By Buzz Bertolero

The Dirt Gardener

Q: We have a trumpet vine that has been severely damaged by the frost. My husband wants to remove the unsightly, damaged foliage. I think we should wait for a couple of weeks, and then only remove some of the dead material. I'm afraid that if we prune too much we'll be encouraging the plants to grow which might do them in. I've also heard that this ugly-looking dead foliage may help protect the plants from further frost damage. What should we do?

A: For the present time, you should leave the damaged plants alone. With trumpet vines, citrus, hibiscus and others, it's not unusual for them to suffer some type of damage in the form of burnt leaves from the previous cold spell.

Although unsightly, the damaged tissue can act as an umbrella and protect the rest of the plant from any additional cold weather. It is very likely we will have another or maybe two cold spells before the end of winter.

The time to prune is anywhere between the end of February and the middle of March, when the damage of frost is past and the days are getting longer and warmer.

Also, if your plants are still covered from the last frost, unwrap them now. You're damaging the plant(s) with no benefit from the wrap.

Plants need the light and they need to breathe; otherwise, they defoliate and or sweat with day-time temperatures over 50°F. Plants should be covered only during the evening and early morning hours. By mid morning, they should be uncovered during cold spells. The exception would be those plants that produce basal shoots such as fountain grass.

Here, the growth is damaged to the soil line and should be cut off at that point. However, it's not imperative that it be done right away.

Q: Last summer, I purchased several miniature roses and planted them in large pots. The bushes have done very well. I'm wondering if they need to be pruned?

A: Yes, miniature roses do need pruning but not like the hybrid tea, grandiflora and floribunda varieties. Miniature roses are pruned only to keep their shape. It is more like a shearing than pruning individual stems.

Depending on the size of the bush, you would remove an inch to six inches of growth. The best time of the year to do so is around Presidents' Day weekend, the third weekend of February. This is just before the spring flush of growth develops.

After each cycle of blooms, is also an excellent time to prune miniature roses so they keep their shape.

You can also remove any and all dead wood. In addition, you should strip off any remaining foliage, clean up the debris that is at the base of each plant and then spray them once with a copper fungicide to kill the overwintering fungal spores.

In March, you should apply a liquid fertilizer, insecticide and disease-control product. Both Bayer and Bonide provide products that do all three tasks.

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