

January 14, 2015



“Frozen” -- Not for Your Tender Plants
By Kate Halvorson
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

Walt Disney Pictures hit another Academy Awards jackpot last year with the popular animated movie, “Frozen.” A Snow Queen with cryokinetic super powers freezes and unfreezes her kingdom at will, while singing the movie’s theme song *Let It Go*: “Let the storm rage on, the cold never bothered me anyway!”

Not to criticize the beautiful Snow Queen, but the cold really can bother tender plants in our foothill winters. Now is the time to get ready to protect your tender plants, which are generally new perennials, succulents and citrus.

Start by monitoring the weather forecast, and prepare to take action when temperatures are projected to be 32 degrees Fahrenheit and below. Also beware of calm, clear winter nights when heat can rapidly radiate up into the sky, cooling down ground surfaces and plants quickly. Frost damages leaves and stems by forming ice crystals in plant cells. This disrupts water and nutrient flow, and is definitely not a good “Frozen” scenario for your plants!

There are many protective measures you can take when temperatures fall. If your plants are in pots, move and cluster them together in warmer, protected areas such as south house walls, under decks, or into a greenhouse or garage.

Citrus is especially vulnerable to frost, and old-fashioned Christmas tree lights hung inside covered citrus trees provides a steady, low-heat source. Heat tape, designed for gutters and other exposed areas, can also be hung around trees to help protect citrus.

January 14, 2015

For in-ground plants, thoroughly water soil around the plant base, as wet soil holds warmth better. Do not water succulents; they are better kept dry in the cold so their water-holding leaves don't burst in a freeze. Cover plants before the sun goes down to capture warmth, using row cover, sheets, newspaper or old blankets. Stake covers up off the plants if possible, and remove it the next day when the sun comes out.

Mulch material such as straw, pine needles, or leaf mold spread over plants will protect plants for a short time. After the danger of frost has passed, remove the mulch. Check out this helpful link for more foothill winter plant protection strategies at:

http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/newsletters/Master_Gardener_E-News_Classes_Events_-_Updates49247.pdf.

After a cold snap, inspect your plants for damage. Frozen or frost-damaged plants normally have brown or black leaves and stems. Don't grab your pruners in despair: trust in the resiliency of plants, and wait until spring to see if the plant survives. If your plant survives, prune away dead parts back to where healthy growth occurs. If you've lost a plant you'd really like to have in your landscape, replant a new one in a more protected area next time, such as close to a heat-reflective wall or under a protective canopy. Be mindful of the microclimates in your yard, and avoid placing tender plants in open, low-laying areas where frost may form. Be prepared for our foothill cold snaps, and just like a Disney movie -- next spring your tender plants can have a happy ending, too!

There is no UCCE Master Gardener public education class this Saturday, January 17, 2015. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Gardeners/ and you can also find us on Facebook.