

The Rest of the Winter

Distribute 01-11-2018

The serious freeze we experienced forces gardeners to assess their landscape situation and plan for the rest of the winter.

The first issue to consider is the reality that we are likely to get more freezing weather. Review how well your freeze protection efforts worked and figure out what you will do different, if anything. One thing I need to do different is to provide a heat source for my lemon trees. I covered them well, but it is obvious that experiencing over 48 hours of freezing temperatures without let-up, and with lows of 22 degrees, requires that lemons be protected with a heat source.

I can compare my lime trees to the lemon results. Limes are more cold sensitive than lemons so I included a mechanic's light at the base of the trees under the covering. The limes with the mechanic's light show very little damage and the lemons are defoliating. My plan for the next freeze this winter will include new mechanic's lights for the injured lemon trees, so the stems don't freeze in addition to the leaf drop. Some hardware and building supply stores call mechanic's lights, "drop lights". They are easy to use and relatively safe as a heat source.

One covering strategy that worked as predicted and should be repeated was the application of a single sheet of insulate or a blanket over the cyclamen bed. The tactic also worked for protecting primula, pansies, dianthus, and alyssum.

The state of the winter color in you landscape is the second issue to consider. If you did not cover the winter annuals in your beds, the cold was severe enough that many blooms were frozen off. Snapdragons and most of the cool weather annuals will eventually return to a blooming state but you may want to rush the return to color in the garden by planting, pansies, cyclamen, alyssum, stocks, primrose from the nursery that are in bloom right now.

In the vegetable garden pull your frozen tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant. Plant broccoli, cabbage and other greens as transplants for a spring harvest. It is also the best time to plant onion transplants. In addition to the famous 10-15 mild yellow onion, nurseries have white and red onions. The bulbs will reach full size by June 1. Harvest the transplants for green onions to leave 6 inches open space between the onions that you want to grow to maturity.

About February 1, plant a crop of potatoes in a trench one foot deep. They will be ready to harvest about the same time as the onions. You can begin using the "new" potatoes as soon as the flowers appear on the potato plants.

Pruning is a big issue right now. Planting a new collection of color plants has more impact if all the dead foliage is removed from the landscape.

That being said, resist removing the frozen back lantanas, summer salvias, esperanza, fire bush, poinciana, duranta, cape honeysuckle and other root hardy plants until late in February for the benefit of the birds and other wildlife. The cover provided increases their success at surviving the winter.

It is especially important to wait before pruning citrus. It will not be clear until early spring which buds and stems will survive and which should be pruned.

Peaches, plums and other fruit trees can also be pruned in February. Valentine's Day is a good target for pruning roses. Visit plantanswers.com for diagrams for the recommended pruning patterns. Prior to pruning, watch for a warm spell this winter when temperatures are forecast to be over 45 degrees for 2 days. Take the opportunity to spray the fruit trees and roses with dormant oil. The action will reduce scale insects, mites, aphids and other pests that feed on the plants and carry diseases.