

Winterizing Plants

Gray Barn Green Thumb Guide



Northwest winters vary greatly from year to year. One will be mild and wet; the next will bring snow and multiple days of below freezing temperatures. The main causes of post winter plant death and damage are-

- **Too Much Water-** The rain and steady wet we endure fall through early spring can rot plants root systems. Our region doesn't get a huge amount of rain. But because of how consistent the moisture is, our soil never has a chance to dry out before the next downpour comes. This creates garden soil that is saturated, which suffocates roots and kills our plants.
- **Sudden Temperature Changes with No Transition Period-** Gradual changes in temperature allow plants to transition from warm temperatures to the approaching cooler weather. When our temperatures are in the fifties one day and twenties the next, there is no transition from warm to cold and plants go into shock. This happens most often in November and ends up damaging or killing plants.
- **Wrong Plant in the Wrong Place-** Make sure you buy the appropriate plant for your garden. If your soil stays wet, don't plant lavender or a dry soil loving plant. Be aware of how much sun, water and ideally, what the soil is like in your garden. Knowing these factors can help you buy the right plant for your garden.

If there are plants in your yard that you fear may suffer from winter damage, here are a couple things you can do to try and protect them-

- **Mulch-** Adding mulch around the root zone of plants can provide two to ten degrees of added warmth through the winter. Apply five to six inches of mulch at the root zone, but not mounding up the trunk or base. The root zone is the soil directly underneath the leaves of the plant. As we get into the teens and even single digits, a couple degrees of added warmth can potentially save a plant.
- **Cover Tender Plants-** If you know temperatures are going to be below freezing, you can cover plants that need extra protection with a blanket, sheet or a plastic bag.
- **Move Them-** The most labor intensive option would be to move the plant into the garage or another protected area for the winter. This is most appropriate for plants that are in pots and weren't given the chance during the growing season to establish a large root system.

The easiest way to have your plants breeze through the cool and wet, is to get them established and healthy during the growing season. Plant them in the right place with fertilizer, add compost and water them when needed during spring and summer. Healthy, strong, properly placed plants survive the cool and wet of winter easily.