



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

DECEMBER FREEZE

By Sharon Ross, Placer County Master Gardener

Q The December freeze and the weight of the snow that preceded it took a large toll on my garden. Now what do I do?

A Microclimates at work in your landscape impacted the extent of the damage resulting from our early December freeze. Areas of higher elevation in your garden will experience less damage because the heavier, colder air settled in the lower areas. However, thick hedges, walls, and solid fencing may have blocked the movement of cold air and if so, the surrounding landscape suffered more damage than in areas where the cold air freely circulated out of the area. Plants in poorly drained soil or those who were dehydrated were also more likely to suffer damage. Plants receiving high doses of nitrogen fertilizer in late fall were likely to have new tender growth, not yet hardened off in early December. This new growth was definitely susceptible to cold damage. On the flip side, older more established plants were less vulnerable to our December freeze. This is an excellent time to plan for the future by accessing what areas fared the best in the freeze and which suffered the most damage. Remember to consider microclimate location when planting tender plants next spring.

But what should you do NOW? Don't panic! What looks like a goner may NOT be lost; there is a strong possibility it will re-grow from the roots in the warmth of spring. If you are overcome with the urge to prune, remove only broken limbs and stalks. The damaged, ugly material still hanging on the plant does afford the roots some insulation if freezing temperatures reoccur. It is far better for the plant if you wait to prune until new growth begins; at that time you will know exactly what needs to be cut and what needs to be saved. Again if you must start trimming, check for plant life by slightly cutting into the stalk/bark. If you see a greenish tint, chances are the cambium is still growing and the plant is alive. If the wood is brown, black or slimy, it is dead.

Do NOT fertilize your plants; you do not want to encourage new growth. And fertilizer will not bring life to dead plants. Watering "wilted looking" cold damaged plants will not revive them. In summary, BE PATIENT! All is not lost.

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