

## Properly pruned ficus can thrive after frost damage

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One of my co-workers has been working with Living Tree Service in Mesa. This company gave us some very valuable information on late winter/early spring tree care and pruning.

I like specifically the information on ficus restoration. If properly pruned at the right time, your brown ficus can be new again. Just be patient.

Dan and Heather Stevens, certified arborists and owners of Living Tree Service, say that, with low temperatures in early January, it's been a tough year for ficus trees. The Stevens recommend pruning out all dead limbs and foliage now through April, before the new growth appears and starts to surround the dead foliage.

"If the tree has no green foliage, you pretty much need to remove any branch that's smaller than half an inch to three quarters of an inch in diameter," Dan Stevens says. "When you're done, you're left with all larger-diameter branches. The tree has an open structure to fill in all new, healthy growth."

Stevens adds it's also best to prune citrus trees just before they flower. And it's best to fertilize citrus trees either just before they flower or just after the fruit sets and when the fruit is about 1/4 inch in diameter.

"During the blossoming stage you want to be cautious, because (fertilizing) can cause the blossoms to drop," he says.

Finally, Stevens says now is the best time of year to prune ash, elm, Chinese pistache, purple plum, desert willow, chaste tree, peach, plum, mulberry and other deciduous fruit trees. And it's best to prune pine trees now through April to prevent excessive sapping.

**Question:** I have a saguaro about 5 feet tall that was planted in October. The landscaper said to water it with a slow drip once a month for one hour. Should I continue to do this year-round? Also, should I be concerned about the freezing temps we had a few weeks back?

**Answer:** Your landscaper is mistaken. During the winter months, I suggest not watering any cactus. The only time you will need to water your saguaro is during the late spring and summer months.

I only water them once a month if we don't have any measurable precipitation, and I usually keep my water source about 4 feet from the base — otherwise, you can rot it very easily. Also, saguaros can withstand temperatures in the lower 20s.

**Q:** We are trying to find a place to buy lemongrass that would grow by our ponds. Any suggestion?

**A:** I've seen this plant at Baker Nursery on 40th Street in Phoenix. You might also check with farmers markets. I hear the key to success with lemongrass is well-drained soil with a large amount of organic matter.

**Q:** I have a palm tree growing in a tight spot between a concrete slab and a block wall. It is positioned so that it would be impossible to dig it up. I am wondering if there is a way to kill it — roots and all.

**A:** I see *Washingtonia* palms sprouting anywhere and everywhere they land. In your situation, I would remove the volunteer as well. I would suggest sawing the palm off as close to ground as you can get. You will be left with the base of the trunk and the roots. Typically, if you remove the meristem of a monocot, it will die and the roots will decay.

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