



Tony Glover  
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News Release

## **Plant Damage During Recent Freeze**

Question: I have several plants that were damaged in the severe cold in early April and I heard a garden expert on the radio recommend fertilizing the plants to encourage new growth. What do you recommend that I do to my damaged plants?

Answer: Many plants in our area were hit hard by the recent freeze. Any tree or shrub with tender new growth, flowers, flower buds or small berries were likely damaged. Some plants that look particularly bad are Japanese maples, crape myrtle, hydrangeas, ginkgo, pecan, figs, loropetalums, butterfly bush and hollies not to mention all the new growth on most trees. Many tender garden plants were killed outright and many perennials just coming up were burnt to the ground. Tougher perennials with enough stored energy should come back but tender perennials that are marginal here like lantana or verbena may be dead. Remember that just because leaves are damaged does not mean the plant is dead. On your trees and shrubs--adopt a wait-and-see attitude, most plants may re-leaf and bounce back just fine. Most likely all these plants will have brown and black tissue which will fall off in good time. Plants such as hollies that make berries may have lost their berry crop for the year. In some instances the berries in the lower portions of the plant may survive while the more exposed fruit is killed. We may need to remember this fact later in the year because of birds that rely on berries in the fall. They may need a little extra help via our bird feeders.

Now, back to your question, I would suggest in addition to waiting that you also water. Wait to assess the damage and water to reduce the stress of making a new crop of leaves. For young or already stressed plants that have lost all of the new leaves to the freeze it may be difficult to regenerate new leaves if there is not enough starch stored up in the root system for "another spring"- they will need extra water for this recovery. For trees and shrubs that were severely damaged, water deeply once or twice weekly. Monitor your plant and if you see leaves start to droop, check the soil moisture around the roots and add more if it seems dry. Keep stressed plants mulched this summer to retain moisture around the roots.

**Do Not Prune**- Pruning can stimulate excessive growth, these plants are stressed, give them time to recover. Dead foliage can be carefully cut away, but this is not necessary for recovery. The trick is to not to cut too much off the plant and to simply clean off the dead wood without stimulating a lot of new growth.

**Do Not Fertilize-** Contrary to the advice you heard on the radio fertilizing now with nitrogen rich fertilizer may cause the plant to grow and re-leaf too quickly instead of giving it time to recover. This could potentially further stress already stressed plants. This is particularly true if you are unable to provide supplemental water during a prolonged drought. In general I would say, trees and shrubs should not be fertilized until next winter. If you have already fertilized, make sure plants receive ample water to use the excess fertilizer.

For more about this topic or other horticulture related information, please contact Tony Glover, Regional Extension Agent-Home Horticulture, Home Gardens and Home Pest Management at the St. Clair County Extension Office at (205) 338-9416 or email [gloveta@auburn.edu](mailto:gloveta@auburn.edu).

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