



The summer- like temperatures have been nice to have around, but we all knew it was only a matter of time before we got back to “normal” weather conditions again. In a matter of weeks, we went from -40 degrees to almost 80 degrees to drop back down again. Not only is that tough on us, but it can also have an influence in the landscape as well.

Even though the warm days have been nice for us to break from the winter blues, our plants could still have a tough spring. While the blooms and buds are nice to look at, the reality is that our average frost-free date in Central Nebraska is around Mother’s Day, meaning at any point between now and then there is the potential for frost, and dare I say snow too.

Warm temperatures followed by cold and snow can lead to several outcomes. The downside of a warm spring is the potential for plant damage in the event of a cold snap. Perennials and roses can have some damage and dieback to the new growth and into the canes if the roses were already pruned for the year. Flowering bulbs can have damage to the foliage and flowers present at the time of the freeze. Trees and shrubs with their blooms exposed during the time of a frost or a snow can have damage to the bloom and to the emerged leaves. Most trees and shrubs can put on a second set of leaves if the first ones to emerge are damaged due to cold temperatures. Flowers on the other hand are different story, the tree will not put on a second set of flower buds if the first ones are damaged.

Providing winter protection is still a good idea to those tender perennials. While it may be tempting to completely remove all the leaves and mulch from around tender perennials during extended warm periods, but don’t give in. Strawberries, roses, chrysanthemums, and other tender plants can be protected from the fluctuating winter temperatures with winter mulch. If the mulch is removed too soon, new growth can form on the plant too early. This new growth is susceptible to damage caused by cold temperatures. Try and delay the removal of winter mulches as long as possible, but be sure it is removed before new growth begins. If the warm temperatures have caused new plant growth, rake the mulch to the side, but don’t remove it completely. If freezing temperatures are forecasted, the mulch can easily be put back on the plants for protection.

The extent of the damage to plants depends on many things. The location of the plant material can play a big role in how the plants are affected. Plants located on the south or west side of a brick house can be further along in their growth stage than those on the east side of a home with wood siding due to the reflected heat. Plants located in a low spot or at the bottom of a hill also have greater potential for cold damage than those at the top of a hill due to the pooling effect of cold air. The type of plant material and the growth stage that it is in can also play a role on the extent of the damage during a cold snap.

While there isn’t much that we can do about cold temperature injury, we can hold tight right now. There is still a lot of winter to go. Once we get closer to May, inspect the landscape for signs of winter desiccation and winter injury and manage accordingly. Always keep in mind that warmer days are ahead, we just have to get through winter first.

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