

From The Bedford Extension Master Gardener HELP DESK



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A Bedford Area Master Gardeners Association (BAMGA) Publication
December 2016

SPRING BULBS EMERGING TOO EARLY! What To Do?

With the unseasonably warm early winter in 2015, a client sent an email in mid-December to ask about bulbs that have already started to emerge. The client wanted to know whether there was something that should be done to stop growth and whether the above-ground parts would be able to survive later freezes.

DIAGNOSIS / RECOMMENDATION: It is not possible to stop the growth of the plants. Covering the plants in mulch could lead to rot of the bulbs with the continuing warm weather but would not stop the plants from growing. While freezes are likely to kill the above ground plant parts, there likely will be regrowth in the Spring since the bulbs are protected in the soil.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: While this type of situation is more common in the Spring, the response of plants should be similar. Many bulbs begin growing with warm weather in early Spring, followed by freezing temperatures. The foliage typically is very cold tolerant and not usually damaged. However, if leaf damage occurs, plants may be able to outgrow it. If not, the damaged portions should be cut off. [1] For bulbs, damage to the leaves normally will not affect blooming; the bulbs underground usually can withstand freezing temperatures. [2] Once the winter weather turns cold enough, mulch can be applied to help provide protection for the rest of the winter. However, it should not be applied while the temperatures are still so unseasonably warm. [3]

RESOURCE LINKS:

[1] <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/frost-and-cold-injury-annuals-bulbs-groundcovers-perennials-and-vines>

[2] <http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/gardens-gardening/your-garden/help-for-the-home-gardener/advice-tips-resources/pests-and-problems/environmental/winter-injury/frost-injury-and-ice-damage.aspx>

[3] https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-201/426-201_pdf.pdf

All resource links accessed November 1, 2016

Answers provided herein were based on specific situations and growing conditions.

These recommendations may or may not be appropriate for all circumstances.

For specific recommendations for your particular situation please contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

MASTER GARDENER HELP DESK

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