



Urban Harvest

## Preparation Key for Recovery from Freeze

By Ray Sher, Homes Correspondent

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I hope all your vegetable, herb and fruit gardens fared well during and after the freeze. It was an exceptionally long freeze, both nights, with more than eight hours the first night and 14 hours the second night. Because of the length of freeze, I expected a great deal of damage.

In preparation, we watered all fruit trees, vegetables and herbs very well, allowing water to soak into the plants to give them strength. This is key to preventing damage during freezes.

We then protected our citrus trees by piling leaves thickly up the trunk about 18 inches. Then on the young citrus trees, we placed a 5-gallon bucket of water next to the trunk and wrapped a blanket around the trunk, water bucket and leaves. All of this was to provide enough warmth to protect the graft. If the top of the tree would have frozen and died, the graft would have been saved, and by summer the tree would have grown back a significant amount.

We also cut our papayas back to 4 feet, put tomato cages around the plants, stuffed the cages with leaves and wrapped blankets around the cages. Fortunately, the citrus were unharmed, as were the papayas.

As for vegetables, we protected the most tender with frost cloth. We placed the cloth over broccoli, cabbage, lettuce and endive plants. They all came through the freeze undamaged. The other vegetables and herbs, which were not protected, were not damaged. This included dill, fennel, carrots, beets, Swiss chard, kale, collards, kohlrabi, turnips, arugula, rutabaga, cilantro, parsley and celery.

At the Plant It Forward Farms, frost cloth was used over some lettuces, and over some lettuce beds, we dumped leaves on top of the plants. The damage was minor to lettuces, but greater to Rhodos endive, a Tres Fine type of endive. The other endive varieties were unharmed. Even Mizuna and Ruby Streaks mustards were unharmed, which was a pleasant surprise. Sugar peas that had not been trellised were damaged, while the ones on trellises were okay.

What did I learn? Good preparation just before long hard freezes is essential, but that most fall-winter produce can withstand the freezes. Another factor could have been that for many days prior to the freeze there were cloudy cold days, which helped the plants harden against adversity. I also learned there are a lot of factors to carefully consider leading up to this type of freeze.

First keep abreast of the weather to allow adequate time to gather materials and use them (this includes gathering bags of leaves from neighbors to dump around citrus and other tropical trees).

Second, water thoroughly, but do it early enough to allow the leaves to dry before the freeze. Protect the most tender plants first, which are lettuces, endives, broccoli and cauliflower. Broccoli and cauliflower leaves can be tied up around the fruit, which is the most cold-sensitive part of the plant.

Dumping leaves on top of lettuces did not prevent freeze damage, and it took some effort to blow the leaves off the plants afterward. I don't think we will do that again. After the freeze, we watered again, for the soil had dried out, and we wanted to give the plants all the help possible to recover.

Hopefully we will not have another freeze like this, or worse, for a long time.

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