

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Purdue Cooperative Extension Service – Hancock County

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Remember Winter? It's Back!

Greenfield- You don't have to be a meteorologist to appreciate how cold it has been over the past several days...How do you know when it is too cold?... Its too cold when you find yourself mowing the lawn while wearing coveralls and long johns instead of sunscreen as a cover-up. Perhaps a more scientific appreciation can be found from the National Weather Service, which indicates that on April 7 (Saturday) we set a record for the all time low for the daytime high temperature. While that sounds pretty significant (and it is) what is really of the greatest consequence to gardeners and farmers alike today is not the low temperatures but the run of unseasonably warm temperatures that preceded them in just the prior two weeks. The days of March 21 –April 3 saw daytime highs from 71-81 degrees with record daytime highs set on both the 13th and 25th. Needless to say plants of all types in our area responded to this warmth by doing what they do at this time of year- sending out tender green stems and leaves and initiating the growth of flower buds that were set last year and just waiting for those conditions. What the combination of cold and fierce winds has done to these plant tissues may appear obvious but the actual extent of the injury may be harder to assess.

So what does this freeze actually mean to our agronomic, garden and landscape plants?

With the low temperatures hovering around 20 degrees or so the past few nights, emerging growth on some trees and shrubs has undoubtedly been damaged or destroyed.

Based on past experience, damage will be severe on Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*), yellowwood (*Cladrastis kentukea*), hydrangeas (*Hydrangea* spp.), and magnolias (*Magnolia* spp.). The “smart” trees are the ones stay dormant longer – the oaks, ash, birch, walnut, hickories, and evergreens.

It is likely that fruit trees in bloom or close to bloom, including apples, cherries, peaches, etc., may have experienced substantial injury to the blossoms, the developing fruit and perhaps some of the more tender woody tissues. While fruit trees can benefit from a thinning of the fruit to increase quality my guess would be that this “thinning” will be pretty complete.

Symptoms of freeze damage include shriveling and browning or blackening of damaged tissue. Damaged growth often becomes limp and may appear water soaked. Eventually, damaged or destroyed leaves may drop from the tree or shrub.

Fortunately, trees and shrubs have the ability to leaf out again if the initial growth is damaged or destroyed. Healthy, well established trees and shrubs should not be greatly impacted and will produce additional growth within a few weeks. Trees and shrubs planted within the past 5 years may benefit from an application of fertilizer. Give them some nitrogen when it warms up. An application of any fertilizer relatively high in nitrogen is good but one without a broadleaf weed control herbicide is preferred. Excessive fertilizers however can cause additional damage which is the last thing stressed plants need right now.

Frozen and wilted foliage and flowers of daffodils, magnolias, iris (foliage), and tree lilac (foliage) are commonplace on this day after Easter. Damage can be expected to be especially severe on astilbes (*Astilbe* spp.), ferns, hostas (*Hosta* spp.), and numerous other perennials. The prognosis however for freeze-damaged perennials is also good. In general, while the freezing temperatures have likely damaged the foliage of many perennials, their crowns and roots should not be harmed. Damaged perennials will send up new growth within a few weeks and it is likely that their blooms will be largely unaffected.

While our thoughts readily turn to flowers and trees one might wonder about the impact of this cold and wind on our lawns. Zac Reicher, Extension Turf Specialist at Purdue feels that the recent cold snap should have little long term effect on the turf portion of the landscape. He assures us that our cool-season grasses are more than capable of withstanding weather like this, though newly emerged seedlings may suffer some damage from the cold and/or wind. This cold (unfortunately) should also have little long term effect on populations of weeds, diseases, and insects. The cold will have no effect on fertilizer or preemergence herbicides already applied, but postemergence herbicides for dandelions should be delayed until the weather warms up and dandelions are in or close to bloom.

Farmers may have experienced some substantial damage from these conditions with the wheat and alfalfa being the two primary concerns. The amount of damage will depend on the growth stage of the plant. For wheat in the tillering stage, temperatures would have had to drop below 12 degrees Fahrenheit before growers would see a yield effect. While for wheat in the jointing stage, moderate to severe yield loss will occur at temperatures lower than 24 degrees for more than two hours.

Growers need to evaluate the field, take into account the soil type, moisture level and growth stage because field variability will have different responses. When evaluating alfalfa, look at the crown and tap root. It's a good sign if the tap root retains a beige/white, solid color and not good if it appears water-soaked, or becomes brown or black in color. In the days following the freeze, it will be common for emerging leaves to take on a bleached appearance. If this occurs, it is only a short-term response. These conditions are not good, but another freeze a week or two following this one would be worse. Plants may tolerate and survive one freeze event, but are less likely to survive a second freeze.

Only time will tell the actual level of damage to our landscapes and crops from this “bait and switch” slight of hand that Mother Nature has dealt us. In any case -bundle up. Winter is back for a brief stay...worrying about what might happen never solved a problem or saved a plant. Rest assured...Spring is coming and this time to stay!

