

Frost Damage

Apart from figs and citrus, most top and soft fruits are hardy outside whilst dormant, however care must be taken in the spring as it is important to protect early flowering fruits against spring frosts if a worthwhile crop is to be obtained.

Damage

Frosts can damage buds, blossom, tender young shoots, foliage and young fruitlets. Buds which are normally tightly rolled and protected over the winter are vulnerable as they begin to swell approaching blossom in spring. A harsh frost or prolonged cold snap at this time can cause both buds and blossom to turn brown and drop, the centre of the blossom often blackens when damaged, this 'black eye' is very evident on strawberry plants. On trees foliage may pucker but normally remains attached and young fruits drop, or grow but are often stunted, misshapen or cracked, often displaying heavy russetting.

Protection

When frosts are forecast precautions should be taken.

Some frost protection during the flowering period can be provided by putting a top net over a fruit cage.

Wall fruit can be protected by rolling down a cover of fleece, hessian or thick netting at night when the frost is likely and rolling it up during the day. This should be supported away from plants by bamboo canes. Alternatively a clear polythene cover with the sides open and a gap of 30cm (1ft) at the bottom for ventilation can be used and left on during the day but as this does restrict access for pollinating insects, hand pollination may be necessary. Ideally the polythene needs to be supported on a timber framework.

Small free-standing trees and bushes can be protected against frost by making a temporary framework of bamboo canes and wrapping this with a cover of fleece, hessian or netting.

Strawberry crops can be protected with cloches or by covering the plants with layers of fleece or straw. Cloches should be left open and fleece or straw removed during the day to allow pollinating insects to gain access.

Care must be taken to still protect crops from frost for a couple of weeks after blossom fall as the young, newly pollinated fruit is still at risk of damage during this period.