

Freeze and Frost Protection for your plants here in Kings Point

Living here in Florida it is easy to forget we do indeed get frost and freezes, so it is important that we protect the lovely flowering tropical and sub tropical plants that we enjoy. The average number of freezes recorded at Tampa Airport is 3.3 days at 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below per year.

Here are a few ideas to help reduce the effects of frost and freezes:

- Flower beds can be covered with sheets or light blankets with plastic sheeting on the top. Using organic materials are the best choice.
- Potted plants can be laid carefully on their side under a tree and can be covered with **two** layers of freeze cloth, towels, sheets, or newspaper.
- Taller plants can be wrapped in sheets, blankets, burlap or commercial freeze protection cloth. Ensure whatever material used is fastened to the ground.
- Create a mini-greenhouse by covering the entire plant with plastic sheeting supported with poles and place a large, low wattage outdoor light bulb inside for heat or use strings of holiday lights.
- Cover entire planting with leaves, pine needles or hay (you will be responsible for removing what ever you use for cover)
- The *morning before* a predicted freeze, water plants. Wet earth will retain more heat than dry, so during freezing conditions do not water plants.
- Plants can be covered with garbage cans, flower pots or cardboard boxes with newspaper inside for insulation.

The majority of the methods listed above protect plants from the cold by keeping the heat in the surrounding soil or air around the plant with either a heat source or wrapping of the plant. Partial covering over the tops of plants does reduce heat loss somewhat; however, the paramount protection is given by covering the plant from the ground all the way to the top. Placing a plant under a tree or placing a hanging pot in a tree canopy does offer a little cold protection as the tree provides some cover. Keep in mind that windy conditions ensure the wrap is secure.

Irrigation water should not be used to try and protect plants, as home irrigation systems will not supply enough water evenly placed on the plant to protect them enough. It is not true that building a layer of ice will protect the plant from freezing and act as a blanket. In commercial settings, the heat generated by the freezing of water keeps the temperature inside the plant just above 32 degrees F. Irrigated plants are protected by the heat released when the water freezes. When dew freezes on the leaves of a susceptible plant, the leaf cells will be destroyed and the leaf will die. A plant that has ice or frost damage will *not* be protected by washing off the damage.

To avoid total ruin of the tropical and sub-tropical landscape in your yard, plant both resilient and sensitive plants.

The information for this article was provided by the University of Florida IFAS Extension office, Paul G. Woods of OLM, John Cornelius of ValleyCrest and Stormy Holloway of Sterling Management Services.

