



Gardening Uncovered: Treating Cold Damaged Plants

By Jason Aguilar



This winter has been anything but predictable. After the recent freezes, many yards are looking a bit brown, you can see that the cold has changed beautiful green foliage into dingy brown. Depending on a plant's hardiness level, it can withstand a bit of cold.

Perennials and tropicals can withstand a few cold temperatures, what damages them are the freezing temperatures. Light frost may be tolerable, only causing minor damage. Hard freezes are concerning because they freeze water that plants are holding in their cells which causes dehydration and damage to these cell walls. This damage results in the plant thawing too quickly as temperatures rise and this is what kills the leaves and stems leaving them looking brown and dead.



If your plants took some damage, even though they were covered, just remember that your goal is to try and reduce the damage. Next time we are in for cold temperatures, you will know to double or triple layer your blankets. The colder the temperature, the more layers you will need. NEVER use plastic to cover plants.

Don't fertilize too soon. Fertilizer will encourage new growth; if there is still a chance of frost, that could cause more damage. Wait to fertilize until the last chance of frost has passed. This will help speed the healing process.

It is very tempting to prune the brown, dead leaves and stems, but wait until Spring. Pruning too early can leave the plant vulnerable to more damage. The dead leaves and stems act as insulation protecting the plant against further damage. Once the threat of frost has passed and temperatures are warmer, it is time to prune. The University of Florida suggests scraping the bark with your fingernail. If the bark is a black or crown that means it has been cold-injured. They recommend waiting for new growth to start to be certain.

Once Spring is here, you will easily see where the new growth is starting and can prune up to that growth. This will ensure your plants come back healthy and strong. If you have questions, give us a call or stop by, our professionals can help you determine the best course of action for your yard.

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Sources: <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/weather/treating-cold-damage.html> Accessed 02/04/22

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