

Cold Hardiness

There are many things to consider when selecting a landscape plant, but cold hardiness is a primary consideration. Hardiness refers to the ability of a plant to survive winters in a particular area. Plants are generally classified according to the lowest temperature they can withstand without being damaged. Similarly, geographic regions are classified according to the average minimum temperature experienced in that area.

The USDA has separated the United States into 11 distinct zones (USDA Hardiness Zones) and each zone is divided into sections A and B where A is north and a little colder and B south and therefore warmer. The state of Florida covers zones 8 to 11.

Because of its unique shape, geography and location, Brevard County contains many different microclimates and covers three different USDA zones. Most of Brevard County is in Zone 9B. Part of northern Brevard borders on Zone 9A and Zone 10 conditions exist in the southern parts of our barrier islands.

Always select plants rated hardy for your zone. To assist you in this regard, plants are rated as having high, medium or low cold tolerance or likewise being high, medium or low cold hardy.

High Cold Tolerance

Plants in this category can withstand most of the cold weather that comes to Brevard County. However, extreme cold such as temperatures in the low 20s could still be damaging to some plants in this group. Even within species there can be variation. For example, some avocado trees are damaged by temperatures just below freezing, some can withstand temps in the low to mid 20s, and still others are safe into the low teens!

Medium Cold Tolerance

These plants can withstand temperatures in the high 20s for brief periods of time.

Low Cold Tolerance

These plants will not tolerate frost or freezing weather (31°F degrees and below).

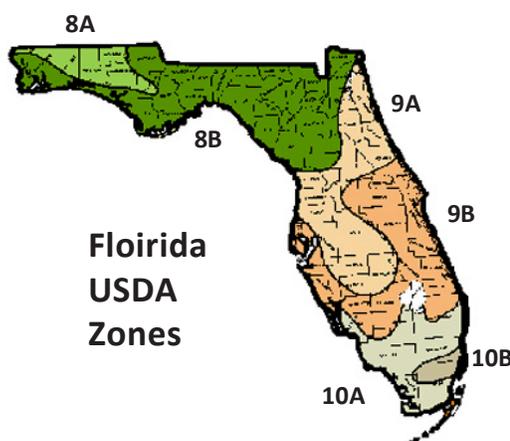
Preparing for Cold Weather

Plants benefit from being well-watered the morning before a freeze. During the day, the water will absorb

radiant heat from the sunlight and help to warm the plant's roots as well as keep the plant hydrated in the cold dry air.

Covering plants also helps. Sheets, blankets—anything but plastic can be used. **Freezecloth** is the best thing to use because it provides a great amount of protection with the least amount of weight. Large bulb Christmas lights and even light bulbs can also be used to provide heat as long as the plant is fully covered to the ground. Be careful that the electric cords used are designed for outside use and that the bulbs themselves do not touch the covering.

Last but not least, spraying the foliage with **Maxicrop Liquid Seaweed** can increase cold protection by three to six degrees. To be fully effective, plants should be sprayed a month before the arrival of cold weather.



After a Freeze

For most plants, wait until all chance of more freezing weather has passed before trimming damaged or dead branches. Some exceptions include plumeria (frangipani) and crown of thorns. When badly damaged by cold, the tops of these branches sometimes develop a rot which, if not pruned away, will kill the plant. Simply prune on a slant below the spongy part of the stem.

Palms that are cold damaged should not be pruned until cold weather has passed, but they should be treated to prevent the development of fungal disease. Pour a small amount of a mixture of **Liquid Copper Fungicide** into the heart of the palm until it dribbles over the side. Plants can overdose on copper, so do not treat them with copper more than two or three times in a year.

One final note

Well-tended plants—those that have been fertilized well and watered properly—are the hardiest against cold damage.

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