



The Green Corner

What to do about winter damage to landscaping

A message from
Kathy Cail

Dear neighbors,

Christmas all gave us a gift we didn't want: a deep Arctic Freeze. I've lived here for over 20 years and while we have had freezes that low in the past, they did not last as long and did not have the horrible wind chills associated with this past blast.

As a result, many of our shrubs have been winter killed. As I've walked around the neighborhood, I see these species mostly affected: Laurels, Holly, Nandina, Crepe myrtle, Spirea and Boxwood. I have even seen some large arborvitae that were killed. Several of us have lost whole hedges, myself included. Some of these shrubs are as old as our homes and even I was a bit surprised when I saw the damage.

Regardless, what are our options? Inspect your bushes and bend a few twigs. If the twigs snap, the bush is dead. If you scrape back a bit of bark and there is a hint of green, or the twig is flexible, it *may still be alive*, but under stress. Treat it kindly, trimming back dead branches, feed with a well balanced food, like Miracle Grow or similar, and *maybe* it could come back but that is no guarantee. The bush it returns to may not be aesthetically pleasing for your home.

With the magnitude of the die off, I would suggest removal of your shrubs and replanting. Because many of our homes have lost whole hedges, that may be original to the house, I suggest getting them professionally removed because of the size of root system and the proximity to the foundation. As someone who gardens in new construction, you'll be surprised to see what is buried under your hedges (concrete, broken brick, gravel, nails, shingles, metal scraps, lunch refuse).

If your home is in the newer section, you may be able to remove the dead shrubs yourself because the plants were not established for many years, like the first sections of development. A good sturdy shovel or pitchfork and maybe some loppers would be all that is required. You may be surprised how easily they pop out of the ground. Developers are not known for their green thumbs.

To replace them, I would suggest the following species: viburnum (not leatherleaf- they get too large), hydrangea, yellow or red twig dogwood, weigela, and nine bark (comes in red or green). Please avoid burning bush as they are invasive, do not replant

nandina because its berries are poisonous to birds. All the bushes I suggest are winter hardy, pest resistant, mostly native to our area, which increases their odds of surviving our climate, and not only beautify your home but also add value for wildlife, mainly butterflies and birds, who are facing environmental pressures.

To make lemonade out of lemons, think of this as an opportunity to put your unique spin on your landscape as opposed to what the builder had in mind. Also, don't forget to water any new plantings for the first full year in your garden- one inch of water per week, more if we have a hot summer, or your investment will literally wither away. Water deeply, not just on the surface for good root development.

Also, it's still not too late to trim trees. I've seen a few that if we keep having these wind storms like we have, they will be splitting in a few years more of growth. It's easy to trim a small, young tree than hire an arborist to cut branches out when it's grown. It's also less expensive (your labor) vs a few thousand dollars to hire an arborist.

If anyone needs help with how to prune your trees, I'd be glad to help. You can find me on the HOA Facebook.

Stay green everyone.