

WINTER PROTECTION FOR TENDER PLANTS

Many plants benefit from winter mulching. Some such plants are perennials such as iris, mums, strawberries, roses as well as new trees and shrubs.

Provide winter protection sometime in December, once the ground has frozen. Do not cover plants before the ground freezes, as the additional coverage will keep the ground warm, encouraging new growth on plants which will be damaged later by the freezing temperatures. The object of providing winter protection is to keep the plants frozen and dormant. Winter damage generally occurs when the ground freezes and thaws several times in the winter, causing soil heaving, which can lift the plants' roots out of the ground. If this happens, press the roots back into the soil during a thaw.

Good sources of winter mulches include straw, well-rotted manure, and pine boughs from old Christmas trees. Leaves, with the exception of maple leaves which tend to mat, are also good mulches. Styrofoam caps will work if a few holes are punched into the sides to allow heat to escape on sunny days.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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