

Horticulture Hints

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Well, that was a crazy freeze we had! The only word I can find to describe it is 'spotty'. Things that froze to the ground in that really bad freeze a year or two ago, came through these three days unscathed. And half of one shrub would be frozen, while the other half



Dead Looking Cigar Plant

(still unprotected) was just fine. Some leaves were even frozen on the inside of the leaf while the outer edges were ok. The gingers were good. All of them. I have to say, though, that those things that hadn't yet realized that summer was over, have finally succumbed to the cool weather. They're down until spring. All in all, very odd. At least in my yard. I'd be interested to know if others had the same experience.

I did find that the regular (incandescent) Christmas lights, along with suitable coverings, were very effective in protecting things. Three of my banana plants were in pots too big to move under cover. So used a one hundred light string on each of two

smaller plants. Then covered with two layers of fabric, they both came out of it without even a scratch. So it was enough to keep the temperature under covering above 32 degrees. The other small bananas (for the plant sale) were small enough to bring into the garage. They spent three days without light, but seemed to be just fine. So we'll have at least a few bananas for sale in April.

On a business note, for those of you who may not know this, we have changed the date of the plant sale to April 1. It seems better for those who not only attend, but those who put it on (US!) to move it to later, rather than earlier. If that makes sense. And for those who may not know *this*, I'm in charge of the Home Grows. Those are the plants that we all, as members of the club, donate for sale. So if you have to dig up and divide this spring, save two or three for the sale. If you have too many of something, pot them up for the sale. If you're starting seeds, start a few for the sale. You get the idea. If help is needed getting things dug or potted up, let me know. Someone should be available to help. My phone number and email will be in the email to which this newsletter is attached. Things get exciting now, planning for the plant sale!!

Since we had a hard freeze and it's possible that we'll get another, here are some general suggestions after a freeze:

- Don't prune until danger of frost is past (here in central Florida, it's about mid-March). If you prune too early, new growth is stimulated and may end up damaged if there is further frost. Also, dead portions of the plant can provide some cover in subsequent freezes.

- Keep soil moist but not wet.
- Skip feedings until new growth is noted.
- You can scrape the stems of shrubs or small trees to see if they are green underneath bark. If they're green, they're still alive.
- When pruning, make cuts beyond where the healthy wood is noted - more dieback is likely.
- Some plants may need to be pruned to the ground.
- Delay removal of plants that appear dead - many come back from buds below the ground.

Other plants may fool you. They still look green and healthy even though they are damaged. It takes time for the stems to gradually die back. It takes time to tell which are alive and which are dead. And I promise that this cigar plant, which looks dead, dead, will come back from the ground. At which time I can cut back these horrible looking stems.



Red Cyclamen

If you have a poinsettia from Christmas that you would like to keep for another year, it's certainly worthwhile to try to keep it. The first thing is to remember to water it. (Don't ask how I know this.) Sometime in January, move the plant to a filtered sun location. Keep the soil moist and begin monthly feedings. General balanced fertilizer is best: 10-10-10 or similar. In March prune the plant back to within twelve inches of the soil, and repot in a larger container. If you want to add it to your landscape, March is a good time to do so. When the plant produces ten to twelve inches of new growth, remove the top six inches of each shoot. Continue pruning in the same way until the end of August. Starting in mid-October, make sure the plant receives no nighttime light. It should start to bloom between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Then enjoy! And don't forget that the cyclamen are blooming this time of year. Next month, I'll go into more detail on the particulars of this beautiful flower.

Enjoy the New Year and Happy Gardening!