

Getting Your Garden Ready for Winter

A sudden freeze or cold snap following a relatively mild November and December may damage even cold-hardy plants. Here are some tips to help your plants will brave the low temperatures and mitigate root, foliage and flower damage.

- Water before a cold spell, especially plants under eaves. Water frozen in the soil will be difficult for plants to access. Providing liquid water will replenish moisture lost through from leaves, and mitigate winter burn damage. Be careful not to over-water.
- Mulch around trees and bushes, covering an area at least as wide as the branch spread. A 2"-4" layer of shredded leaves, straw, fine bark or compost helps insulate the soil and prevent winter "heave"--the process of freezing and thawing which can literally wrench plants and roots out of the ground. Do not pile mulch thickly up against the branches or trunk.
- In exposed areas with strong winds/winter sun, try wrapping the trunks of young saplings and smooth-barked trees with insulation, burlap or tree wrap up to the first branch to insulate against the cold. If necessary, use wind screens or fabric wraps.
- Cover plants loosely with frost cloth (insulating fabric) to help trap heat and keep the foliage a few degrees warmer than the surrounding air. It also prevents moisture loss through the leaves, while still allowing penetration of some light and water. Remove cloth if/when the sun comes out in the morning.
- Anti-transpirant sprays may help prevent dehydration of evergreen shrubs in very windy/dry areas.
- Prune any dead, diseased or damaged branches. Weak or tall branches may break off in heavy wind and snow. Delay severe pruning until late winter/early spring.
- Protect plants in containers by either bringing them close to the house and wrap the pots with an insulating material (generous layers of blankets, burlap, or even bubble wrap) . If you have exceptionally tender plants in containers, move them to an unheated garage.

Access plant damage in spring. Sometimes seemingly dead plants will recover, in which case you can prune and begin fertilizing.