



The Plant Professionals

Freeze Protection 3.0

First, let's put this cold weather event in perspective. Back in the '60s and '70s, we had wintertime lows in the 20's several times through most winters. In the 1980s, we had temperatures as low as 14 degrees, with several days in a row where temperatures never rose above freezing. So this freeze is relatively moderate. But what's the bad news? Since we've had very mild winters through the 1990s and 2000s, people have planted many more very tender, tropical shrubs, trees, and palms. And since this winter has been mild up to now, many plants are still growing and blooming, and their high metabolism rate makes them much more susceptible to cold damage (a good reason to turn off the sprinkler in late October). So what are you to do? Do what you can, and don't worry too much about the rest of it!

Things like roses, Indian hawthorn, dwarf yaupon holly, and ligustrums will not be bothered by this freeze, other than losing the newest, softest foliage. Unless covered, intermediate plants like blue plumbago, shrimp plant, and cape honeysuckle will look awful after this freeze, but will come back fine after trimming. Ixora, plumeria, bottle palms, royal palms, royal Poinciana (flame tree) will likely bite it unless heroic measures are taken to protect them.

Wrapping tall palms or trees like a lollipop or a Slim Jim is not likely to do much good, you would prefer to have a heat supply under that wrap, such as a heating cable used to protect water pipes, sometimes available at Grainger Supply. If you have a tall shrub to protect, too tall to cover, such as a plumeria or esperanza, consider cutting it back to a few feet tall so you can cover it.

Bags of leaves collected from your yard or a neighbors curb make good insulation for low, cold sensitive groundcovers and shrubs, or to protect the graft on your citrus trees.

Quilts, sheets, blankets, towels, rugs are good covers, plastic tarps or sheets help, corrugated cardboard is a good insulator. The main idea is to create a pup tent with the ground underneath radiating heat up into your tent, and the tent firmly anchored to the ground. One good way to anchor is a drained garden hose circled around the plant a few feet out, on top of the cover.

What have I left out? A whole world of information, impossible to put it all here. Feel free to call us here at either Gill Landscape Nursery location with your questions. And my seminars this Saturday Feb. 5th at 10:00 am & 2:00 pm, usually on Get Ready for Spring, will be revised to include more question and answer on how to deal with your freeze damage. Best of luck, and see you on the other side of this (you'll be o.k., really!)

James Gill