

Prepare plants for upcoming spurts of colder weather

After a reasonably cool and very wet summer, it looks like fall finally has arrived. I say “reasonably cool” because as a native Floridian, I remember past summers where we hit the century mark numerous times during a “normal” summer.

I don’t know if it was all the clouds and rainy days that made the difference this year, but I’m not complaining.

The cooler weather at home means that my wood-burning fireplace is being put to use. It also means that I “get” to cut, split and haul wood to burn in the fireplace so my cold-natured wife can warm herself by the fire after surprising me with her cold hands to show me just how cold she really is.

Cooler weather here at work means we are able to start cutting back on our irrigation run times for the District common area properties that we control, which include areas along major roadways, villa frontages, our three downtowns and various recreation centers.

Many irrigation timers have an irrigation percentage option where you simply can adjust the run times for all your zones at one time. Simply put, this means if you are running at 100 percent for the warm seasons and a certain zone runs for 20 minutes twice a week, if you adjust the percentage down to 80 percent that zone will run for only 16 minutes twice a week. This will translate to a 20 percent savings on your water bill as well.

Make sure your rain sensor is operating correctly and set properly so if we do get rain, you can save even more water. As the daytime and nighttime



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average temperatures are even cooler, you may be able to reduce your times down to 70 percent or maybe even 60 percent, as the plants are not growing much and don’t need the extra water.

If you have not done it already and you have cold-sensitive plants or palms such as queen palms, pigmy date palms, Bismarck palms or several other tropicals, now is the time to get in late-year fertilization to help your plants withstand freezing temperatures.

Studies have shown that strong, well-fertilized palms, trees, turf and shrubs can withstand a freeze better than plants that are deficient in one or more essential nutrients or weak because of insect or disease infestation.

With that being said, make sure the fertilizer you use has as much as possible in slow-release form so you don’t push any new growth at this time, as it is more tender and susceptible to cold damage.

Dr. Tim Broschat, with the University of Florida, has researched and developed the correct formulation for palms in Florida; you can visit the following link to review the specific information: edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep261.

As he reports in this publication, this formulation of fertilizer benefits all plants in the landscape and I use it for all plantings and turf at my house.

We also specify this product in our maintenance contracts for all palms in our District landscaped areas.

It is more expensive than the average fertilizers you might buy at the large chain stores, which do not carry this product, but it is well worth the price for the results you get.

Many off the shelf “palm special” fertilizers actually do more harm than good to palms because they do not have some necessary nutrients, some are not in the correct form or amounts, or they are not in slow-release form and push too much tender growth at first, and then simply wash through the soil profile with the first few rains and are gone.

Here are some reminders to help protect your plants from cold damage on those freezing nights we may have this year in our area.

First, for your turf and shrubs -make sure the soil moisture level is adequate as soil with proper moisture holds and releases heat at night better than soil that is too dry.

Second, a frost cloth is just that; it can prevent frost from touching your plants, but does little to hold in heat in the event of a hard freeze. Blankets, sheets, tarps, burlap, plastic or other less porous materials do more to trap heat in and around your plants.

Just make sure to remove them before the sun gets too hot, as covers such as plastic or tarps can cook your plants in a very short time if the sun is shining directly on them.

Also, if you decide to utilize Christmas lights, a drop light

or a light bulb in a can for extra heat on those really

cold nights can help your plants; just make sure it is arranged where it will not come in contact with anything flammable or you can have a disaster on your

hands.

Lastly, in the event we do have a frost, kindly wait until the frost is gone to drive on turf or park to walk Phideaux for his morning business. Even

a golf cart will crush and damage turf that is covered with frost and leave brown tracks after it thaws out.

Till next time, stay warm and I will see you again here,

at Our Place.

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