

# Freeze Protection For The Landscape

Inevitably, at least once or twice each winter we in south Florida are threatened by freezing temperatures. The winter of 1985-86 was relatively mild with a very limited amount of freeze damage occurring in mid-January. The winter of 1984-85 will not soon be forgotten because of the devastating nature of the freezing temperatures. Unfortunately, up to now the winter of 1986-87 has shown similarities to 1984-85. Temperatures have remained above normal throughout the fall and early winter causing plants which would normally be dormant to continue active growth. As you might expect an actively growing plant is more susceptible to freeze damage than a plant which is dormant. There is really not much we can do to induce dormancy, particularly with subtropical plants. Therefore, we need to consider what can be done to protect these plants from freezing temperatures.

## WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE FREEZE.

Probably more can be done in the weeks and months before the freeze than can be done the day of the freeze. Here are some factors you might consider when attempting to have your landscapes as cold hardy as possible.

- 1) Proper site selection. Plant cold sensitive plants in more protected locations where frost is less likely. Use hardy plants in low areas and windy open locations.
- 2) Avoid excessive late season pruning. Heavy pruning may cause a new flush of growth which will be more cold sensitive.
- 3) Properly fertilize in the fall. Use an even analysis fertilizer for fall fertilization. Avoid the use of excessively high levels of nitrogen which will encourage late season flushes, however, provide adequate nutrition. A healthy well fertilized plant is more likely to survive than one which is poorly nourished.

## WHAT TO DO THE DAY OF THE FREEZE.

- 1) Covering plants. An effective method of protecting hedges and low to medium size shrubs is by covering the plant completely to ground level before the

freeze. The preferred materials are fabric or newspaper, plastic should only be used as a matter of last resort. It is important to tent the cover and avoid touching as much of the foliage as possible. Any foliage in contact with the cover will be frozen. Coverings should be removed as soon as possible the day after the freeze in order to avoid heat and moisture build-up which could be damaging.

- 2) Watering plants. Two types of watering need to be considered in freeze protection. It is advisable to thoroughly moisten the soil around landscape plants a day or two prior to the freeze. A moist soil will hold more heat and warm surrounding plants more than dry soil.

Watering during freezing temperatures is a rather risky method of freeze protection and should be well understood before being undertaken. Once a sprinkler system is turned on in an area during a freeze, it must remain on until the temperature is above freezing and all ice is melted from plants. Adequate water must be applied during this period and any wind will probably yield this method of protection useless. It is important to consider the consequences of watering before turning on the sprinklers.

## WHAT TO DO AFTER THE FREEZE.

- 1) Watering plants. It is important that moisture is maintained in plants after freezing temperatures. Dessication of foliage may occur if plants become too dry.
- 2) Pruning damaged plants. Wait as long as possible to prune freeze damaged plants. If possible, allow the plant to flush before pruning then prune out any dead wood. When it is necessary to prune shortly after the freeze, scrape the bark to determine whether a stem is dead or alive. If the stem is dead, the cambium which is normally green will be turning brown and water soaked. Trim no more than is necessary.

Maybe if we are lucky, you won't be covering plants or pruning dead limbs this winter. But, if so, it's better to know what to do if it's needed. ■



## Your Sand Man

E. R. JAHNA IND., INC.  
LAKE WALES, FLA 33859-0840  
(813) 676-9431