



WINTERIZING YOUR HOME LANDSCAPE

STARNOTE 115
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Protect Your Yard for Winter: A Guide to Cold-Proofing Plants and Pipes

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The Desert Southwest's weather can surprise you with occasional cold snaps. This guide helps you prepare your yard for winter, minimizing damage to plants and irrigation systems.

UNDERSTANDING WINTER'S IMPACT

Winter weather can vary greatly from year to year. While most plants here are adapted to some cold, a harsh winter can damage them. Here's how to give your plants a fighting chance:

- **Healthy Plants are More Resilient:** Proper plant selection, placement, watering, fertilization, and pruning all contribute to a landscape better equipped to handle winter stress.
- **Reduce Watering in Cool Weather:** As temperatures drop, ease up on watering to prevent root damage.

KEEPING YOUR LAWN GREEN

If you want a green lawn throughout winter, focus on proper fertilization:

- Apply winter fertilizer (Dr. Q's® Winter Gem or Best Nitra King) in November, December, and January to keep your lawn from going dormant.
- Remove dead grass buildup (thatch) before winter for better fertilizer and water absorption.
- Bermuda grass goes dormant in winter and doesn't need fertilizer unless overseeded with ryegrass. ([top](#))

HELPING SHRUBS, VINES & TREES PREPARE FOR WINTER

- Encourage hardening off in fall by reducing watering and switching to fertilizers lower in nitrogen but higher in phosphorus and potassium.
- Prune only deciduous trees and shrubs around New Year's when fully dormant. Avoid pruning evergreens or desert plants until spring.
- Apply mulch around the base of plants to retain moisture and regulate root temperature.

PROTECTING YOUR IRRIGATION SYSTEM

- The Desert's occasional cold snaps can wreak havoc on your irrigation system if it's not properly winterized. Here's how to safeguard your pipes and prevent costly repairs:
- Ensure pipes are buried at least 6-8 inches deep during installation for natural insulation.
- Install drain valves at the lowest point of each irrigation line for complete water removal.
- Wrap exposed Pressure Vacuum Breaker (PVB) valves with Frostbite's PVB Protector or insulated foam pipe wrap to prevent freezing.
- Use prefabricated pipe insulation for exposed pipes near the shut-off valve or sprinkler heads. Cover spigots with winterization products from your local nursery.
- If a hard freeze is predicted, turn off the main water supply, drain the PVB valve (consult a professional), and remove drip system end caps.

SPECIAL CARE FOR DESERT YARDS

- Limit winter watering for most desert plants, especially cacti. One deep soak in late October or mid-November is enough until late February.
- Avoid winter pruning on desert plants as it can induce new growth susceptible to frost damage. Prune in early spring instead.
- Apply desert plant fertilizer (Dr. Q's Desert Plant and Cactus Food) in early spring to promote blooms.

CONTAINER PLANT WINTERIZING

- Move tender plants like citrus trees, bougainvillea, and hibiscus indoors before frost arrives.
- Gradually reintroduce sunlight when bringing container plants back outside in spring to avoid burning. ([top](#))

- Choose cold-hardy varieties like pansies, primroses, kale, stock, or violas for winter containers.

WINTERIZING SUBTROPICAL PLANTS IN THE GROUND

The Desert's occasional cold snaps can threaten the health of your beloved subtropical plants. Here's how to protect them when temperatures are expected to dip below 35°F on any given night:

- Apply a thick layer of mulch around the base of subtropical plants like citrus trees to insulate the root zone.
- If frost is forecast, cover vulnerable plants with burlap or thermal blankets.
- For vining plants, use an inverted nursery pot filled with mulch to create a mini-insulated shelter around the base.
- Create a tent-like structure with sticks or lumber when using covers to allow air circulation and prevent smothering.
- Water deeply only when the top few inches of soil feel dry to the touch, as overwatering can be harmful during cold weather.

By following these tips, you can increase your chances of protecting your subtropical plants during winter cold spells. Remember, in a very cold winter, even extreme measures may not be enough to save tender sub-tropicals.

WINTER ANNUALS AND VEGETABLES

- After the first frost, replace frost-sensitive summer vegetables with cold-tolerant options like broccoli, cabbage, carrots, radishes, and lettuce.
- Swap out summer flowers with winter bloomers like pansies, cyclamen, stock, kale, and primroses. Refresh the soil with organic matter and starter fertilizer.

PREPARE FOR THE WORST: WINTER WEATHER ACTION PLAN

- Monitor the forecast for hard freezes (below 20°F) with strong northerly winds for 24 hours or more.
- Deep water the ground around non-desert evergreens and subtropical plants a day before the freeze.
- Use burlap or thermal blankets as temporary covers for vulnerable plants when temperatures are expected to dip below 35°F.
 - Remove covers during the day if there is no wind and temperatures rise above freezing.
 - Replace covers at night as temperatures drop again.
- Avoid walking on frosted lawns to prevent damage. [\(top\)](#)