

# from the Bedford Extension Master Gardener HELP DESK

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## Winter Damage To Evergreens

### QUESTION

In April of 2015, as the weather warmed, a client contacted the Help Desk expressing concern about Carissa Hollies that seemed to be dying. Beginning in early March leaves started falling off. The client stated the hollies are 15 years old, located by house with lots of sun. The client also saw the problem on Carissa holly at neighbors and other locations. No insects were apparent. Leaves just turned brown and fell off. Will it come back if pruned? No problems were seen on azaleas, which are more protected.



photo credits: <https://extension.umd.edu/hqic/winter-damage-landscape-plants>

### DIAGNOSIS / RECOMMENDATION

The winter of 2015 was very warm for the first part but was followed by severely cold weather. Thus, many evergreens sustained winter damage. Damage was severe on several different varieties of evergreens as well. Winter damage on evergreens can be caused by desiccation, which can cause leaves to turn brown and fall; this typically is worst on plants near a house with a lot of sun. It also can appear as brown or dead branch tips or branches when new growth is not hardened off and freezing temperatures cause cells to rupture. [1] Carissa hollies are not as hardy as other Chinese hollies. [2] If possible, wait and see if they come back before making any final decisions about pruning or replacing. [2, 3]

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Many broadleaved evergreens are susceptible to winter leaf scorch, particularly the more shallow-rooted types. Injury is worst on exposed plants. It can occur particularly on dry, windy, warm or sunny winter days. Many times, the damage occurs during winter but symptoms aren't apparent until spring growth begins. [4]

Steps should be taken in the fall to minimize the potential for winter damage. This includes giving plants a deep watering in the fall if conditions have been dry and watering during

warm weather in January or February if there has been limited precipitation. Mulching helps provide protection to the root system and helps prevent water loss.

Small evergreens can be protected by using windbreaks made from burlap, canvas, or similar materials. This will provide some shade and can help reduce the force of the wind. A complete wrapping of straw or burlap is sometimes used. Black plastic should be avoided as a material for wrapping plants as it traps too much heat. Any wraps should be removed, after the winter season, to prevent insect or moisture damage.

Making sure to select well-adapted plants for an area and then maintaining healthy plants also is important to minimizing future damage.

## RESOURCE LINKS

- [1] [https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-500/426-500\\_pdf.pdf](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-500/426-500_pdf.pdf)
- [2] <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/3010/3010-1482/3010-1482.html>
- [3] <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-607/426-607.html>
- [4] <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/winter-damage-landscape-plants>

*All resource links accessed March 3, 2017*

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.

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### MASTER GARDENER HELP DESK

Bedford County Extension Office: (540) 586-7675 / Email: [BedfordMG@vt.edu](mailto:BedfordMG@vt.edu)

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