A few dates to remember...

For those who would like to learn a bit more about “normal” spring gardening activities, you are welcome to attend a presentation entitled Spring Garden Almanac on Friday, April 20th (Part 1-Fruits, vegetables and lawns) and April 27 (Part 2-Outdoor flowers, trees and shrubs) during the lunch hour in the Purdue Extension office. Please call 462-1113 to preregister. While there is no charge these programs will be held only if there is sufficient preregistration.

April 24 and 28- Basic Wildflower and Tree Identification Class and Hike- This class will introduce basic techniques for identifying flowers and trees. We will follow-up the classroom portion with an easy hike at one of the best wildflower viewing sites in Indiana -- Shrader-Weaver Nature Preserve in Fayette County (<http://www.in.gov/dnr/naturepr/npdirectory/preserves/shrader-weaver.html>). Classroom portion: Tuesday, April 24, 6-9 p.m., Purdue Extension – Hancock County Office. Hike: Saturday April 28, 9:30 a.m. – noon. Pre-registration with Purdue Extension – Hancock County required. A \$10 fee covers both the classroom portion and the hike. Call 462-1113 for more information.

Last but certainly not least, the Hancock County Solid Waste Management District is sponsoring an **Earth Day Spring Clean** event on April 21 from 9am – 12pm. This will be a county wide community litter pick up that will kick off in Greenfield behind the courthouse at the chamber of commerce and also Greenfield Riley Park.

Those interested in helping out in this cleanup effort should contact Katherine Wampler at Hancock County Solid Waste Management District (SWMD) at 317-462-7605 or kwampler@purdue.edu. We are seeking community leaders in Fortville, McCordsville, Charlottesville, Cumberland and New Palestine to step forward and lead the cleanup effort in their communities and welcome their call or e-mail to be part of this event. We invite you to “celebrate earth day and spruce up your community!”

Cheekwood Answers your Questions Dealing with the Easter 2007 Freeze

What to do with your plants at home

Cheekwood has received many inquiries since the freeze. The freezing temperatures over Easter Weekend caused damage to many of the plants at not only Cheekwood's Botanical Garden, but also landscapes throughout the region. While it is still not known what the extent of the damage will be, the Botanical Garden staff is confident that most plants will recover with minimal long term effects.

Most concerning at Cheekwood is damage to Crepe Myrtles and Japanese Maples. In both cases, damage depends on plant variety, location, and size. "Many of the flowers we were anticipating seeing over the next few weeks have suffered damage to the flower buds and will not flower this spring," said Leigh Anne Lomax, Botanical Garden and Horticulture Manager at Cheekwood. "However, they should recover and bloom next year. It is important to understand that we are still evaluating damage and will not really know the true extent for several weeks."

Following are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions. Email gardens@cheekwood.org for answers to any additional questions you might have. All information will be updated on Cheekwood's website at www.cheekwood.org.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What should I do now?

The best advice for the short term is to do nothing. Give the plants another week to recover. Pruning or removing leaves or branches may result in more long-term injury than just living with the current effects. This time period should give the plant time to develop secondary buds that will grow and result in a re-leafing of the plant.

Will plants recover faster by watering?

Extra water will not help the tissue damaged by the cold. However, if temperatures warm and rain fall is limited, water plants deeply twice weekly to reduce drought stress.

Should freeze damaged plants be fertilized?

Do not fertilize freeze damaged trees. Trees should be fertilized near the end of next winter. It should be okay to fertilize smaller ornamental plants as they begin to re-grow. Use a slow release, balanced fertilizer and follow recommended applications rates or use a half rate.

Many of my plants have brown, damaged leaves. Should I cut away this damaged foliage?

Some plants will naturally shed damaged leaves and replace them with new foliage. Some may have damage to the stems and will require more significant pruning. Resist the urge to trim too soon, as it is nearly impossible to determine the extent of the damage until the plants begin to recover. Wait a few weeks or more before making any decisions.

How can I tell if my Crepe Myrtle or Japanese Maple is damaged?

Look for bark that is split and peeling away from the stems. On larger stems, damage might only appear as cracks in the bark. It is also possible to use your fingernail or small knife to scrape away the surface of the bark to reveal living green tissue. Green tissue indicates the stems did not suffer freeze damage and will be able to re-grow foliage.

My Boxwood has turned white! What should I do?

Many of the boxwoods at Cheekwood have also turned white. Fortunately, only the young tender leaves have been damaged. We will not do anything to these plants until we see whether they will naturally shed the damaged leaves.

Can I trim the damaged foliage off my Hosta, Liriope, or ornamental grasses?

Yes, remove only the damaged foliage on Hosta and cut ornamental grasses and Liriope as you would in the late winter. Plants might not be as vigorous this year but should recover with time. This method should be applied to other herbaceous perennials.

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