

CHRIS' CORNER



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Cold Weather and Landscape Plants

Happy New Year! We are off to a frigid start! According to the news services, 90% of the country has experienced freezing temperatures. That's pretty amazing! Snow has been predicted as far south as Jacksonville, Florida. As I watched the news and listened to reports about freezing temperatures, the thought of plant survival entered my mind.

Cold injury varies with plant species, age, vigor of the plant and soil characteristics. Most of the damage that may occur from cold injury will not be apparent until new growth begins in the spring. If there is a mild spring, many people will not relate the visible damage to the extreme winter conditions.

Snow cover provides natural insulation that can help to protect root systems. The survivability of landscape plants will depend on the extent of root injury and death. The roots of plants are much less hardy than shoots. The soil itself is a good insulator and, in most winters, will provide enough protection for roots to ensure plant survival. Those roots that are killed are feeder roots since they are closest to the soil surface. The amount of damage will depend on root hardiness, depth of rooting for the species, soil texture, and the presence or absence of mulch.

Winter damaged plants are slow to initiate growth, may show signs of distorted growth, dieback of shoots and branches and death of flower buds and leaves. The options for dealing with injured winter plants are limited. Prune out dead portions of affected plants, provide the plant with water and mulch and don't add fertilizer. Be sure to provide a good growing environment to eliminate further stresses.

Be sure to get out and scout your landscape plants this spring for winter damage. Spring can't get here fast enough. Stay warm out there! Until next time, keep reading those seed catalogs!



Christopher Compton

