



STAFF PHOTO BY JENNIFER MCNALLY

Ice and sleet blanket flowers Monday outside Rembrandt's Coffee House in the Bluff View Arts District.

## Gardening experts say plants are prepared for cold temps

BY LISA DENTON  
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Gardeners fearing a replay of [the Christmas week freeze of 2022 that damaged the growth of vulnerable plants the following spring](#) can stress less about this week's low temperatures and blanket of snow. Experts said this weather event, though cold, shouldn't produce the same results.

In a video post on social media about what gardeners should be doing for their plants over the next few days, [Signal Mountain Nursery owner Kim Bonastia](#) said conditions were different for that hard freeze.

"The temperatures were really warm, and then it dropped like 40 degrees in one day," she said. "I want to point out that this freeze is a lot different. Plants have had an opportunity to harden off, and so they're not going to be as affected by this cold weather that we're having."

The problem with that temperature plunge — from 49 to 7 degrees Dec. 23, 2022 — "wasn't necessarily the cold temperatures but how quickly the temperature changed," Haley Treadway, the University of Tennessee Extension agent for Hamilton County previously told the Chattanooga Times Free Press.

Outdoor plants are



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Snow rests on a leaf Monday in Coolidge Park.

dormant in winter, which helps their tissues withstand freezing temperatures, dry weather and water and nutrient shortages. Plants were not able to acclimate to how fast the temperature plunged in the 2022 weather event, Treadway said. This drop in temperatures has been more gradual.

Serious gardeners will have already prepared their plants for winter, said Ann Brown, a member of Master Gardeners of Hamilton County since 2010.

"Usually you do that in the fall," she said by phone. "You mulch your plants that are new or just planted and haven't put down their root system."

Even for gardeners who didn't, it's not too late to add

associate at America's Gardens Nursery in Red Bank, said watering plants well is a good idea before any plunge in temperatures.

"They're more likely to freeze if they're dry," she said by phone.

There are still precautions gardeners may take, Baker said.

"One of the first things you can do is cover them," she said. "Anything you can't move, cover with a frost cloth, a sheet, a blanket or a garbage bag to protect them from the wind and open sky."

Also, Baker said, anything in a pot or planter is more likely to freeze than anything in the ground because it has less insulation. For those plants, she suggested: "Bring it inside, move it closer to the house or move several closer together so they can protect each other a little bit."

Gardeners should also pay special attention to site-specific weather patterns, especially the effects of wind chill, Brown said.

"Most of our weather comes from the west. I have a west wind that really whips my yard, and so I've been careful not to plant plants that I think cannot survive," she said.

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protection after this cold spell gives way to warmer weather, she said.

"The thing about our weather is that it never freezes hard enough for a long period of time for our roots to freeze, [like it does in the Northeast or the Midwest](#)," she said. "Once it warms up again, if they have things with the roots down, they can put mulch down."

Late December rain is also working in the plants' favor, Brown said.

"We've had lots of rain, and that also helps the plants not to freeze," Brown continued. "I had three-and-a-half inches at my house (in Lookout Mountain, Tennessee). The earth is saturated all the way down. That's good."

Tia Baker, a nursery