

Winter Woes:

How to protect plants from the cold

by Melanie Albright

Fortunately, Florida winters are not as harsh as those in other places. We'll get a few brisk days and even freeze warnings here and there, but on most days a trip to the beach would not result in raised eyebrows. However, for those days and nights that we do experience weather that may threaten the vibrancy of our plants, it is important to take preventative measures that may save our important resources, namely time and money. Here are some helpful tips and tricks that can protect your plant life.

1. No pruning until early spring.

A hands-off approach to maintaining plant life in your yard during the winter will be more beneficial than will excessive pruning, which is generally unnecessary and potentially detrimental during this time. Plants' growth rates slow in the winter time because of the lower temperatures and shorter days, leaving more room for error when pruning. Keeping the extra tissue will actually prevent the plant from freezing to death. The best way around this is to leave pruning until early spring, ensuring that what is being cut back is needed to improve the health and look of the plant.



2. Replenish mulch beds.

Mulch has many benefits, from weed control to water retention to temperature insulation. During the winter, it is

important to lay a thicker layer of mulch down to keep plant roots warm and prevent them from freezing. Depending on how big or small the mulch pieces are, you'll want the winter layer to be from three to four inches, respectively. Be sure to leave one to two inches of space around the stems or bases of plants or they will rot.

3. Provide plants with cover for freeze warnings.

Covering plants with breathable materials, like sheets, newspaper or cardboard, can prevent freezes from doing undoable damage to them. Be sure to take the covers off first thing in the morning and to never directly cover plants in plastic, as this will damage them. If you deem it necessary to use plastic as a preventative measure, put a fabric sheet between any plant tissue and the plastic and again remove the cover immediately the next morning so the condensation build-up stays minimal.

These tricks can help the plants in your yard to survive the few cold weeks Florida winter offers as well as help them healthfully bloom in the spring. Taking these minor preventative measures can not only save your plants, but your resources too.



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