

## Care for Plants Affected by Freeze Damage

April 9, 2007



Last week, freezing weather covered most of the country and Greenleaf Nursery Company would like to take this opportunity to present some suggestions on how to treat any plants that may have been damaged at your nursery location.

First of all, it's impossible to predict how much damage has occurred to plants in different areas of the country. Freeze damage accumulates, so areas that went below freezing for long periods of time could be hurt worse than areas that got colder, but weren't below freezing as long. Also, not all the damage will be obvious as soon as the temperatures warm up; it may take several days before the full extent of the damage to plants becomes obvious.

Many plants had lush, new growth and this growth will be the most heavily damaged. All damaged plant tissue should be removed because diseases can start in the damaged tissue and move into the new growth as it emerges. Most freeze-damaged plants would benefit from a light amount of fertilizer and proper watering to help feed the plants and speed the recovery process. The best way to treat the plants will depend on the variety; here are some recommendations for the most common plants:

### Trees:

The best treatment for all trees is to strip (by hand) the damaged leaves and young twigs off the plants. All trees have secondary buds and these will begin flushing out once the damaged leaves and twigs are removed.

### Fruit Trees:

Most fruit trees bloom in the spring. If the trees haven't bloomed yet, then the blooms are probably damaged. For trees that have already bloomed, then the flowers were probably pollinated, but the young fruit was probably damaged and will most likely fall off the trees. All of the damaged leaves, twigs, flower buds and fruit should be stripped from the trees.

### Landscape Shrubs

Slow-Growing Shrub varieties such as Althea, Lilacs and Viburnum: low-growing shrubs should have the damaged new growth stripped off. Try not to cut these plants back because it will take too long for the plant to recover from being cut back before new growth will begin again.

Fast-Growing Shrub varieties such as Crape myrtle, Hydrangea, Spiraea and Weigela: Fast-growing shrubs should have the damaged new growth cut off to speed up the recovery process. These plants will respond quickly to shearing and begin new growth rapidly.

### Flowering Shrubs

Besides the lush, emerging new growth, the next part of the plants that is most susceptible to freeze damage are the flower buds.

#### Spring-blooming Shrub Varieties:

Spring-blooming shrubs that had flower buds present will probably lose the flower buds and won't bloom later this spring (or at best, very weakly). If the flower buds are black, then they are dead and need to be removed. If the flower buds are still green, then they should be left on the plants because they could still bloom. Even if the flower buds appear to be okay, there's a chance that as the flower buds open the petals could show some discoloration from the freezing weather.

#### Summer-Blooming Shrub Varieties and Re-Blooming Spring Shrub Varieties:

Summer-blooming shrubs probably have not begun forming the flower buds yet, so their blooming should not be affected. Some shrubs bloom in spring and re-bloom throughout the season, such as Endless Summer Hydrangea, Blushing Bride Hydrangea, Abelia and Weigela. These varieties may lose their flower buds this spring, but form more buds and bloom later this spring and early summer.

#### Conifer:

Most conifer should have minimal damage, if any. Conifer that had new growth just emerging, such as Spruce and Yews, will probably drop the needles and begin re-growth in several weeks. If this happens, then any twigs that are left after the needles have dropped, should be cut back to the healthy green part of the branches.

#### Roses:

Most shrub roses held up well through the freezing weather, but new growth may have been damaged. If so, cut off the damaged tissue and the plants will re-grow very quickly.

#### Ornamental Grasses:

The new flush of most ornamental grasses will probably need to be cut off. The growing point for ornamental grasses is down in the crown (at or below the soil surface) and probably wasn't damaged, so once the damaged tissue is removed, the plants will begin new growth very quickly.

#### Perennials:

Like ornamental grasses, the growing point for most of the perennials is in the crown of the plant, so once the damaged tissue is removed the plants should recover quickly.

#### Annuals and Tropicals:

All annuals and tropicals should have been moved inside heated areas. If not, then the plants are probably dead or have severe dieback.

Compounding the problems from last weekend, many areas are now predicting freezing weather for this coming weekend also. If your area is calling for freezing temperatures this weekend, move all damaged plant material inside for protection to prevent further damage to the plants!

These are guidelines that Greenleaf Nursery Company hopes will help you recover from this unfortunate turn of the weather.