

Don't Let Cold Kill Your Plants

Five things you can do to keep marginally hardy plants alive outside

.....
Article & Photo Courtesy Grumpy Gardener Steve Bender

The TV weather people are giddy right now, because after a boring year with hardly any hurricanes or tornadoes to terrify us with, now an Arctic blast is poised to freeze America's hiney off. And not just in Minnesota, where thousands of folks lose their hiniies every winter. In Mobile, the temp dropped to 20 degrees this morning, sufficiently frigid to claim at least 10 hiniies. But forget hiniies.

What are you doing to protect your plants?



.....
1. LET IT SNOW!

If you are lucky enough to live where it snows a lot (Grumpy is not), you know that snow is just about the best insulator there is. The temperature under the snow can easily be 20 degrees warmer than that above it. Lots of times, a broadleaf evergreen is discovered in spring to be dead above the snow line and alive and kicking below it. Spring-flowering shrubs like forsythia often bloom below the snow line, but not above.

2. PILE ON THE FALLEN TREE LEAVES!

Piles of dry deciduous leaves make for great insulation, because they're light and trap warm air between them like layered clothing. Did I also mention they're free? They are. Use them to completely cover small shrubs you're worried about, perennials that still have foliage, and even cold-weather veggies like greens and broccoli. Pile them on top of early bloomers that are showing flower buds now, like hellebores and early narcissus. And unless your French hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) are rebloomers like 'Endless Summer,' cover them with leaves too. Severe winter cold often kills their flower buds and they don't bloom the following year. Leave the leaves there until the stretch of frigid air passes.

3. WATER

PLANTS BOTH IN POTS AND IN THE GROUND BEFORE THE SOIL FREEZES.

Moist soil is a much better insulator for roots than dry soil, because as water evaporates, it releases heat. (Of course, watering plants in clay pots before it freezes will cause many of them to crack, so you may want to take them indoors for a while. Or switch to plastic pots.)

.....
4. FILL EMPTY PLASTIC MILK JUGS WITH WATER AND THEN PLACE THEM IN A RING AROUND A TENDER PLANT.

As the water inside the jugs freezes, it will release heat. Cover the jugs with an old blanket to trap the heat under it if it's windy.

.....
5. IF YOU HAVE LOTS OF SMALL POTTED PLANTS, PLACE THEM UP AGAINST A WALL OF THE HOUSE POT-TO-POT SEVERAL ROWS DEEP.

Each pot will be insulated by the other pots around it.

For more care tips:

Southern Living

PLANT COLLECTION

SOUTHERNLIVINGPLANTS.COM

