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**How to Treat Freeze Damaged Plants**

So, you are new to gardening, and many of your plants this year got damaged by an unexpected hard freeze. Now you are looking at blackened, lumpy messes and don't exactly know what to do. Your first reaction is to prune back the dead parts but wait, don't be so hasty. Treating freeze-damaged plants depends on the type of plants and the time of year. So how do you determine which plants are toast and which ones will come back?



Woody plants are treated differently than herbaceous plants for freeze damage. Woody plants have sturdy, non-bendable stems and stalks usually covered in bark. Trees and shrubs and vines are in this category. They tend to grow taller than an herbaceous plant and almost always a perennial. If you have a freeze damaged woody plant, the first thing to determine is how much plant is dead and how much is still alive. You can test the stem on a woody plant by scratching the bark away. If the underlying stem is green, then the plant is still alive, but if the stem is black or tan, then that part of the plant is dead. It's usually a

good idea to wait a few weeks after a freeze or even until spring to prune them back. While unsightly, you don't want to encourage new freeze damage by continuing to prune in the wintertime. Each time you prune back, you leave more plant exposed to freezing temperatures and more damage. The dead part of the plant insulates and protects the rest of the plant from further damage during winter. You want to keep the plant well-watered during cold weather, but you do not want to fertilize as that will encourage new growth. Once all danger of frost or freezing has passed, then you can start pruning back. If you are still uncertain about where to prune, wait to see where the plant sprouts new growth and then prune back accordingly.

Herbaceous plants have a soft, pliable stem that never grows a bark on it. Herbaceous plants can be perennials, biennials, or annuals and can be susceptible to freeze damage. Perennials such as Texas natives will look dead, but the root systems are usually intact. You can go ahead and prune the plant down to the ground and wait for spring to regenerate growth. Other plants such as tropicals may be more difficult to determine what is dead on the plant. You can go ahead and prune back all the dead looking parts but if you aren't entirely sure, leave the pruning until spring. Some herbaceous plants that show freeze damage may completely collapse. These should be pruned down to the ground, and if the crown and root system appears to be affected, go ahead and remove the dead plant before fungal or bacterial problems may affect the soil.



## *Benefits of Growing Indoor Plants*

Here's an exercise: start growing indoor plants this winter to see if it helps with those winter or quarantine blahs. Even if you are not a gardener, there are many indoor plants that are easy to grow and science has shown there are many benefits from growing indoor plants.



Healthier air quality: A lot of research has gone into how indoor plants can improve air quality by removing toxins and pollutants and increase oxygen. Many newer homes and furniture emit toxins such as xylene, formaldehyde and benzene from fabrics, carpets, and paints. The ability to purify the air with plants depends on the type of plant, size and amount. Three really easy to care for indoor plants that provide purification are **snake plant**, **aloe vera**, and a **rubber tree**. All three require very little maintenance and are great starter plants for indoors.

Boost well-being: Research has shown that plants added in hospitals helped increase a sense of well-being. We evolved from living among plants and our basic DNA responds to greenery in a positive way.



Adds comfort to a room: Before filling up a new room with furniture think about adding some indoor plants to provide a pleasing vibe to your decor. Indoor plants are known to increase indoor humidity during the winter; screen an unattractive area; shade a too bright room and even reduce noise levels.

Be creative by experimenting with several plants in different types of planters, sizes and groupings. If you still can't bring yourself to decorate with live plants then try a wall of plant pictures along with aroma candles to give your living space a green feeling.

Sense of accomplishment: If you are new to gardening and plant care, growing a few easy indoor plants can provide you with a sense of accomplishment. It can turn a "black thumb" gardener into a "green thumb" one without a lot of work. Check out our next article on plants that can easily be grown in water.



Grow your own produce: Start a small indoor herb garden in your kitchen and utilize those fresh herbs in your cooking. **Rosemary** is a great herb to grow inside. It grows in the same conditions as **basil** so plant them together. Sow **chive** seeds and plant in a sunny window with a tray of pebbles and water under the pot to give it extra moisture. **Oregano** and **sage** have the same growing conditions so pair them together. In addition to being a beautiful indoor plant, fresh **thyme** is so much more fragrant and potent than when dried. Fresh **parsley** is a common herb used in many recipes.

Reduces stress and increases creativity: Research has shown that caring for plants can reduce stress by suppressing sympathetic nervous system activity. Numerous studies have confirmed that plants in an office environment fosters greater creativity. See if caring for a plant helps reduce your stress levels.

