

After the Freeze
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Warm temperatures in December created a feeling of spring. Welcome back to reality as winter returned in January. The effects of the freezing temperatures can be seen in area landscapes, from inland areas extending to the beaches. Questions are rolling in about can we still eat our citrus to what can we do about our damaged plants? The following should address some of the more common questions.

Citrus: Damaged citrus fruit should be easy to detect. Most cold damaged fruit will fall to the ground a few days following the freeze but others will stay on the tree. The easiest test is to cut one open and look at it. If the fruit look and smell good, they're fine. If you see white spots in the fruit, they were probably frozen and should be used as soon as possible. Grapefruit are the most cold-hardy fruit because of their thick skin followed by oranges, mandarin types, lemons and limes. Branches and twigs of citrus trees may also be damaged by the cold but the damage (dieback) may take months or years to show up.

Vegetables: Most cool season vegetables fared well with collards, carrots, onions, broccoli and beets coming through fine. Thinner leaved plants like mustard greens and sugar snap peas suffered some damage. Frost blankets did not save my tomatoes and peppers but other more industrious gardeners with double poly structures plus a light bulb for heat managed to save theirs.

Ornamental Plants: Don't prune woody plants that were damaged from the cold yet. Wait until the danger of freezes is past and then determine the severity of the damage. Once the weather warms up, new buds will break along the stems, especially towards the base where they were protected. Another technique to determine if the plant is still alive is to scrape the bark and look for green tissue below. When new growth emerges, remove the damaged wood just above a new bud. Eventhough some plants like plumbago, bougainvillea and hibiscus may look dead, they typically develop new growth along the stems or from the root system once warm weather returns. Be patient as this may take five to six weeks following spring temperatures. If you can't handle the brown leaves, perennial plants can be cleaned up a little if they look unsightly but don't cut these plants all the way back unless you're willing to give up a security layer for the plant in the event of another freeze. There are some tried and true perennials like cannas, firespike, and gingers that can be cut all the way to the ground and they will regrow this spring from the root system.

Palms: More tropical types of palms are at risk if they suffered cold damage. The University of Florida recommends removing cold-damaged leaves but do not prune leaves if they are still green. As soon as pruning is completed, spray palms with a copper fungicide plus a spreader sticker. Repeat the application 10 days after the first or use a different broad spectrum fungicide. Make sure to cover all the damaged plant material, pruning cuts and center bud with the spray material. Don't use copper more

than twice per year because of potential toxicity problems.

Lawns: Lawns are now a mix of browns and greens. Once lawns go dormant, mowing is not required unless you are doing this to trim cool season weeds. Leave the dead material in place for now as it will provide protection to lawns in the event of another freeze. Once we are out of danger from freezes, the damaged areas can be lightly raked to remove the brown.

Fruits: Deciduous fruit like peaches, persimmons, apples and pears should come through the freezes with little to no damage. Flowers or flower buds however are more sensitive. Take a wait and see approach to determine the extent of damage before pruning fruit trees. Strawberry plants can tolerate temperatures in the low 20's but flowers and fruit can be damaged at temps below 32°F. Bananas were definitely damaged unless they were protected. Banana plants will come back from the underground rhizomes but if the stems were damaged, don't expect any fruit this growing season.