

FACT SHEET: PROTECTING YOUR LANDSCAPE DURING AND AFTER COLD WEATHER

A “Personal” Message from Your Favorite Ornamental

It’s no secret, the cold weather is here. Unless you’re a landscape gambler, you may want to heed the advice Lynn Barber, Florida Yards & Neighborhood Agent with the Hillsborough County Extension, has to offer for proper care of your ornamental plants.

Barber has adapted her advice from *Cold Protection of Ornamental Plants* by Dewayne L. Ingram and Thomas H. Yeager and presents it from the perspective of the ornamental plants in question.

“There are many ways you, homeowner, can protect me, your favorite ornament plant, from cold damage this winter. Let me count the ways!

“First and foremost, remember principal #1 of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™. That rule is right plant, right place. As a cold sensitive ornamental plant, I should be planted in an area where air flows freely and does not settle, like in low areas. You can easily protect me and my kin from winter winds with the use of screening, fences and landscape design where multiple plants are located strategically for protection. Well drained soil is important because it enhances my root growth and stability. Landscape plants should be fertilized in February, May, August and December in south central Florida. I need less fertilization in the fall because my nutrient intake is small that time of year.

“If you planted me in a more shady location, I will become dormant earlier in the fall and stay that way until later in the spring. You can reduce the cold injury I will suffer if I’m planted under a tree canopy because the evening temperature is higher. My shade thriving plant friends have less moisture loss than my full sun loving plant buddies. And, remember that sun loving plants living in shady conditions are less cold tolerant.

“Second, avoid doing things that encourage new plant growth because my new growth is more prone to cold damage. So, don’t prune late summer or early fall. It will alter my hormone balance resulting in a growth flush. As a healthy plant, I’m less prone to cold damage and more resistant to insect damage or disease.

“Third, having slightly moist soil helps me because it releases more heat than dry soils can. Because of this, hand watering the ground beneath me will help. You will, however, damage my root system if you allow for long term saturated soil.

“Fourth, maintaining a three-inch layer of mulch after it settles helps regulate soil temperature and will protect my roots.

“Fifth, plant coverings are a frost protection versus cold protection. Covers can be cloth sheets, quilts or frost/freeze cloth. These must be removed during daylight. Frost/freeze cloth, however, can remain in place for several days as air and light flow through the cloth. Plastic is NOT a good choice because it transfers the cold onto me. The cover must extend to the ground to capture heat and provide wind protection. Please

keep the cover off me and over a frame of some sort. If the cover touches me, the freezing temperatures will transfer onto me at the point of contact.

“Sixth, post-freeze; please check to see if I need a drink. My leaves could be losing water while frozen water remains in the soil. Applying water to the soil will provide a thaw and give me a drink.

“Seventh, delay pruning post-freeze until you see my new growth and after the risk of future freeze passes. Then prune beyond the point of my black or brown coloration.

“If you have more horticultural questions, call my friends at the Master Gardener Help Desk at the Hillsborough County Extension Service, located in Seffner: 813-744-5519, Extension 7. There’s also a lot more gardening information available on the web at <http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu> and <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

“Lastly, thanks for caring for me.”