

Results of the Freeze

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Freeze damage varies from neighborhood to neighborhood depending on the state of the plants when the freeze arrives; the severity of the temperatures experienced; the period the temperatures were below freezing; and the success of your freeze protection efforts. Gardeners in the SA area experienced low temperatures of at least 22 degrees, and below freezing temperatures for at least 30 hours. Here is my report on freeze damage I have seen and expect under these conditions.

Most gardeners went ahead and harvested all their full-size tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant, determining accurately that the freeze was going to be too severe for the plants to survive. It appears that most of the winter vegetables fared well although the Swiss chard showed some damage. Greens with freeze burns should produce new leaves.

In the flower garden the cyclamen and primrose escaped with blooms intact, especially if you covered them with a sheet of insulate or a blanket. Snapdragon, alyssum, calendulas, stock, petunias and roses out in the open all had their blooms frozen. The foliage looks good on all but the calendulas and allyssum. Pansies and viola fared well. Cool weather annuals in containers close to the house did not show damage. The cool weather flowers will recover for an early spring bloom period.

Some cold periods will defoliate evergreen plants but at least in the City it looks like viburnum, boxwood, ligustrum, Texas mountain laurel, pittosporum, loquat and most other woody evergreen plants made it through in good shape. Mexican olive, anaqua, and Mexican honeysuckle were exceptions in my neighborhood. The species were defoliated by the cold. It also appears that the immature loquat fruit was frozen, I expect it will drop off the tree without any further development.

In the perennial garden, plumbago, ruellia, and lavender lantana quite often remain evergreen all year, but it won't be so this year, all will temporarily lose their leaves.

It will take some time to determine the full extent of damage on citrus, but it looks as if the satsumas, grapefruit, Changsha tangerine, navel oranges, calamondin, and kumquats were not damaged even if you did not cover them. With a heat source Mexican limes fared well. Covered Meyer lemons and limes without a heat source may lose their leaves. For defoliated lemons they still might produce some fruit in 2018, depending what happens in the next 2 months. If the limes are defoliated, you will go another year without fruit production.

It is obvious that the cold killed the foliage and stems of the summer salvias, poinciana, esperanza, thyralis, firebush, lantana, cape honeysuckle and duranta. You could cut them back to the ground now, but a better overall strategy may be to leave the freeze-killed stems in place for the rest of the winter, so they provide cover for wintering birds.

Considering the birds, if you are feeding them and you maintained the seed and suet levels through the week, you probably had lots of action. Insect eaters such as kinglets, orange-crowned warblers,

starlings, golden-fronted woodpeckers, Carolina wrens, curve-billed thrashers and mockingbirds went through several suet cakes. House finches, white-winged doves, goldfinches, and Inca doves used the seeds. Blue jays, cardinals, titmice, English sparrows, and Carolina chickadees used both the seed and suet. I know it is amazing to imagine, but the rufous hummingbird that is spending the winter in my neighborhood faithfully visited the sugar water feeder every day. On Wednesday morning my wife, Judy, rushed out a new feeder when it was clear that the existing feeders had all frozen solid. He survived the weeklong freezes.