## *Indoor Plants You Can Grow in Water*

Continuing with our indoor plant theme, why not try growing some indoor plants in water and see what happens. Here are a few plants that do well in water:



**African Violet:** Growing African violet in water from leaves is usually a good way to get a clone of the parent plant. Choose young, healthy African violet leaves to start a new plant. Cut the leaf along with two inches of stem, and place the leaf in a narrow-necked bottle that keeps the leaf suspended and dry. Roots take about a month to form. Over time a tiny plantlet will form complete with its own crown.



**Baby's Tears:** Baby's tears plants produce a myriad of tiny leaves on creeping plants that form a dense yet delicate trailing mat. Pinch off a cluster of stems, with or without roots, and watch how easily this plant adapts to growing in water. Because baby's tears grows so many leaves along their stems, leaves that are constantly submerged will begin to rot. Change the water weekly to remove any leaves that are floating in the water, and allow the water level to drop once roots are well-formed and delivering moisture to the plant.



**Begonia:** The thick, succulent stems of begonias are very forgiving when harvesting the stems to grow in water. Practice with hardy wax begonias, which have very knobby leaf nodes that form roots easily. Even the fancy rex begonias and tuberous begonias will grow in water, and only a single leaf is necessary to start a whole new plant. It may take a couple of months for roots to form, and it's wise to perform weekly water changes to prevent bacteria that can lead to rot.



**Coleus:** With so many new coleus varieties hitting the market each spring, it's easy to design an entire garden around the orange, purple and chartreuse leaves of this tropical plant. As coleus plants have grown in popularity their prices have increased accordingly, but coleus plants are easy to propagate and grow in water, allowing you to create a colony of the handsome houseplants. Take a six-inch cutting, and remove the leaves from the bottom four inches. Place the cutting in a glass or vase of water, and you will see roots begin to form in several weeks.



**Lucky Bamboo:** The hardy stalks of lucky bamboo can become a living centerpiece, no soil required. Growers often train the stalks into spirals or woven shapes, and while these extensions don't affect the plant's ability to grow in water, plants may become very top-heavy and require more than just water to stay in place. Surround your lucky bamboo with colorful gravel or rocks, which will add to the ornamental value as well as providing some support.



**Wandering Jew:** Wandering jew plants fill a color gap in the houseplant collection like no other low-care plant can. Both the zebra-striped variety and the purple-leafed cultivar are well-adapted to houseplant life and will make a handsome focal point in rooms with moderate light. Add some stems to a mason jar or vase of water, and the plants will keep up their growth in your home.

## *Bay Laurels*

I bought a bay laurel plant at the herb society a few years ago and planted it in a large pot. It has slowly but steadily grown, but now I've decided I want it in my landscape as a shrub. Can you grow a bay laurel in our part of Texas? The answer is yes but with a caveat. Bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) is an evergreen shrub originally from the Mediterranean, prized for its culinary addition to recipes. Since our winters are colder than Mediterranean winters, it will need a little protection on a frigid winter night. Once it is established in the ground though, it can handle temperatures down into the teens for short periods of time.



In its original home of the Mediterranean, bay laurels can grow as tall as forty feet but in our part of the world, it tops out around five feet. It can be used as a shrub or a hedge or even a topiary and doesn't mind being pruned back for better management.

To plant a bay laurel, you will need rich, well-draining soil amended with lots of compost. It needs full sunlight, especially from an eastern or southern exposure. This plant needs plenty of water; otherwise, it will struggle in our high heat summers, especially with low humidity. But don't overwater it. The best time of year to plant in the ground is early spring, when they are semi-dormant. If you have provided a rich amended soil, it never needs additional fertilizing.

Try growing this aromatic plant in your landscape so that you not only have an attractive addition to your yard but also a wonderful resource for cooking.

### **Taking Care of our Winter Birds**



What can we do to help our feathery friends in the winter-time? While you may look out and see a lot of greenery and think there are many food sources for birds, that's not necessarily true. All those insects, berries, and foliage that were plentiful in spring and summer are gone. Birds need extra fuel to combat the cold, so supplying them with a steady diet of sunflower seeds, millet seed, and peanuts are excellent choices for filling up a bird feeder. Also, providing a reliable water source is just as important. The most important word here is **consistency**. Once you start feeding winter birds, you have to keep a steady supply handy until spring. Why? Because birds become acclimated to a food source and end up depending on it during lean times. If you don't know what kind of birdseed to purchase, the best overall is black oil sunflower seeds which provides high powered nutrition that almost all types of birds will eat. A huge bag can be purchased for under \$20 at almost any major hardware store but you can even find it at your local grocery store. Throw a few on the ground for the ground feeders. Fill up a bird feeder placed outside your window and watch who comes to eat. This winter, we have been pleased to see many species taking advantage of our feeders, including some birds that normally don't come to a feeder.

