



Assessing Plant Damage from Winter Storms

Because of ice or heavy snow, you may see several types of damage to your landscape plants as late as this spring and summer. Particularly vulnerable are plants that have not become established (in the ground for at least 2 full growing seasons) or went into the winter in a weakened or stressful state.

What to expect:

Types of Cold Damage

- Leaf burn: Severe cold and wind can dry out or burn leaves especially on many evergreens such as hollies, euonymus, cherry laurel etc.
- Many times when the leaves burn, the plant will defoliate, meaning the burnt up leaves will dry up and fall off and new leaves will grow back in spring.
- Plant dieback: all or part of the plant may be completely killed.

Physical Damage (Snow /Ice)

- Broken or snapped branches from the weight of heavy snow or ice
- Fallen trees
- Split branches (damage may not show up till summer)
- Plants leaning over.

Particularly vulnerable plants include:

- Crape myrtle may experience branch breakage and various degrees of dieback depending on the location, age, and specific variety.
- Nandina may show burnt leaves but generally recover.
- Hydrangea and camellia may die back partially or be killed completely.
- Leyland cypress , white pines, and boxwood.



How to manage cold and ice or snow damaged plants?

1. **Assess the damage.** Any broken, splintered or obviously dead or damaged branches should be cut off cleanly. Do not apply any dressing or covering to the cuts. They may actually harm the healing process. Many deciduous plants may regrow and hide the old damage. Evergreens may take years to recover and look right (if ever) depending on the species and amount and type of damage. *You may not be able to fully assess the dead or damage on many plants until they are in active growth in April or even early May to determine the amount of dieback.*
2. **Think carefully about repositioning plants and trees that have fallen over.** Plants and trees that have been uprooted or even bent over and then replanted, staked, or cabled will always be weak and prone to total failure in a future thunderstorm or snow, ice, and wind. Consider this carefully when you make your assessment.
3. **Determine if the plant should be replaced-** if an evergreen or specimen plant or tree is more than 25 or 30% damaged or broken, you should consider replacing it. Decide if you really need to replace that particular tree or shrub at all.
4. **Leave branches or shrubs that have bent over** until after all of the snow has melted **and** the sap rises and the new growth has started. This may be until April or May. Many of these will right themselves (at least partially) as the sap flows and the plants resume growth. Then you can determine if the bent or fallen over branches will need careful staking or cabling, and/or tip pruning will help to return the plants to a semi normal look. Often careful pruning on the ends of some of the longer branches may help lift the weight off the stems and they may spring back.
5. **How to prevent future damage?**
 - Maintain all of your landscape plants in the healthiest state possible.
 - Plant plants that resist snow or ice damage: cryptomeria or Green Giant Arborvitae instead of Leyland cypress.
 - Proper pruning and thinning over the lifetime of the plants will encourage growth deep inside the plant, make it less top heavy, and less likely to be damaged or break because of snow or ice. For example carefully shearing and topping Leyland cypress may make them less likely to be damaged in snow or ice. Do not plant too closely to allow for a full, well rooted plant.

NOTE: some damage may take months to show up. Hidden fractures or splits may show up suddenly this summer as dried or dying branches.

Please contact your McFall and Berry manager to answer your questions or concerns about your community.