

Treating Cold-Damaged Palms

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Palms stressed by low temperatures are very likely to get bud rot which can kill the palm. During the cold months palms are also likely to show signs of nutrient deficiencies. Cold weather slows down the growth of palms, lessens the activity of the roots and weakens the plant. Sometimes the palm gets so weak that a disease will move in and kill it.

When cold damage is severe, caused by frost or freezing temperatures, plant tissues are destroyed and water uptake into the plant may be reduced for years. Many times it is only the protected bud that will remain alive (yet another reason to keep as many leaves on a palm as possible – only remove totally brown, dead fronds).

Treatment includes removal of the cold-damaged parts of the leaves. If the fronds are green keep them on the tree, just remove the damaged part of the frond. It is important to leave the green portion of the fronds because this is the part that produces food for the plant.

After pruning away the damaged fronds, spray the palms with a fungicide containing copper at the label rate (if the palm is bearing edible fruit do not spray). Include a spreader sticker in the fungicide if it does not already have it. Repeat the copper spray 10 days after the first treatment. The spray must cover the damaged tissue and healthy bud completely. Copper sprays should not be sprayed more than twice because the copper can cause damage to the leaves. A soil drench of fungicide can be applied to palms growing in a container to help stop root diseases.

Sometimes, cold damage is severe or disease has already caused the spear leaf to loosen and pull out easily. These palms can still be saved if the bud is still alive. To treat these palms, remove as much dead and dying material from around the bud as possible so it can dry out. Drench the bud with a copper fungicide using the force of the sprayer to clean out the bud as much as possible. Follow up ten days later with another treatment.

As the weather warms the palm will start to grow and this will help it to recover. Follow the two fungicide treatments with a monthly application of a minor element spray. Also include a spreader sticker in the spray. This spray should be applied to the fronds. Established palms should also receive a granular palm fertilizer in the spring. Repeat fertilizer every three to four months. Broadcast the fertilizer evenly starting a foot away from the trunk and out past the longest frond.

Palms damaged by cold can still show symptoms six months to a year following a freeze. If leaves coming out during the spring and summer appear mis-shaped, browned or otherwise abnormal, this may be a sign of damage that happened during the freeze. Usually the palm will grow out of

this in a year. Sometimes the palm loses its ability to take up water. If there is a sudden collapse of the fronds in the crown during the first hot days of spring or summer the palm may die. There is nothing that can be done to save a palm that can no longer "drink" up water.

Some palms that are likely to suffer cold damage in our area include: Queen, Foxtail, Royal, Areca, Coconut, Pygmy date, Bismarck and Lady. Remember it is always best to choose plants that are in our hardiness zone, which is 9B. Some palms that are better suited to our zone include: Saw palmetto, Needle, European fan, Pindo, Paurotis, Chinese fan, Sentry, Cabbage, Canary Island and Date.

For more information or to get a free publication listing palms for our area, call your local Master Gardeners at the Manatee County Extension Service (an "extension" of the University of Florida/IFAS). Master Gardeners are available Monday-Friday from 9 AM to 4 PM and can be reached by calling 722-4524. Our website is: <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu>