



Gardening by the Moon

January 2023 Newsletter



Navigating Freeze Events

By Dr. Moon

The recent arctic blast in December 2022 that hit Texas has created anxiety for many homeowners, property managers, community managers, and landscape maintenance professionals. Everyone remembers the damage from the last arctic blast, Winter Storm Uri, that caused so much damage to landscapes. Uri was far colder and more extensive than the freeze in December. This latest freeze storm will not cause the level of damage we saw with Uri, especially if you water as per the directions we sent out earlier. My advice, for now, is to be patient and give plants time to recover. In most cases, it will be spring before plants recover following leaf drop or spring cutback.

You might observe some of the following symptoms in plants due to “sudden temperature change” and plants not being acclimated to this condition:

- **Live Oak Trees** – Leaves will turn grayish brown, and leaves will fall off the tree earlier than the usual early springtime. This is not a problem for these trees since they drop leaves yearly. Fertilize these trees as per the following recommendation.
- **Dormant Trees** – Red Oak, Bur Oak, Chinese Pistache, Lacebark Elm, Cedar Elm, Ash, etc., should have no damage since most of these trees had already gone dormant before the arctic blast. Fertilize these trees as per the following recommendation.
- **Narrow-Leaved Evergreen Trees** – Conifers, Eastern Red Cedar, Juniper, and Pine trees will turn reddish from the cold. These plants will have extra needle drops now and in the spring. Do not be concerned about the reddish color. It will go away in the spring with new growth, and there should be no permanent damage. Fertilize these trees as per the following recommendation.
- **Broadleaf Evergreens** – Holly, Ligustrum, Magnolia, and other broadleaf trees can have brown spots on the leaves or brown leaves caused by the freeze. These leaves will drop off in the spring, and new leaf buds will replace old leaves. Some pruning may be required but wait until spring to do this pruning. These plants should recover. Fertilize these trees as per the following recommendation.
- **Palm Trees** – Palms may have burned fronds that must be removed, but most will recover from this freeze next summer. Fertilize these trees as per the following recommendation.
- **TREE FERTILIZATION RECOMMENDATION** – I do not expect healthy trees to have any problem recovering from this cold weather. The stress could further weaken old and weak trees going into the freeze. The best treatment for these trees is to fertilize in February with $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of turf fertilizer per inch trunk diameter spread evenly from the trunk out past the drip line of trees. This treatment will encourage new vigor when trees leaf out in the spring.
- **Shrubs** – Shrubs such as Holly, Boxwood, Ligustrum, etc., can have brown spots on the leaves and yellowing or brown leaves caused by the freeze. These plants should recover. These leaves will drop off in the spring, and new leaf buds will replace old leaves. Some pruning may be required but wait until spring to do this pruning. Fertilize in March to improve vigor.
- **Plants with Underground Rhizomes and Spreading Roots** – Dianella, Liriope, Ginger, Foxtail Fern, etc., will have burned leaves. These plants will survive. Cut back to the ground now or in March. Fertilize in March to improve vigor
- **Ground Cover** – Asian Jasmine, Colorata Euonymus, Honeysuckle, etc., will have burned yellow-brown leaves. These leaves will drop off, and new leaves will come out in the spring. Fertilize in March to improve vigor.
- **Ornamental Grasses** – These grasses should have minor damage since they were dormant. Cut back and fertilize in March.
- **Perennials** – These plants will have burned leaves. Just cut back in March.

- **Outdoor Tropicals** – Plants like Philodendrons will have brown leaves that can look water-soaked. Monitor these plants for recovery. If recovery is not achieved, replace in the spring.
- **Annual Color** – If the color looks water-soaked, it will not recover and must be replaced. However, if the color has brown leaves, they can recover by spring.
- **Cool Season Turf** – Ryegrass and Fescuegrass will turn yellow and brown but will recover rapidly from this cold event. Fertilize to encourage new growth.
- **Warm Season Turf** – If St. Augustinegrass was not completely dormant going into the freeze, it may have some damage but will recover in the spring. Since the Bermudagrass was going dormant, it should have no permanent damage. Fertilize in the spring to encourage new growth— lower mowing height before fertilizing.

