

in the garden

BY STEPHEN AND KRISTIN PATEGAS

Cold Damage Remedy



Kristin and Stephen Pategas

We had a memorable ten days in January! Multiple early morning temperatures dipped into the upper 20's. One day it sleeted and the high was ONLY 36 degrees. Meanwhile dozens of sheets, blankets and pieces of frost blanket dotted our garden and a plethora of container plants displaced the minivan in the garage. Where we didn't provide cold protection we are faced with melted plants of all shapes and sizes. And the color? Typically brown. What's a gardener to do?

First we had to be patient through February when frosts were still likely. However early March is the perfect time to start the rehabilitation of our freeze damaged gardens. Head outside and take stock of the damaged plants. Remember that the most important tool is very near at hand. Gaze down at your fingertips and notice there are fingernails that can perform a critical task - checking for green on plant stems. Before trimming away those brown stems determine where the plant's living tissues still reside. Work your way along each stem scratching as you go and then trim away the dead portion. On a green portion of the stem make a diagonal pruning cut just above a branch, leaf node or leaf.

Damage to plants varied according to the microclimate at each location. South sides of structures and overhanging tree canopies offered some protection. The more tropical plants (remember we are in a sub-tropical Zone 9b) such as hibiscus, Xanadu philodendron, gingers, lantana, elephant ears, golden dewdrops/Duranta, princess flower/Tibouchina, Eugenia (which are trimmed into those topiary balls on a stick) and others may have frozen back to the ground and should resprout. It's hard

to cut out the old when the new is sprouting so remove all of the dead material before new growth lengthens.

Plants not cold hardy to our area have crept north since the major freeze on Christmas Eve in 1989 when temperatures dropped into the lower 20's and stayed there for many hours. Don't be shocked to see severe and possibly fatal damage to some of these plants. Palms such as the foxtail and Christmas are especially susceptible with their growth points located in the buds at the base of the fronds hovering in the air well away from any residual heat in the ground.

Plants are ready to respond to the pruning and the warm weather. So as you finish removal of dead wood and trim to shape plants get ready to fertilize. Water once a week at the most until Daylight Savings Time when twice a week is allowed again. In our April column read



< Prune out the brown before too much green appears.

Some Xanadu philodendron died to the ground but will resprout. >



March is the perfect time to start the rehabilitation of our freeze-damaged gardens.

about cold hardier plantings to replace the oh so tender ones.

So remember to scratch, but pass on the sniff. You may end up with a little brown under your fingernails, but it's sure to lead to a green thumb.



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Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis