

Dormancy Breaks

Information on weather-ready landscapes

WHAT IS IT?

When there are warm winter temperatures, plants often break dormancy sooner than they should. They will “break bud” and begin to grow during the warm temperatures only to have the temperatures drop to seasonal levels soon afterwards. This can cause tissue damage to the newly emerged plant tissue.



Abnormal Temperatures

3 days in a row above 65 °F in Feb.	3 days in a row above 75 °F in Mar.
Ashland: 7 since 2006	Ashland: 21 since 2006
North Platte: 21 since 2006	North Platte: 20 since 2006

Typical Damage: New tree buds like the one pictured are the most susceptible to damage resulting from dormancy breaks.

Average Maximum Temperature



February: mid 40s in SW Neb, mid 30s in NE Neb
March: mid 50s in SW Neb to upper 40s in NE Neb)

Source: Midwest Regional Climate Center

PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS

Preventing winter desiccation is much easier than correcting it.



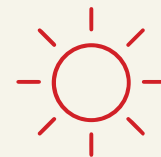
1

Identify plants prone to breaking bud too soon and avoid placing them in locations in your landscape that might speed up dormancy breaks, like near a brick facade on the south side of a house or near concrete.



2

Plant in proper hardiness zones. Plant trees, shrubs, groundcovers, perennials, and ornamental grasses that are adapted to USDA hardiness Zone 5 in eastern Nebraska and Zone 4 in western Nebraska.



3

Pay attention to the weather forecast. Long stretches of unseasonably warm temperatures can cause some plants to break dormancy too soon.



4

Mulching perennial plant material in the winter (mid to late November) with wood mulch, leaves, or straw will help to protect the plants from the temperature fluctuations and keep a more consistent temperature.



5

Water soils around plants thoroughly in late fall so that they enter winter moist, not soggy or dry. Avoid fall fertilization of shrubs, roses, groundcovers and perennials.

TYPICAL DAMAGE

Tissue death on ornamental

Withering of new tree buds



CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

Recovery is difficult and may take some time.



Allow frosted leaves and blooms to fall off the plant naturally, then rake them up and compost them.



Cut off blackened stems with a bypass hand pruner just above a node or growing point.



Avoid fertilization until the plant recovers. Early summer will be appropriate in most situations. Keep soils around the plant evenly moist, not soggy or dry, for the growing season.



Mulch with wood chips to avoid weed competition and to moderate soil temperature and moisture. Avoid placement of mulch next to the trunk to prevent suffocation and wildlife damage.

For more information, visit weather-ready.unl.edu/landscapes