



Care For Frost Damaged Plants

Once the threat of frost is gone, typically by March in Arizona, you can begin to trim away the damaged portion of your plants to prepare your yard for the new growing season.

The extent of frost injury to plants depends upon a number of factors including: species, age, health, soil moisture and location. Frost injures plants by causing ice crystals to form in plant cells, making water unavailable to plant tissues and disrupting the movement of fluids. Frost-damaged leaves appear water-soaked, wither and turn dark brown or black. Frost damage is progressive within plants. The softest tissues, like leaves and tender new shoots, experience damage first. Tougher stem tissue and buds down from the tips withstand more damage but are not immune if the cold temperatures are prolonged.

Proper Pruning

Before you begin to prune, allow for new growth to take place so the damage is clearly defined. Pruning too early can result in leaving some limbs which might continue to die back or the removal of portions of the plant which may have recovered. It is important to remember that the more severe the damage, the longer it takes for the older buds to emerge. Young, undamaged buds break and grow early. Buds in older parts of the plant need more warmth and other stimuli to begin to grow.

Limp, dry and brown leaves damaged from frost stand out easily; however, damage to stems and buds usually remains hidden. Once the spring growth happens, the site along the branch where buds break out marks where the frost damage stopped and live plant tissue exists. You now have two pruning options. If the condition of the plant allows, you can choose to do a light prune, like you did in the fall, and trim just the extremities of the plant or a hard prune which means



you cut the plant down almost to the base to stimulate all new growth. For a light prune, locate the first bud that is growing and cut just above it making sure the tissue that is visible from the cut is alive, usually a green color.

Extra care when pruning and proper cutting helps the plant by directing its growth initially, relieving later fix-up cuts that weaken the plant. Remember pruning is tough on plants. It removes leaves that make energy for the plant and the plant must expend energy to heal the wound, so prune only where it is necessary.

Source:

University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension
<http://extension.arizona.edu/>

