

## IN YOUR GARDEN UNUSUAL WEATHER HARD ON PLANTS

Much of the Midwest has been blessed with an unusually mild winter so far. Very little snow has fallen to interfere with driving and the mild temperatures are in direct contrast to those of last year.

According to James A. Fizzell, University of Illinois Horticulturist in Cook County, what we humans consider nice may be very hard on plants which really need the vigorous winter. The mild weather through December and into January kept many plants from going completely dormant. Some, which had achieved dormancy in early cold spells, thought winter was over and broke dormancy. Crocuses bloomed. Buds of lilac and forsythia began to swell. A magnolia even popped out a flower.

We do know many of these buds were damaged or killed when temperatures suddenly fell back to normal. We won't know the full extent of damage to buds, branches and trunks until spring when plants try to leaf out and bloom.

Research has shown that sudden drops in temperatures causes much more damage than do very low temperatures themselves.

The lack of snow cover has an effect on plants too. Snow is an excellent insulator. If snow cover is heavy enough it can keep the ground frost free all winter. This year frost will probably go deep into the soil. Roots which are less temperature tolerant than tops of plants may be severely injured or killed outright.

There are some benefits from lack of snow cover. For instance, insects, which normally overwinter in the soil or plant debris protected by snow cover will have a tougher time standing the cold. (Insects normally exposed in winter can stand just about anything mother nature provides.) Also, soils subjected to repeated freezing and thawing tend to become more friable and in better planting condition for spring.

You can be of some help to your plantings by providing mulch to insulate perennials and roots of newly planted trees and shrubs.

Wrap the trunks of thin bark trees such as maple, ash or locust to insulate them from the warming rays of the sun. On days when the ground isn't frozen water evergreens under overhangs where they may not have received benefit of the December rains.

And, if you have evergreens exposed to winds and sun, spray with one of the wilt proofing anti-desiccants on a day when temperatures stay above freezing for several hours.

No matter what we mortals do our efforts are sometimes futile when compared with the forces of nature. But take heart. Each mild day brings us closer to spring and in only 10 weeks or so we'll be into planting season.

**James A. Fizzell, Senior Extension Adviser  
Horticulture**

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