

FACT SHEET: Ten Tips to Protect Landscape Plants from the Cold

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#1: Make it right - Right Plant/Right Place. This Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principle takes the following into consideration: sun/shade, wet/dry, mature size, soil type and pH. Cold sensitive ornamentals should be planted in an area where air flows freely and doesn't settle, like in low areas. Use screening, fences and landscape design where multiple plants are located strategically for protection. Well drained soil enhances root growth and stability. Plants in the shade become dormant earlier in the fall and stay that way until later in the spring. You can reduce the cold injury the plant will suffer if you plant it under a tree canopy because the evening temperature is higher. Shade thriving plants have less moisture loss than full sun loving plants. Sun loving plants living in shady conditions are less cold tolerant.

#2: Avoid it – Don't encourage new plant growth because it is more prone to cold damage. Healthy plants are less prone to cold damage and more resistant to insect damage or disease. Landscape plants should be fertilized in February, May, August and December. They need less fertilization in the fall because their nutrient intake is smaller that time of year. See pruning comments under # 9 below.

#3: Water it - Slightly moisten the soil. Moist soil releases more heat than dry soil. Hand watering the ground beneath the plant helps. See #8 below on watering the plant.

#4: Mulch it – Maintain a three-inch layer of mulch after it settles. This helps regulate the soil temperature and protect the plant roots.

#5: Cover it – Plant coverings are frost protection versus cold protection. Covers can be sheets, quilts or frost/freeze cloth and should be in place before the sun goes down. Other than frost/freeze cloth, the covers must be removed during daylight. Frost/freeze cloth may 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 the plant. You can, however, put plastic on top of the sheet or quilt during windy freezes or very cold nights. The covering must extend to the ground to capture heat from the soil and provide wind protection. Make a frame over the plant you are covering; then place the covering on top of the frame. This way, nothing touches the plant itself. A cardboard box large enough to fully cover the plant works also.

#6: Light it – Even though you have covered your plants, an additional source of heat may be needed. Christmas tree lights (not LED) or a light bulb may provide enough heat to protect your plant from freezing.

#7: Move it: Container plants can be covered to the ground or grouped together and covered. They can also be moved onto your lanai or front porch close to the house. Your garage may

will be 10+ degrees warmer than the outside temperature which is another option for plant storage during freezing temperatures.

#8: Wet it - Post-freeze, provide a drink. Check to see if your plant needs water. The leaves could be losing water while frozen water remains in the soil. Applying water to the soil will provide both a thaw and water your plant at the same time.

#9: Leave it? To prune or not to prune: Pruning alters the hormone balance resulting in a growth flush. There are two options on pruning. The 1st is to delay pruning post-freeze until you see new growth and after the risk of future freeze passes. In our area, that is generally February 15th. Then prune beyond the point of black or brown stem coloration. The damaged plant material insulates and protects the live parts of the plant. The 2nd option is to prune all dead and freeze damage after the freeze. This makes it easier to cover and protect the plant if a freeze occurs before spring.

#10: Start it again...go back to # 1 and start over for the next freeze. Covering tropical plants in your landscape and those not hardy in zone 9a, our zone, may help those plants survive cold weather. Refer back to #1 above.

Most perennials are root hardy. While the foliage will die back to the ground, come spring, new shoots will appear and all should be right with your landscape again.

Visit or call the Hillsborough County Extension office for additional horticulture information. We are located at 5339 County Road 579, Seffner, FL 33584, (813) 744-5519. Master Gardeners are available Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. We can help!