



Trees That Survived the Freeze of February 2021 Part 3 of 3

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Thirty years ago, I met an older gentleman who told me “The key to growing plants and trees is in the word LAWNS. L for light, A for air, W for water, N for nutrients, and S for soil.” When I questioned the role air played in the health and growth of trees, he said, “It’s not the air all around us, it’s the air in the soil. Roots need oxygen to grow healthy trees. So, if you water too little the tree will die fast because trees need water to survive. But, if you water too much, trees will die slowly.” Consistently overwatering will drive oxygen from the soil making for a toxic environment for roots to grow in. That toxic environment will cause root rot issues that will affect the whole health of your tree.

Referring back to part 1 of this series: All the St. Augustine lawns in Austin died during the freeze of 1989. Well, not all of the lawns died, I started noticing that some survived. There was one lawn in particular that was very odd because the whole lawn died except for one perfectly round circle of grass. When I stopped to ask the homeowner as to why that circle of grass survived, he replied “that’s where we ran the sprinkler 2 days before the freeze”. So, cutting back on water during the fall months (Oct. – Dec.) will prepare our trees and landscape for the harsh winter months (Dec. – Feb.). During the fall months at our tree farm, I look for opportunities to cut back on the water, both in frequency and volume without damaging the trees. However, when a big freeze is coming, I will give plenty of water about 2-4 days ahead of the freeze to help insulate them from extremely cold temperatures.

In the end, it isn’t as much the extreme temperatures that dictate what landscapes live or die, it is what we plant, where we plant, the health of the trees and plants, and how we prepare our landscapes for the extreme temperatures that Texas offers.



Other factors to consider in growing healthy trees:

- Regularly check on your newly planted trees (1-3 years) to see how wet or dry the soil is.
- Deep water your tree as needed, soaking into the soil that surrounds the root ball. This will encourage the roots to go for that water and help establish your tree as healthy and strong.
- Daily watering of your tree is not only unhealthy, driving out oxygen from the soil, but also creates a dependency on water. Under most circumstances, watering deeply once a week is healthy for your trees.
- The “Hope Valley Tree Farm” Watering Guide encourages homeowners to ween their trees off supplemental water within 3-5 years.