



**January 2, 2010**

**Branch Managers  
ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance  
Central and South Florida  
Via Email**

**Ref: Freeze and Cold Damage**

---

900 S. Palmetto Ave  
Sanford, Florida 32771  
*tel:* 407 496 5842  
*fax:* 559 961 4174

btroutman@valleycrest.com  
www.valleycrest.com

**Seasonal Color:** The coming cold front is apt to drop temperature near or even slightly below freezing in some parts of Central Florida. As you know from previous frosts, seasonal color plants are the most sensitive to frost. Where possible these plants should be covered during cold weather. There will tons of advice given on nightly news shows that will not doubt tell everyone what to do and our customers will expect some damage.

**St Augustine Lawns:** The freezes are no big deal most years because lawns are semi dormant and freezes are hardly noticed by our clients. However; this time lawns are fully green and even growing, so freezing temperature will make some big changes in lawn appearance. Although lawns will be damaged this for the most part will be just a temporary setback for healthy lawns. **Never walk on frosted lawns** since this activity will grind ice crystals into healthy turf and increase turf damage.

In light frosts and freezes the upper blades of grass are apt to freeze when the temperature drops below 32 degrees. As ice crystals form in living tissues breaking cell membranes and killing the cells. The first sign of this type of damage is a blackening of the leaves which shows the morning after the frost. You are apt to get questions from customers who believe something black like oil has been applied to their lawns. Within a few hours these black areas dry out and turn brown. The browned tissues are dead and the lawn will remain brown until warm weather returns and new leaves grow.

A single freeze event is not apt to kill St Augustine unless temperatures drop below 28 degrees for several hours. These hard freezes can kill St Augustine runners causing large areas of the lawn. However, repeated light freezes in late winter and early spring can kill St Augustine by



causing it to use all its stored food reserves before it can replace brown leaves.

**Shrubs and Trees:** It will take a pretty hard freeze to damage woody plant material. Plants from hardiness zone 9b and 10 are the most sensitive. We may see some damage to young tender foliage if this weather gets colder than predicted. If we do the rule of thumb is to wait a couple of days before pruning damage. Then prune out tissue that does not scratch green and the plants should recover quickly.

**What can we do?** Beyond covering cold sensitive season color there not much we can do. Recent rains should have created good soil moisture conditions so drying of plants during a few days of cold weather are not apt to be a problem. It would be an excellent idea to be sure that sprinklers don't run during freezing weather. Don't try the citrus industry trick of watering plants to prevent freeze damage. This will cause more plant damage and might create icy conditions on walks, drives and streets.

*Barry C. Troutman*

Barry C. Troutman, Ph.D.  
Vice President, Technical Services  
ValleyCrest Companies

Cc: