

Garden Column for the Salisbury Post  
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Nobody would have dreamed the jet stream would take a dip into the south this last weekend and bring a blast of cold Arctic weather. Warm temperatures lured many, including myself, into planting tender annuals. In the early 80's I remember planting Woodleaf tomato trial plots in April only to have a snow storm wipe out an entire early planting county-wide two days later. Unusually warm temperatures in January and earlier this month compounded winter damage.

Media reports have made most aware of the immediate damage to the strawberry crop as well as other small fruit, peaches and grain crops. However, this late spring cold damage may not be obvious until later this spring or even into early summer. Pecan trees were in full bloom when the freeze occurred. It is possible that an entire pecan crop may be lost this year. Crepe myrtles, hydrangea, pieris, camellia and azaleas also suffered. One would expect blooms to be a later, sparse or possibly no blooms at all in some landscape materials.

Splitting stems caused by the sudden drop are not obvious until sections of a shrub start to become dull, yellow and then eventually dies. This is especially prevalent in azaleas and shrubs that were pruned too early or under other types of stress.

The objective at this stage is for homeowners to prune out any dead or damaged plant material attributed to the freeze. Judiciously prune back the tips of trees and shrubs that were killed outright to green wood. Dead leaves and limbs harbor insect and diseases that could cause problems later. Make sure shrubs receive proper nutrition with appropriate fertilizers and plant foods. Nursery fertilizers have complete nutrients and are designed for constant feeding for the summer. Proper nutrition is essential for preventing cold damage. Avoid fertilizing late in late summer.

Irrigation is especially vital for evergreen trees and shrubs because they transpire moisture especially in the winter. Trees and shrubs can also be protected from winter damage with an application of organic mulch. Now is a good time to apply six to eight inches of coarse wood chips, bark or pine straw over the root zone. Organic and other mulches help retain soil moisture also maintains a constant soil temperature around the root system.

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