



REFERENCE:

Protecting the Garden in Cold Weather

1. **Bring in all container plants** that are tropical or cold tender. You'll minimize damage, and they won't have to start growth over nearly as much. *Containers will get 7-10 degrees colder (and hotter) than plants in the ground.* Remember that most tropical plants are *in danger at the 45-degree mark.* Take hanging baskets down, and move the more frost tolerant plants to the southwest side of the house if possible. Don't forget: frost can easily occur even if the *air* temperature is not freezing, but the area *at the ground* is.
2. Use a **layer of burlap** for plants too large to bring in, loosely tying a doubled layer around the containers to protect the roots. Leave these in place, or if you can, move them up closer to the house and cover.
3. **Water**—especially up to 24 hours prior to freezing temps. Water insulates, making plants much more resistant to damage. *If it's already freezing and you've missed your chance to water, wait until temperatures warm up, and water—but move on with other protective steps.* Water stressed plants will take a hard hit.
4. Water temperature matters—below 40 or above 90 degrees, plants can't efficiently absorb water. 65-72 degrees is optimal. Add **liquid seaweed** or **SUPERthrive** when you water herbaceous plants and vegetables. These contain vitamins, hormones, and potassium that makes plants stronger and more resistant to stress. Apply at least 24 hours before a freeze for the best effect.
5. **Apply 3-4" of mulch after watering.** Newly planted annuals, perennials and shrubs will need additional attention. Double-checking this amount now will offer great benefits to ensure the survival of healthy soil organisms. If only a lighter cover will be needed, pile any fallen leaves nearby on top of plants and containers. They can blow off in windy conditions, so dampen leaves if possible to help weigh them down, and cover with a layer of another material for added warmth if needed.
6. **Frost Cloth** is your number one tool. *Remember that for some plants, one layer simply won't be enough.* Offering up to 8 degrees of protection, it can be doubled for greater effectiveness. Anchor with **staples, clothespins, bricks, or binder clips.** Leave air space, and use a **plant stake** in the center of plants or rows to prop up the cloth and prevent crushing blooms. Lay any unused tomato cages down first to use as supports until needed for tomato season. It's okay to leave frost cloth on plants for two or three days.
7. **Plankets** are a convenient alternative, especially for containers. This material is slightly heavier than frost cloth and some sizes offer a convenient drawstring. *Never cover with heavy blankets, plastic, or any other non-breathable materials, as these can cause damage from overheating, crushing or suffocation.*
8. **Cover cool-season annuals.** If dianthus, snapdragons, or Iceland poppies were planted in fall, they will typically survive winter with minimal protection. Cover primroses and cyclamen below 30 degrees. Many will survive frosts, but flowers will be easily damaged. Cover with a layer of frost cloth or a **Planket.**
9. **Check vegetables.** Broccoli, cabbage, and lettuces need covering below freezing; cauliflower is sensitive. **Pick tomatoes and peppers.** Ripen green tomatoes indoors stem side down in a warm window.
10. **Continue to monitor the weather.** Watch for calm, clear conditions for danger of frost, and remember to roll up frost cloth and other protective materials and keep them close by for the next cold front!

See a Garden Advisor for additional help in protecting your garden.

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