the foliage until it drips off.
- Move containerized plants into the garage or house. If they must stay outside, move them together, pile mulch around the containers and cover the entire group with blankets or quilts. (Containerized plants should also be watered well before a freeze.)
- When a hard freeze is forecasted you can place a light bulb or Christmas lights underneath the cover. Just make sure that none of the bulbs come into contact with the covering.
- If plastic tarps or sheets of plastic will be used, build a structure with wood or PVC to support the plastic up above the foliage. Secure the plastic to the ground so that the wind won't get underneath.
- To use irrigation for cold protection it must be turned on just before the temperature hits 32 degrees (like around 34 degrees) and it must run continually until the temperature come back up above 32 degrees (like around 34 degrees again!) This could result in the irrigation running for a number of hours - non-stop. The danger of using this method is that if for some reason the system shuts off (like a power outage!) before the temperature is above freezing then more damage could be done than if the irrigation had never been turned on in the first place!

Here are suggestions of things to do for damaged plants after a freeze!

- Delay severe pruning until new growth appears in the spring. This will guard against any live wood accidentally being removed.

- Dead, unsightly leaves may be removed as soon as they turn brown. Just pick them off.
- Though many tropical plants may get killed back down to the ground (but will re-sprout from the roots in the spring) some may be totally killed – roots and all. If you want to replant again in the spring make sure that you do not replant it in the same spot again! Some locations that will provide tropical or tender plants with some cold protection include under trees (this is not an option if the plant requires full sun), near fences or tall plants, or on the south side of the house.
- Spray any damaged plants, with foliage present (including turf) with at least four weekly applications of fish emulsion and seaweed.

This is a good list to cut out and file away since we never know until after winter is over if we will get any freezes or not! If we could make it through the rest of the winter not getting any colder then we have been so far then I will be happy but then, that's just me.