Again, be patient and give plants time to recover. Fertilize in March to encourage new growth in plants.

Don't Commit Crape "Murder"

By Dr. Louie Gradilla

Crape myrtle trees are the darling plant of the south. They flower most of the summer, providing long-lasting white, pink, red, or purple blooms. Some varieties are determinate and will grow only 6 to 8 feet in height; some types are dwarf and plant as shrubs, and where there is room for height, some varieties will soar to 25 or 30 feet.

In many instances, the natural beauty of crape myrtles is limited when homeowners perform crape "murder." Crape "murder" is when you cut the tree back from the top, leaving stubs (see picture below). Crape myrtles are best grown as trees, and you should prune them as trees. **WINTER IS THE BEST TIME TO PRUNE CRAPE MYRTLES!**

Follow these guidelines when pruning crape myrtle:

- Remove low-hanging branches that interfere with walkways.
- Remove broken and dead branches.
- Remove crossover or rubbing branches.
- Remove sucker growth off the base of the trunk or on the trunk.
- Remove any branches growing into your home structure.

You do not need to prune old seed heads; they will fall off naturally, but crape "murder" will shorten the life of your tree.



CRAPE "MURDER"



CORRECT PRUNING



RESULTS OF CORRECTLY PRUNED CM

Additional Winter Tips for CM: Crape myrtles have overwintering insects and diseases that you can control by spraying thoroughly until runoff with Neem Oil. This product is a safe, non-toxic pesticide for your garden and landscape that is also friendly to the environment and still effective. Neem Oil is your friend and an excellent answer to all these concerns, and you can use it on all trees, shrubs, ground cover, and even in your garden. It means you can keep only one product in your garage for control of most insects, some diseases, and mites.

You can also control scale and aphids with Bayer Tree and Shrub Granular plant food and insecticide. For diseases, you can prevent powdery mildew and sooty mold with Daconil.

The beauty of crape myrtles is worth the effort to prune them correctly and control insects and diseases during the winter because they will enhance your landscape and offer you beautiful color throughout the summer.

Winter Pest Control

By Jennifer Hall

Most of us do not think about controlling insects, mites, and diseases in our plants during winter. But now is an excellent time to reduce those overwintering pests and diseases for next spring and summer.

First, clean up leaves and other debris from your yard. This debris provides a perfect place for pests to overwinter. Also, be aware of stacked firewood in your yard. It is another overwintering site for pests.

For the control of these overwintering insects, mites, and some diseases, excellent organic control is Neem Oil. Treat all your trees, shrubs, ground cover, and

perennials by spraying thoroughly. Spray several days before an expected rain event and when temperatures are above freezing. Apply at rates given on label instructions.

Neem Oil is an all-natural pesticide derived from the Neem Tree. It is safe to use on fruits and vegetables until the day of harvest. It is very safe for humans and pets.

This treatment will benefit you by reducing insect and disease problems during the spring and summer.

When Arctic Cold is Predicted!

In Texas, when temperatures fall below freezing for an extended period of time, the temperatures can damage tender plants that have not acclimated to the brutal cold. The best protection for these plants is to keep them from being dry going into this type of weather.

Recent rains may not supply an adequate amount of water. Provide extra water to all trees, shrubs, ground cover, vines, perennials, ornamental grasses, annual color, and turf (lawns). Additional watering is especially needed on all new plantings since they have a limited root system before cold weather arrives. All plants still use water in the winter. **Hydrated plants survive cold weather better because they have frost protection.** Water releases heat slower than plant tissue protecting plants from the cold. Moisture in the soil also traps heat and gives off heat to plants so they can stay warmer for a few days. This simple task can make all the difference in plant survival.

Water early and do not water after the cold arrives. **Make sure irrigation systems are off during freezing weather!**

During an extended freeze, you can also cover plants for extra protection. Use a fabric material, not plastic, if possible or affordable. Remove materials immediately once temperatures warm back up to prevent disease.

