



## GARDENS OF THE MONTH

December 2009: 615 E. Livingston St.

January 2010: 720 E. Livingston St.

February 2010: 805 Harwood St.

## WALKING IN A WINTER 'WONDER' LAND

By Jeff Thompson, RLA, ASLA

Central Florida has really been a Winter Wonderland of late ... everyone is "wondering" how it got so cold this year ... Jack Frost has not only paid a visit but it seems like he decided to move in.

It has been many years since we had temperatures this cold for this long. So it was not difficult to decide what to write about for this issue of the newsletter.

If you have any cold sensitive plants, it's likely that they have some withered foliage or worse from January's freeze. Because of the relatively long duration of the freeze, there will likely be more cold damage than usual. But, as there is a milder microclimate downtown (thanks to the oak canopy, Lake Eola and the proximity to the urban core), the neighborhood fared better than many other areas in Central Florida.

Regardless of how unattractive some plants may be, it is best not to prune damaged foliage until March 1. This is because pruning stimulates new growth, and the new growth is even more sensitive to cold weather. There is always the possibility of a late cold snap. The remnants of the damaged foliage can even provide marginal protection in the event of another freeze.

It is best to use cloth or, better yet, a frost blanket (available at local garden centers) to protect plants from the cold. The frost blanket should extend down to the ground to trap the residual heat coming from the ground. Plastic covers can transfer the cold in the air to the foliage if they are touching. Wrapping cloth around the canopy of a tree or shrub doesn't provide much protection as plants do not generate their own warmth.

Another option is to provide a heat source. For those who have procrastinated putting away the last of the decorations; the small outdoor holiday web style lights usually offer enough warmth to save a plant. These lights work well for large Staghorn ferns or other plants that cannot be moved inside or effectively covered. The lights are warm to the touch and can make

enough of a difference to protect the plant without burning it.

Plants that already have been damaged by cold weather are perhaps more vulnerable than those that have not, so it is especially important to protect your plants if there is another freeze.

Be sure to provide damaged plants with a boost of high nitrogen fertilizer in March or April to assure adequate resources for the extra growing they will need to do to recover.

Colder weather isn't all bad. It goes a long way toward controlling garden pests and provides those chill hours necessary for spring-blooming plants like redbuds and dogwoods. And this could be a chance to make lemonade from this lemon of a winter. There are plenty of wonderful native plants that are perfectly adapted to our weather extremes. You might want to take this opportunity to do some remedial landscaping using plants that are more tolerant of the occasional freeze ...

Happy (and warmer) gardening!



## GARDEN GROUP MEETING

The next meeting of the Lake Eola-Trinity Lutheran group will be February 18. Please join us for an informal program on Horticulture. The group meets the third Thursday of each month at Trinity Lutheran Church at 7 p.m. Hope to see you there.



## HARP CONCERT

The International Harp Museum concert will be February 28 at 3 p.m. at Broadway United Methodist Church. Ina Zdorovetchi will perform.

The concert is free and open to the public, donations accepted.

