

Gardening Q&A

Distribute 03-04-2019

Q. We experienced temperatures of 25 degrees for several hours during the early March freeze. What will happen to our Florida King peach tree that had already bloomed and was setting fruit? Should we have tried to cover the tree and even use a heat source? How about watering the trees?

A. It will be affected. A portion of the fruit will freeze. If the temps stayed below freezing for 6 to 8 hours on 2 consecutive days, you will probably lose 90% of the fruit! If you had covered the tree perhaps a larger percentage of the crop will have survived. It is, however, very difficult to cover a full-size peach tree. Providing a heat source under the covering would have raised the percentage of the crop survival. Applying sprinkler irrigation to protect the tree from freeze damage only works if you start the sprinkling before the freezing temps arrive and can run it until the temperatures rise above freezing. There is no easy way to protect blooming peach trees from freezing temperatures.

Q. We were out of town during the recent cold spell so were not able to bring our potted-up tomatoes out of the cold weather and into the house. The plants were sheltered on the south side of the house and did not freeze. What does the exposure to the 2 days of temps below 40 degrees mean?

A. The exposure means that the plants have probably been hardened off and will stop growing at the rate they were growing before the freezes. Expect the cold to delay their ability to set and mature tomatoes. For an experiment obtain some plants from the nursery that were protected from the cold and compare their growth rate and production of fruit to you cold-retarded plants.

Q. Tell us about the rusty blackhaw viburnum. Our neighbor has one that has attractive white blooms on a v-shaped 10 ft. shrub right now.

A. The rusty blackhaw viburnum (*Viburnum rufidulum*) is an excellent landscape plant. The bloom in the spring is attractive and the berries that are produced in late summer are favorites of the birds. The plant grows to 15 feet in partial shade or sun and has excellent fall color. Like other viburnums, the deer do not eat its stems or foliage. Rusty blackhaw viburnum are relatively hard to root and slow-growing so are hard to find and expensive.

Q. Our carrot crop has been great this winter. Is there any deadline to harvest all the carrots before they decline?

A. You can count on the quality to stay high through March and even well into April if the temperatures stay mild. At some point pests will begin gnawing on the roots in addition to the roots becoming tough and gnarly.

Q. we did not cover our cyclamen to protect the plants from the freeze. It got colder than we expected, and all our blooms were knocked off. The foliage looks great but there are no flowers showing. Will they put out new blooms?

A. Check under the foliage for reserve blooms. If they made it through the cold weather, you can expect new blooms in a few days. If the cold was severe enough to kill the buds along with the flowers, there isn't much chance that new flowers will be produced before the hot weather arrives in April and the cyclamen starts to decline.