

Cold Damage Depends On Plant Age

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Last week I commented about the vagaries of our winter's weather and the effect of the very low temperature on plants. This time, let's take a closer look.

Let me say in the beginning that the degree of damage will depend upon the kind of plant, age, vigor and exposure to cold, drying winds.

Many camellias were in full, beautiful bloom and, of course, all flowers were killed. I have not observed any severe damage to foliage, although I have had one report of heavy foliage damage.

Moderate to heavy damage has occurred to pyracantha and Ilex cornuta Burfordii berries. However, this injury is more disfiguring than serious. I have observed Burfordii plants within 10 feet of each other; one at the corner of a building exposed to the wind and the other, protected by a building. The corner plant was heavily hurt (berries and foliage) while the protected plant is all right.

Moderate to severe damage has been noted on the following plants: abelia, heavy damage. This plant is, in most seasons, evergreen in our area but all plants that I have observed have been heavily hurt and will defoliate; ligustrum, a very hardy plant, has been severely damaged, especially the weak, leggy, overgrown plants; pittosporum has been heavily damaged. I have one large plant on which the foliage has turned a beautiful deep brownish orange color. It will most likely defoliate so I will enjoy the sudden change in color while the leaves are still holding on.

Continuing: Gold Dust aucuba has been hurt. However, most damage has occurred on young plants and on some of the older branches of mature plants; Yunnan Honeysuckle (Lonicera yunnanensis) has been heavily damaged. If you do not know this plant, it somewhat resembles cotoneaster in growth habit. Other plants which have been damaged are: osmanthus, Formosa azaleas, gardenias and liriope.

I am sure that you, too, have observed that there is a wide variation in plants as far as their ability to withstand low temperature is concerned. Some plants may remain frozen all winter without injury while others may be killed.

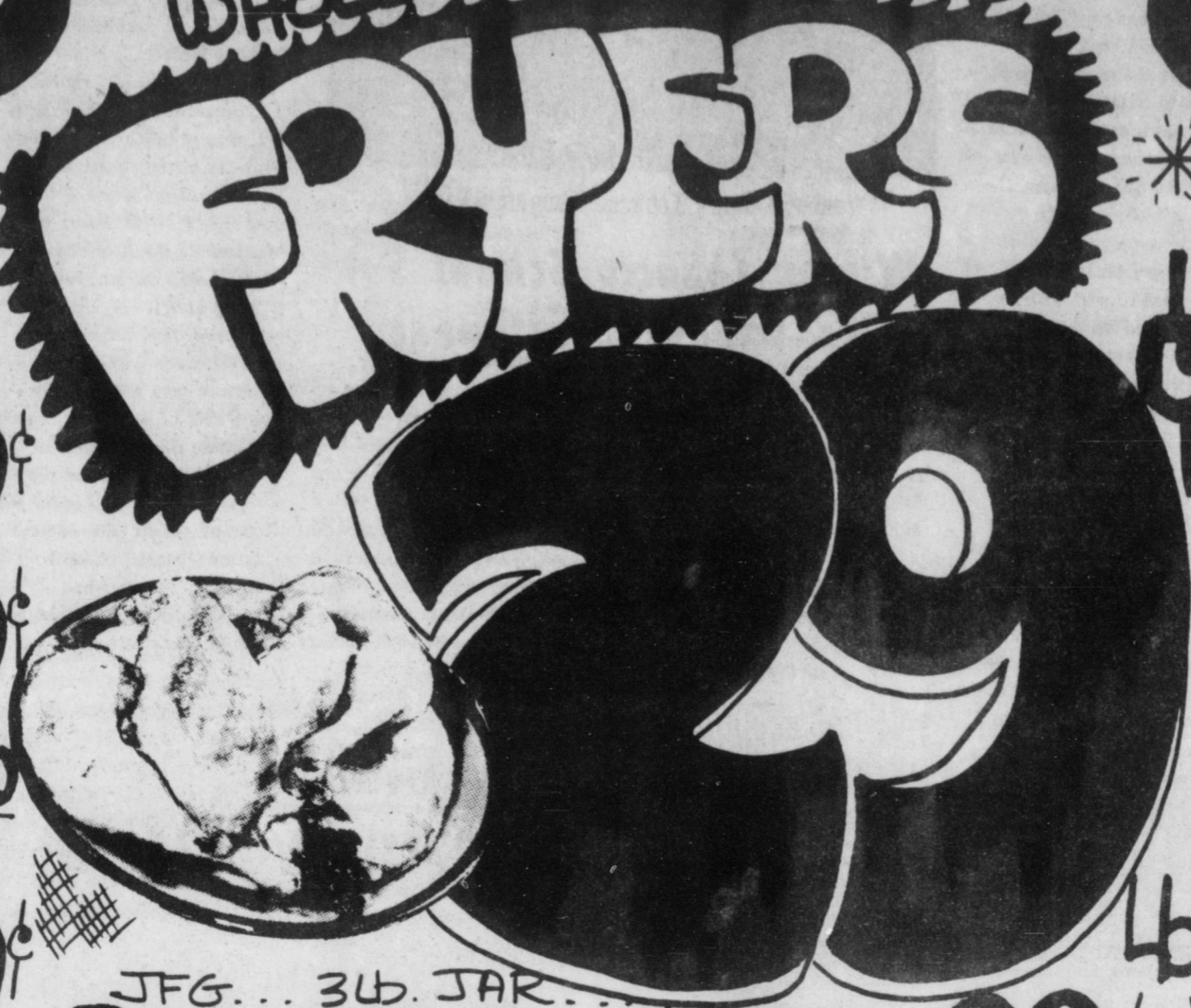
There are internal conditions which have a bearing on the ability of a plant to resist cold damage, such as concentration of cell sap; and the holding of water by the plant tissues against the force of freezing.

What are my suggestions now? Leave the plants alone as far as pruning, removal or replacement are concerned. It is too early to take drastic measures. If we have a prolonged dry spell, keep your plants well supplied with water.

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