



ValleyCrest

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December 15, 2010

Re: December Freeze

In the last two weeks many parts of Florida have experienced record or near record cold weather. In many locations temperatures have dropped low enough to damage landscape plants. Temperature lows varied widely from North Florida to South Florida as you might expect but also coastal areas stayed warmer than nearby inland areas. What is surprising is that temperature lows and damage also vary from area to area within a landscape. So we can expect wide variations in plant damage depending on location. Low temperature is only part of the equation of plant damage since the duration of subfreezing weather is also important. Generally the longer temperatures stayed below freezing the greater the potential plant damage. Because of the wide variation in temperatures that have occurred it is not uncommon to see damage on plants on one side of a building that are undamaged on the other.

Turfgrasses: Areas of lawns exposed to freezing temperatures will likely lose color and remain brown until the return of consistent warm weather. Some long term damage might occur in St Augustine but generally Zoysia, Bermudagrass and Bahia lawns will recover with the return of spring weather. We have a lot of winter ahead of us so it is very difficult to predict what will happen next. If we get warm weather St Augustine will green up yet this winter however Bermudagrass, Zoysia and Bahia will be slower to green up and may indeed stay off color until spring. Fertilization is not apt to speed green up of any grass until consistent warm weather returns.

Annual color and succulents: Herbaceous plants are very susceptible to freeze damage and covering them may not fully protect these plants when temperature dip into the low 20's or stay below freezing for long times. Pansies, violas and snapdragons will likely recover with time but impatiens and other tender plants that were unprotected may not recover. Only time will tell.

Shrubs and Trees: Damage to woody plants is very species dependent and is going to be most severe on tropical plants that are planted north of their normal adaptation zone. Plants like ixora, hibiscus and crotons may show frost and freeze damage. This damage is characterized by the blackening of leaf tissue immediately after the freeze. These leaves will quickly dry out and turn brown. Part of the plant may remain green. Wait to see the extent of damage before



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pruning out dead wood. Some limbs may recover and produce new leaves. Pruning green material may stimulate new growth that will be very susceptible to later freeze damage. You should not prune any damaged material that still has green tissue under the bark.

Palms: Last year we saw a lot of cold and freeze damage to palms that were planted too far north of their normal adaptation range. Freezing temperatures produce immediate damage to flowers and leaves on some palms, it may also deform embryonic leaves that are just forming in the bud. These deformations may not show until spring or early summer when the damaged leaves emerge. If the bud of the palm freezes the palm may continue to grow for several months only to die in late summer.

ValleyCrest is here to help: Over the next few days and for the rest of the winter your ValleyCrest area manager will be evaluating specific damage on your landscape. They can give specific guidelines on management of damaged plants. We all need to be aware that winter is just starting. No one can say whether or not we will have a long cold winter or a mild one. We won't be able to fully evaluate the replacement needs of your landscape until spring. If anything this is Mother Nature's way of reminding us that freeze hardness is an important factor in selecting plant material in Florida.

Respectfully,
ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance

John Cornelius

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Branch Manager