



PHOTO BY Heidi Sheesley

Last week's cold fronts did not drop temperatures down low enough (or long enough) to cause significant freeze injury to most cold-sensitive plants including mangos and most types of citrus.

The onset of cold weather conditions last week seemed to have been more stressful to people than to landscape plants. Fortunately, temperatures did not drop down low enough (and long enough) to cause significant freeze injury to most cold-sensitive plants. Despite the possibility of an occasional severe freeze, local gardeners (myself included) still cling to the use of tropical

plants in the landscape. I utilize bananas and other tropicals in my landscape and I do not plan on giving up on them either. Many tropical plants grow well and provide welcome color and texture to landscapes in the intense heat of our summer growing season. Surprisingly, most tropical plants are more cold-tolerant than we generally give them credit and

will tolerate light freezes where the temperatures dip briefly below freezing. But you do run a risk when leaving them out or not covering them on nights when even light freezes occur. Many tropicals may survive a hard freeze (temperatures in the mid-twenties and below-freezing temperatures lasting most of the night) by coming back from their lower trunk,



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crown, roots or belowground parts such as tubers, bulbs or rhizomes.

The following is a sampling of recent questions asked by area gardeners on the impact of cold weather conditions on cold-sensitive landscape and garden plants.

Q: I have several hibiscus plants growing in containers. How susceptible are their roots to cold injury?

A: Hibiscus are tropical plants and do not tolerate extended periods of very cold weather. While the aboveground portion of hibiscus may suffer cold injury, most types are root-hardy in our growing area and new growth can be expected to develop from roots and lower stems as the spring season approaches.

However, plant roots in small containers can certainly sustain cold weather injury whereas, under the same temperature conditions, roots of same plants in the ground will escape cold injury. Roots of plants in exposed containers can be injured by low temperatures and show no apparent damage until the plants are stressed at higher temperatures after the growing starts.

Q: I live in Kemah close to Galveston Bay and I have two Norfolk Island pines growing in my landscape. How cold-tolerant are Norfolk Island pines?

A: Norfolk Island pines are

grown in many local landscapes, especially along coastal areas. Very low temperatures (30° F to 32° F) over several hours can cause the growing tips to die and fall. Temperatures below 25° F can cause severe freeze damage.

Q: Should I wrap my banana trees?

A: Temperatures below freezing (32° F) for several hours will kill the foliage to the ground. The rhizomes of most banana cultivars are hardy to 22° F. Rhizomes will generate new shoots when the weather warms again. If cold weather threatens, a banana plant can be protected by covering trunks with a blanket or tarp. I did not protect the banana plants in my landscape during any of last winter's cold snaps. Banana plants are fast growers. My plants quickly grew back from the rhizomes.

Q: I live on Galveston Island and grow Mexican Thornless limes. Should I protect my lime trees when cold temperatures are in the forecast?

Most types of citrus can withstand cool temperatures. Satsumas and kumquats have the greatest degree of cold hardiness and will withstand temperatures as low as 20° F without appreciable wood damage.

However, the Mexican Thornless lime is very sensitive to cold temperatures. Damage to the foliage may occur at 30° to 32° F, and wood damage or death

will occur with temperatures below 29°F. I recommend protecting limes whenever cold temperatures are likely to occur. Question: This is my first year to grow broccoli. The plants are growing well and are producing heads. Do I need to protect my remaining plants from cold temperatures?

Broccoli not only enjoys cool weather, it's moderately tolerant of genuinely cold weather. Colder temperatures (26° to 31° F) may burn foliage but will not kill broccoli, nor other cool season vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, chard, lettuce, mustard, onion, radish, and turnip. The real cold weather champs are beets, Brussels sprouts, carrots, collards, kale, parsley, and spinach.

#### At a glance

**Growing Citrus in Your Own Backyard:** Saturday, January 17, from 9:00-11:00 a.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office, 4102-B Main (Carbide Park), La Marque. Master Gardener Chris Anastas will provide a PowerPoint presentation on how to grow citrus in the home landscape. Preregistration required by e-mail ([GALV3@wt.net](mailto:GALV3@wt.net)) or phone (281-534-3413, ext. 1-2).