

Caring for Your Frost Damaged Plants

Once the threat of frost is gone, typically by March in Arizona, you can start trimming away the damaged portions of your plants to prepare for the next growing season.

The extent to which frost damages plants depends on several factors. These can include the plant species, age, health, soil moisture, or location. Frost injures plants when ice crystals form in plant cells, limiting water flow to plant tissues. Frost-damaged leaves appear water-soaked, withered, and dark brown or black. The softest tissues, like leaves and tender new shoots, experience damage first, while tougher stem tissue and buds further down usually withstand more damage but suffer if cold temperatures are prolonged.

Tips For Planting to Help With Frost Damage

- Choose native plants. Desert-adapted plants are more tolerant of our weather conditions than non-native plants are.
- Plant frost-sensitive plants in spaces with western and southern exposure since these areas get the most sun.
- Cover bare soil with an even layer of mulch to create a barrier between freezing temperatures, frost, and your plants.
- Cover frost-sensitive plants with cloth (such as old sheets or linens. Many nurseries carry frost cloth as well) before freezing temperatures arrive at night. Do not cover your plants with plastic of any kind! And be sure to remove the cover in the morning.

Proper Pruning

Before pruning, wait for new growth to take place as this helps define the damage. If you prune too early, you could leave limbs that might continue to die back or remove pieces that might have recovered. And remember, the more severe the damage, the longer it takes for older buds to emerge. Young, undamaged buds break and grow early, but buds in older parts of the plant need more warmth (and other stimuli) in order to grow.

Limp, dry, or brown leaves tend to stand out easily; however, damaged stems and buds can be harder to spot. Once you notice spring growth taking place, locate the spot along the branch where buds break out. This marks the end of the frost damage and the beginning of live plant tissue. You now have two pruning options. If there is a small amount of damage, you can perform a light prune, trimming just the frost-damaged extremities of the plant. You'll locate the first growing bud and cut just above it, making sure the visible tissue is alive and green. Or for major damage, you can cut the plant down almost to its base. This stimulates entirely new growth.

Taking extra care to prune properly helps your plants initially, limiting further cuts that could weaken the plant. Remember, pruning is hard on plants! It removes leaves that provide energy, so the plant has to work hard to recover. Prune only where it is necessary.

Source:

University of Arizona Cooperative Extension

<https://extension.arizona.edu/>



Examples of frost damage on different plants

