



**January 7, 2015**



PHOTO BY **William M. Johnson**

**A variety of items you already have around your home can be used to provide excellent cold weather protection for plants, including large towels (pictured above). Remember that insulating covers need not be expensive nor styled by Ralph Lauren, just effective.**

Our winters tend to be relatively mild and that's considered a blessing by most folks. Weather forecasters seem to be confident that temperatures will dip into the low thirties a couple of times during the week. Of particular concern is the fact that many cold sensitive plants have not entered a fully dormant state. They are still in a vegetative or active state of growth due to the relatively warm winter conditions we have been having. In

the event of a severe cold snap, such vegetative growth can be harmed by freezing temperatures. So that we can be proactive horticulturists instead of reactive horticulturists, I am providing a discourse now to provide measures needed to avoid or reduce cold injury to plants. Save this information and you will know what to do when a real blue norther bear down on us this winter! Several factors will influ-

ence the extent of cold injury damage to landscape trees and shrubs and even certain types of fruit, especially citrus. Such factors include variety (some plant varieties may be more cold tolerant than others) and age (recent plantings that are not well-established are more susceptible to cold injury). A very important factor is the general health of a plant. Plants grown under low soil fertility or

Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

*News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.*



drought conditions or plants that suffered severe disease and/or insect problems during the summer growing season are far more likely to sustain damage.

However, homeowners can take protective measures to help reduce the occurrence of freeze injury to cold sensitive plants when cold weather conditions are in the forecast. These steps include the following:

**PROVIDE INSULATING COVER TO PLANTS.** Here are some things you already have around your house that can be used for just this purpose: paper bags, newspaper, flower pots, bath towels, beach towels, bed sheets, blankets, drop clothes, etc. (use your imagination!).

Weigh them down with sticks and rocks or use clothes pins, twine and staplers to hold them in place. This can actually be fun—use your creativity. Caution should be used when using plastic sheeting during prolonged hard freezes as plant leaves touching the plastic may suffer cold injury. However, it can be very beneficial to place plastic underneath blankets, sheets, etc. for large plants. The important thing to remember is to protect your plants from freezing temperatures and hopefully you've already protected the plant's roots by mulching in the fall.

**KEEP PLANTS WELL-WATERED.** Providing proper soil moisture conditions is an extremely important plant-saving practice for winter. Since most areas of the county have received ample rain-

fall over the past week, soil moisture levels should be sufficient.

**PROVIDE PROTECTION TO ROOTS AND CROWN.** One of the most sensible ways to help protect cold-sensitive plants from the effects of a severe freeze is to protect their roots and crown by mulching. Mulch is an excellent insulator. If the roots and crown survive, the plant can usually be salvaged and new top growth developed.

**DELAY HEAVY PRUNING.** In the event of a freeze, do not do any pruning until late winter or early spring even though affected woody plants may appear to be in poor condition. This applies to all citrus and ornamentals, including palm trees.

Heavy pruning after a hard freeze can stimulate new growth which could easily be burned back if another cold snap occurs.

Some plants, of course, won't stand any freezing weather regardless of how many toughening techniques you employ. That's one of the many reasons for using only cold hardy plants in the basic framework of your landscape (such as for shade trees and screening and foundation plantings). Use the less hardy, more tender plants (i.e., flowering annuals, bougainvillea, hibiscus, etc.) as filler to add interest to entryways, flower beds or borders.

Compared to our more northerly gardening friends, we have had fairly mild weather conditions for the winter season. But take heed to the above steps and your

plants will be better able to withstand cold temperatures.

### **Upcoming Programs**

**Growing Avocado & Papaya:** Saturday, January 10, from 9:00-11:30 a.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office, 4102-B Main (Carbide Park), La Marque. Presented by Jerry Hurlbert. Learn the best varieties for the Gulf Coast, how to start plants from seeds, as well as tips on tree planting and cultivation methods for growing avocados. Preregistration required by e-mail ([GALV3@wt.net](mailto:GALV3@wt.net)) or phone (281-534-3413, ext. 1-2).

**Growing Peaches in Galveston County:** Saturday, January 10, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office, 4102-B Main (Carbide Park), La Marque. Master Gardener Herman Auer will provide a PowerPoint presentation on how to grow peaches in the home landscape. Topics include rootstock and variety selection, planting, cultural care, and disease and insect pest problems. Preregistration required by e-mail ([GALV3@wt.net](mailto:GALV3@wt.net)) or phone (281-534-3413, ext. 1-2).

