

FROST

This is the time of the year when the word frost starts to appear in the forecast. Frost occurs at the temperature where water turns into ice, 32° F (0° C). The warning signs of a potential frost are nights where the air is very still, there is no cloud cover, the humidity is low, and the evening temperatures are 45° or less.

Often you can avoid frost damage by covering your garden beds with old bed sheets or shower curtains. Create a tent so that the fabric doesn't touch the leaves of the plants. If the next day is warm, remove the cover so your plants don't cook.

Since frost damage occurs because the plant cannot replace the moisture that has left its leaves, water the garden well just before nightfall when a frost is expected. Moist soil holds and releases more heat than dry soil, creating a more humid environment around the plant. The plant will suffer less water loss when the frost pulls the moisture from the plant's leaves.

Plants that have suffered damage from the frost are often dark green to black and wilted. The plants and the fruits or vegetables also look and feel like they are full of water. At that point, there is nothing you can do about them and they should be removed from the garden. On the other hand, some crops actually taste better after a frost. These hardy plants often survive a hard frost (see list below) and will continue to grow (slowly) into the late fall and early winter.

So when you hear about a frost coming to your area, consider what to do with the crops still in your garden. Protect them as best you can. Tender crops (see list below) should probably be harvested and brought inside so that all the produce is not lost.

Tender (damaged by light frost): beans, cucumber, eggplant, melon, pepper, pumpkin, tomato, basil | **Semi-hardy** (tolerate light frost): beets, carrot, cauliflower, chard, lettuce | **Hardy** (tolerate hard frost): broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, collards, kale, peas, radish, spinach

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