



GARDENING BY THE MOON

Extended Freezing Temperatures and your Plant Materials

Submitted by

Dr. Robert E. Moon

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Homeowners, extended freezing temperature damages or kills plants, even plants that are more adapted for our area. Currently, temperatures have been below freezing for over 48 hours and the projection is for 5 or more days for this freezing weather to continue. From past experience, there will be plant damage but this will need to be determined in the spring or summer. The best situation is to not panic if you see brown plants. Many can and will leaf back out in the spring. The cold weather dehydrates the plants or bursts cells. As soon as temperatures climb and the temperatures are to stay above freezing, you will need to water everything thoroughly to re-establish moisture. If a plant has freeze damage it often looks like it has melted. The leaves have the appearance of water-soaked tissue and tissue turns black or brown. The freezing temperature causes the cells to burst and leak water as they warm up giving this appearance.

There are certain varieties of plant materials in landscapes that will sustain freeze damage but the extent of damage will not be fully known until spring and summer. Ground cover such as Asian jasmine will turn totally brown but can recover in the spring after it has been cut back. Shrubs such as holly can have freeze damaged growing points but with some pruning these plants will recover. Most hardy perennials can be cut totally back in the spring to encourage new growth. If annual color is affected, this will be known shortly after freeze ends. Large landscape trees such as live oak can sustain damage but damage might not show up for months. Damage will cause the bark to pop off tree trunk.

It is my recommendation to wait until plants start to recover before doing any plant removals or major pruning on plants.

I know there are questions about covering plants for protection but when there is a long period of freezing weather, this has very little affect. It can help during a shorter period when the covering can be removed during the day and temperatures climb above freezing.

Unfortunately, the bottom line is that there probably will be plant damage and some replacements needed.