

Winter Care for your Plants

The recent cold spell we experienced was a real wake up call for gardeners in the Lowcountry. The unusually warm weather we had preceding the cold kept our plants from hardening off as they would normally have done; leaving them particularly susceptible to cold damage. While we may have gotten off easy this time with primarily cosmetic damage; we may not be so lucky in the future.

Sometime we just have to take a few extra precautions to protect our cold sensitive garden investments. PJ Gartin, Charleston County Master Gardener and garden writer recently addressed this subject in her column in the Charleston Post and Courier. PJ writes;

“Although uncontrollable variables such as wind, soil temperature and how long temperatures stay below freezing will affect the outcome, the following might be helpful.

Try to trap warm air around susceptible plants by covering them. If possible, perform this chore during the warmest part of the day, which is usually around 3 p.m. Materials such as blankets and plastic will work, but keep in mind that plastic conducts cold. If it touches the plant, expect to find freeze injury. Pine straw is also a useful insulator. Cardboard boxes are beneficial when placed over taller plants and, for added protection, fill the enclosure with pine straw and close the top.

Unless temperatures refuse to climb, uncover plants on the following day. Usually, the enclosure’s environment will be cooler than the next midmorning’s ambient air. If dangerous temperatures are forecast again, give the area time to warm up before sheltering again.

Dry, cold air and strong winds can desiccate plants. Regular watering protects them against leaf shrivel. Anti-transpirants such as Wilt-Pruf offer additional protection with a thin film that keeps moisture from transpiring from the leaves. However, application can be time consuming and spraying liquids in cold weather can be unpleasant. The best time to use such a product is on a pleasant day before the threat of an imminent cold snap.”