**Events**

Grimes County Master Gardeners will have their **January Business Meeting on Tuesday, January 12th—9:00 a.m.** This will be a **zoom only meeting.**

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, no in-person continuing education classes are available. Below are some virtual learning and webinars for this month.

# January 2021

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7 	8	9 
10	11 	12 	13	14	15	16 
17	18	19	20	21 	22	23
24 	25	26 	27 	28	29	30
31 						

## Continuing Education and Events

- Jan 7: Home Grown Lecture Series, Harris County AgriLife; **“Pollinator Gardens”**, 10:00 a.m.—11:00 a.m. Free
- Jan 7: Urban Harvest Facebook, **“Growing Organic Vegetables Series”**, 6 p.m.—8:30 p.m. \$225  
*Part of an on-going series starting in January 7th, ends May 20th*
- Jan 9: Urban Harvest Facebook, **“Square Foot Gardening”**, 9:30 a.m.—11:30 a.m. \$20
- Jan 11: Harris County AgriLife, **“Pruning Basics, Green Thumb Gardening Series”**, 10 a.m.—11:30 am.
- Jan 12: Urban Harvest Facebook, **“Fresh from the Garden—Juice Cleanse Workshop”**, 5:30 p.m.—7:00 p.m. Free
- Jan 16: Urban Harvest Facebook, **“Fruit Tree Training & Pruning Series”**, 10:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m. \$90
- Jan 19: Texas A&M Garden Interest Group (GIG), **“Designing a Meditation Garden”**, 9:30—11:30 Zoom  
*(Contact: tamugig@gmail.com)*
- Jan 21: Home Grown Lecture Series, Harris County AgriLife, **“Soil Testing”**, 10 a.m.—11 a.m. Free
- Jan 24: Urban Harvest Facebook, **“Sustainable Living through Permaculture #1”**, 1 p.m.—5 p.m. \$45
- Jan 31: Urban Harvest Facebook, **“Sustainable Living through Permaculture #2”**, 12:30 p.m.—5:30 p.m. \$55

## ON-LINE TREE SALES

- January 2—January 31: TAMU AgriLife Harris County: Pick up in Cypress and Pasadena, Texas
- January 26 –January 27: Montgomery County Master Gardeners: Pick up January 30th and 31st

# Texas Master Gardeners

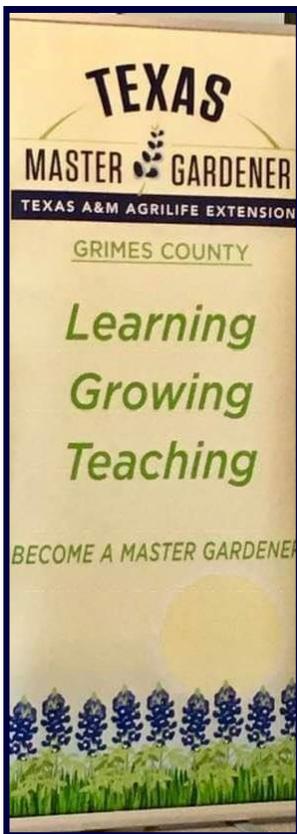
203 Veterans Memorial Drive  
Navasota, Texas 77868

Website: [txmg.org/grimes](http://txmg.org/grimes)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/GrimesCountyMasterGardeners](http://www.facebook.com/GrimesCountyMasterGardeners)



## Grimes County Master Gardeners

Please send submissions and photos by the 20th of each month to: [pwparmley@gmail.com](mailto:pwparmley@gmail.com)



## 2021 Board of Directors

- President.....Paula Parmley
- Vice President .....Kimberly Hertan
- Secretary .....Renee Harter
- Treasurer .....Herb Abraham

## 2021 Committees/Chairs

- Advertising/Publicity .....Peggy Sloan
- Auditing.....Jena Jackson
- Community Garden.....Cathey Hardeman
- Co-op.....Fred Vesperman
- Social Media.....Jamie Bruns
- Fundraising .....Carol Garnet
- Historian.....Sharon Murry
- Intern Class Coordination.....Herb Abraham
- Junior Master Gardener.....Kay Douglas
- Newsletter .....Paula Parmley
- Nominating.....Carol Garnet
- Timekeeping.....Martha Brogdon
- TMGA Awards .....Sharon Murry