THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
Colleges of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences & Family and Consumer Sciences

Blankets Won't Protect Outdoor Plants

For generations, homeowners have believed that covering their landscape plants with blankets will protect them from winter temperatures. University of Georgia horticulturists say trick may offer the homeowner peace of mind, but does little to protect the plants from cold.

Covering your landscape plants provides little protection as the wind usually blows off the covering. Even if the covering stays on, UGA experts say a blanket on a plant isn't going to create heat as it does on a person. We're warm-blooded, and we create heat. Plants aren't. The only heat available under the blanket would be coming from the ground.

UGA Extension horticulturists say the time to help your landscape plants prepare for the winter, is actually in the spring and summer. If you take good care of your plants in the warm months by keeping them insect-free, giving them ample water and fertilizing them, you're helping build a hardier plant.

Temperatures would typically have to drop below 20 degrees to damage the stem tissue of landscape plants, UGA experts say. Twenty-four degrees isn't all that terribly cold for a plant.

If it's a flowering plant, you may lose some of the first flowers. You have to remember that landscape plants are outdoors 24 hours a day. They have adapted, and the temperature change is more of a gradual change for them.

UGA horticulturists say saving the "babying treatment" for prized possessions such as a banana tree. If it's a one-of-a-kind plant and you really don't want to lose it, build a makeshift shelter for it.

The overall key to making sure your landscape plants survive each winter is planting the right variety from the start. Don't just buy a cultivar of azalea or other woody ornamental you've heard about or one you think would do well in your landscape. UGA experts say take some time to do a little research. Make sure the cultivar you're buying is suited to your area and you can save your blankets for keeping your family warm.

Source: Orville Lindstrom, University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences