

Q: California has been experiencing the coldest winter weather we have had in years. Gardeners love to experiment with plants, and tropical and subtropical plants have been best seller in nurseries for the past few years. These plants can be severely stressed and may die when temperatures drop. What should you do with plants that are turning brown and crispy with frost-burn?

A: The first recommendation is to be patient. The second is to make sure that you are not letting the plants dry out. We have had little rain to date. If you must prune, check to see if the stems are still green even if foliage has turned brown. If the stems are green, stop pruning. If the stems are brown and crisp, they can be cut back. Some plants such as *Salvia elegans* (Pineapple sage), can be cut back to the crown (to the ground). They will re-sprout once the weather warms up. For perennials this works well. If you have lost woody shrubs, they may need reconstructive pruning to achieve a healthy silhouette. Trees such as Citrus may have suffered freeze damage or the fruit may have been frozen. Remove the damaged fruit as soon as possible, but do not prune the trees until -summer. By mid-June you should know what is alive and what has been lost. At that time you should prune out the dead wood. There may be numerous sprouts emerging from the trunk. Choose sprouts that are properly spaced to form a new canopy. If the tree has frozen back to the bud union, replace it.

Be sure that pruners are sharp and that your cuts are clean. Do not coat pruning cuts with anything. Think good thoughts for spring.

Call or email the Master Gardeners if you want information or recommendations for a specific plant variety. Ph 925 646-6586, email mgcontracosta@ucdavis.edu.