

## DEEP FREEZE 2009

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As I look back on my 9<sup>th</sup> January here in Charlotte County, this time of year has become fairly predictable as far as cold weather is concerned. It seems that almost every year during January, we have a frost or freeze. Our most recent cold snap was no exception. I did receive a good deal of frost/freeze damage in my yard this year which always looks bad and is somewhat depressing. However, this is generally a temporary condition and most everything eventually grows back - sometimes more than expected! How do you deal with our yearly cold weather in the landscape? I would like to offer some suggestions on how to beat, work around, or avoid cold and freeze damage to your landscape plants.

My first point will be to plan before you plant. Keep in mind that we are in certain plant hardiness

zones which gives a sense of what plants can survive in our area. For the most part we are in zones 9b to 10a. The closer you are to the water, the more chances there are of finding a sliver of warmer temperatures. Warmer spots such as this are known as "micro-climates". Micro-climates are places that are often warmer or more protected than the surrounding landscape. The shade provided by a tree can offer a reduction in cold injury by reducing the heat loss from the ground. However, plants that need full sun will of course not do well under these circumstances. Fences and buildings can also protect plants from frigid winds and some associated freeze injury. Hardiness zones are not completely exact and can vary a bit, but at least they give you an idea what plant is ideal for a spot, what plant is not going to make it,

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*Freeze damage on *Dypsis lutescens**

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and what plant may be marginal. Colder temperatures can almost always be expected in interior portions of our county.

Culturally, avoid fall pruning that may initiate a flush of new growth. This new growth will be tender and more susceptible to cold temperatures. Overall, healthy plants will better withstand cold temperatures. Pest management will assist with this as will proper fertilizer practices. When a frost or freeze warning is on, there are other methods of protection that can be completed. Any plant that is in a container can be moved indoors or temporarily gathered together outside, mulched to reduce heat loss from the containers, and covered with a cloth sheet or quilt. For container or in-ground established plants, arrange the covering so that it ex-

tends to the ground and does not touch the foliage. Leaves that touch the covering can be injured as heat is transferred from the foliage to the cold cover. While water is often used as freeze protection in nurseries and crops, it tends to be very impractical for the homeowner considering the timing required and water restriction issues.

After the freeze event, inspect the plants for damage, but don't jump to remove any injured parts. Truly dead leaves can be removed when they turn brown. Don't prune any woody parts out until you see new growth in the spring as you must allow time to be able to determine what is truly dead and what is still alive. Once damage has been determined, prune just below the dead portion.

So, don't get disappointed or disheartened! We have to face this weather each year and can deal with it with common sense and practical prevention. Otherwise, watch the local weather reports and have your supplies on hand. It will get warm again!

#### Resources:

- Ingram, D.L. & Yeager, T.H. (2003) *Cold Protection of Ornamental Plants*, UF/IFAS Extension Service.
- *Florida's Fickle Frost - Pinellas County UF/IFAS Extension Service*. [http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/publications/floridas\\_fickle\\_frost.pdf](http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/publications/floridas_fickle_frost.pdf).

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*For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email [Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com](mailto:Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com).*

*Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.*

**contact a  
MASTER GARDENER**  
on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 764.4340 or by email [Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com](mailto:Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

You can also visit them at one of our many **Plant Clinics** around the county:

<http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/PlantClinics.pdf>



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