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2010 Cold Weather Damage to Lawns and Landscapes

By Harold Jones

Southern Horticultural Consultants

Winter 2010 has been a tough year. Unless you have lived in the area since about 1980 you don't remember cold weather like this in northeast Florida, but it has been colder. Over Christmas 1983 temperatures dropped to 11 degrees and on January 21, 1985 the low temperature was 7 degrees.

What this means is we've seen colder weather here, but it has been 25 years since then and many people have moved into the northeast Florida area during our warm winters.

During January there were 12 days below freezing temperatures, 6 of which were below 25 and including one 21 and one 20. There will be substantial damage this spring!

St. Augustine grass is a semi-tropical grass which can be damaged by frost if it has not had a chance to adapt to cold temperatures or is trying to grow. Generally when temperatures drop below 25 degrees there is heavy damage in St. Augustine lawns.

What can you do to reduce the severity of cold weather damage to your lawn and landscape?

1. Probably the most important thing is be patient. It's going to take time for the grass to recover this year.
2. Don't mow the yard until warmer weather (generally March) and then don't mow if frost is predicted.
3. Water the lawn when the weather turns dry. Watering has generally not been necessary this winter because we have had more rain than normal. When the temperatures get into the 70's and 80's watch the water closely. Remember, you can water once a week (if needed) while we are on Eastern Standard Time and twice a week (if needed) while we are on Eastern Daylight time. Too much water will damage the grass rather than help it.
4. Spring fertilization will be important. Fertilizer applications should not start until after March 1st this year and even then, a late frost could make damage worse. The grass will need the nutrients to recover this year.

St. Augustine grass will run and cover damaged areas if you can be patient and wait. Sod will probably be in short supply and prices will climb.

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www.kandvlawncare.com • (904) 343-3323 • info@kandvlawncare.com