



**STARNOTE 110**  
June 2024

# TAKING CARE OF FROST DAMAGED YARDS

## *What to do after a severe freeze*

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A yard full of frost-damaged plants can be disheartening. The natural urge might be to grab your pruners but hold on! Even after a harsh freeze, many plants can surprise you with their resilience. This guide will help you assess the situation and take the right steps to get your landscape back on its feet.

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### **RECOVERY:**

Here's why a "wait and see" approach is often best:

Plants are Tougher Than They Look: Many plants can recover from seemingly severe frost damage. The full extent of the injury might not be immediately clear.

Patience is Key: Different plants have different recovery timelines. Some may bounce back quickly, while others might take weeks or even months to show signs of life.

Focus on Long-Term Health: Jumping into major changes like pruning or replacement can harm recovering plants. Let them focus their energy on healing.

### **WHAT TO DO NOW:**

Instead of rushing to replace your plants, here are some initial steps you can take:

Hold Off on Pruning: Wait until spring when new growth emerges. This will reveal which branches are truly dead and need removal. This is especially important for palms, as they only produce a limited number of fronds per year. Pruning away too many fronds can weaken the palm significantly, hindering its ability to recover from frost damage. ([top](#))

Evaluate Each Plant: Take an individual look at each plant. Some might be salvageable with proper care, while others might be beyond saving.

By following these steps and giving your plants some time, you'll be in a better position to determine the best course of action for your specific situation.

### **WHEN TO PRUNE FOR RECOVERY:**

Different plant types have different recovery timelines:

- Fast Healers: Plants like Mock Orange, Photinia, Privet, and Texas Sage will typically show signs of recovery by early March. Prune these only for shaping after they've bounced back.
- Slow Responders: Eucalyptus and African sumac might not show new growth until April or May. Delay any replacement or pruning decisions for these plants until you see a clear picture of their health.

### **THE BOTTOM LINE:**

Patience is key! Resist the urge to prune right away. Let spring growth reveal the true extent of the damage and guide your pruning decisions. This will help your plants focus their energy on recovery rather than dealing with additional stress from pruning cuts.

### **PALMS: A SPECIAL CASE**

Palms are particularly vulnerable to frost damage because of their unique growth pattern. Unlike most plants that can sprout new branches from buds lower on the stem, palms have only one growing point called the heart-bud. Damaging this bud is fatal, as they can't produce new fronds elsewhere. Additionally, palms only produce a limited number of fronds each year.

### **WHAT TO DO WITH FROST-DAMAGED PALMS:**

Wait and See: Be patient! Avoid pruning or removing any dead leaves (thatch) until spring growth appears. The dead leaves provide insulation for the heart-bud. Prune only after new growth is evident. Five strong new leaves are a good indicator of a healthy palm ready for some shaping.

Mediterranean Fan Palm Exception: This variety might send up new shoots from the base after cold stress. You can choose to keep or remove these shoots as desired.

Inspect for Fungus: After a freeze, be on the lookout for signs of fungal issues in the crown, such as discoloration or wilting. ([top](#))

Treat for Fungus (Optional): If you suspect fungus, or want to prevent it as a precaution, treat the crown with a drench of copper-based fungicide. Consult a certified arborist for guidance on choosing and applying the appropriate fungicide.

By following these tips, you can increase your chances of reviving your frost-damaged palms.

*Remember*: When in doubt, it's always best to consult a professional arborist familiar with palm care in your specific region. They can assess your palm's health and recommend the most appropriate pruning strategy.

### **OLIVES (March):**

Prune lightly in March, focusing on removing small, twiggy growth. Avoid using fruit-inhibiting chemicals, as they can slow recovery. Expect a lighter or nonexistent fruit harvest this year due to the freeze damage.

### **EUCALYPTUS & AFRICAN SUMACS (May):**

Wait until May to assess the full extent of the damage. These trees may not sprout well from damaged branches. Consider replacing them if severely damaged, as they might not fully recover. Some may re-grow from the roots, but this can take time.

### **BEDDING PLANTS:**

Evaluate each plant individually. Replace badly damaged plants based on your budget and preferences.

### **LAWNS (Fescue- March):**

Rake dead grass (thatch) in mid-March. Use a high-nitrogen fertilizer to promote recovery. Water deeply (3-4 inches) before fertilizing. Avoid weed-and-feed products for now. Water deeply once a week but adjust based on the weather.

### **FERTILIZING:**

Hold off on fertilizing most plants until spring when new growth starts. Use balanced, low-analysis fertilizers or organic options. Avoid strong doses of high-nitrogen fertilizer, even on healthy plants.

### **WATERING:**

Water deeply when the soil dries significantly but avoid overwatering. Overwatering can lead to root rot. Water less frequently in cooler weather. Lawns typically need watering only once a week in cold weather.

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**GENERAL TIPS:**

Be patient! Let the plants show you how they're recovering before taking major actions. Over-watering, fertilizing, or pruning can harm recovering plants. Proper watering is crucial. Consider seeking guidance from local experts like your university extension office.

**REMEMBER: PATIENCE IS KEY**

Replacing plants too early can be a waste of money. Wait and see how your plants recover before making any drastic decisions.

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