

Real Estate and Landscape – How to Prepare for a Freeze

Texas weather can change quickly, especially in the winter. A fast-moving cold front can cause temperatures to drop below freezing within hours. You can avoid thousands of dollars of damage to your walls, ceilings, carpets, and furniture by taking a few simple measures to protect your home. Preparing your landscape for a freeze is just as important and will preserve the beauty of your landscape and save you money.

Before the Freeze:

- Protect faucets, outdoor pipes, backflows and exposed pipes in unheated areas by wrapping them with plastic foam and black tape or old towels /newspaper then trash bags. I emphasize that it's important to wrap backflows after draining with insulating foam, then overwrapping with black tape or aluminum tape. I keep mine wrapped year round.
- Insulate your outdoor water meter box for a hard freeze and be sure its lid is on tight.
- Drain and store water hoses indoors.
- Protect outdoor electrical pumps.
- In your pool, keep the pump motor running. Running the motor for short periods is better for the system than continuous.
- Drain water sprinkler supply lines and backflows\$\$\$\$. This is the item most overlooked.
- Open the cabinets under sinks in your kitchen and bathrooms to allow heated indoor air to circulate around the water pipes.
- Set your thermostat at a minimum temperature of 55 degrees, especially when you're gone for the day or away for an extended period
- Let indoor faucets drip; it isn't necessary to run a stream of water.
- Make sure you know where your home's shut-off valve is and how to turn it on and off.
- If you leave town, consider turning off your water at the shut-off valve while faucets are running to drain your pipes. Make sure you turn the faucets off before you turn the shut-off valve back on.
- If you drain your pipes, contact your electric or gas utility company for Instructions on protecting your water heater.
- Many homeowners' policies do not cover loss caused by freezing pipes while your house is unoccupied unless you used reasonable care to maintain heat in the building; shut off the water supply; and drain water from plumbing systems.
- Landscape tips – don't prune shrubs after September or a sudden freeze could destroy plants through tender new growth. The freeze damage may not be evident until the following summer when the plant suddenly dies; the plants vascular system is at risk during a freeze. Hold off on fertilizing shrubs until the spring. Tender new growth is vulnerable.

- Landscape 'freeze cloth' is available in nurseries – there's usually a run on it when a freeze is announced. Get yours early. Wrap tender tropical plants and secure with clips off bricks around the bottom edges to keep the cold air out. Never use just plastic to cover plants; it will freeze the plants faster than no cover at all.
- Plumerias can be pulled straight out of the ground and left in a garage during the cold snap and then replanted in the spring.
- Roses are generally winter hardy and do not need covering.
- Place potted plants in the garage. If plants are too large to move, grouping them together out of the wind and covering with freeze cloth is the next best thing. A portable light can provide heat.
- The most important "insulation" for landscape plants is a heavy layer of mulch 4" and greater.
- If a severe freeze happens, don't prune frozen parts of plants until spring. The frozen part actually provides insulation for the rest of the plant.

Around our home, having a plan, a checklist helps us to move quickly when a freeze is predicted. I hope these suggestions are helpful to your family as well.

Bet Jennings