



Marion County
Board of County Commissioners

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PROTECT YOUR PLANTS FROM COLD WEATHER

Immediate Release

MARION COUNTY, Fla. (Dec. 22, 2011) – Though the weather this season has been mostly mild, the first week of winter is upon us and cold temperatures could be right around the corner. When you're turning up the heat and piling on extra blankets to keep yourself toasty, don't forget your plants! Read on for tips from UF/IFAS Marion County Extension Service on how to protect your plants from the cold winter weather.

Plan ahead when you plant. Plants that do best in central Florida can withstand average minimum temperatures of 10-20 degrees Fahrenheit. Check the recommended "hardiness zone" when selecting plants; central Florida's hardiness zone is 8-9a.

Plant tropical plants in the warmer areas of your yard. This could be along a fence that will protect them from cold winds or areas with good drainage to prevent frost from forming.

Don't mow too low. It's tempting to mow your lawn until it's nearly bald to minimize how many times you have to mow. But by not cutting your grass too short, you'll promote the growth of deeper roots that will increase the lawn's cold tolerance.

Before the freeze. The day before a freeze is expected, water landscape plants well. This will allow the soil to absorb more solar radiation and the heat will be reradiated at night, thus keeping the plants warm. Adding a layer of mulch also helps keep that heat around the root zone of the plants.

You can use sheets, quilts, black plastic bags and frost cloths for covering plants as long as the cover extends to the ground and doesn't touch the leaves. Leaves in contact with the cover can suffer cold damage, because the heat transfers from the leaves to the cold cover. Remove black plastic immediately the morning after the freeze; the cover absorbs heat from the sun, resulting in high temperatures that can damage the plant. You can also move plants indoors or inside the garage for warmth.

After the freeze. Avoid cutting frost-damaged plants back until spring. Pruning them now will result in new growth that will only get damaged again with the onset of another frost.

Types of frost damage. The damage resulting from cold weather may not manifest itself in some plants until months later. Symptoms may include water-soaked and wilted leaves, marginal leaf burn in evergreens such as hollies, splitting of the stem or bark, frost cracks running the length of the tree and desiccation (drying out) if the ground freezes within the root zone of the plant.

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