



# TREE NEWS

MAY 2023

YOU CAN USE

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

### DID THE DECEMBER FREEZE KILL MY TREE?

We are in that “May flowers from April showers” time of year when the grass is green, the weeds in our gardens still seem manageable, and it hasn’t hit 90 yet. However, some are struggling to enjoy this brief bit of spring because they are still coming to terms with the impacts of our wild winter. So, let’s address the elephant in the room and say it just may be the year to pull the plug once and for all on those Leyland cypress trees, but before you start up the chainsaw, let’s recap.

Deciduous trees, from redbuds and dogwoods to the oaks and tulip poplars, should have all been dormant for the December freeze. In fact, we have seen limited damage to healthy and dormant trees from that rapid temperature drop. So, a dead spring redbud was more likely taken down by pre-existing disease, stress, or site issues more than our December blast. What we have seen this spring in deciduous trees are [frost cracks](#) in the trunks caused by rapid temperature fluctuations between bright, warm days and cold nights. This issue is most common on young and thin-barked trees and often occurs on the southern or western side of the trunk because it receives the most sunlight and temperature change. Prevention is tricky, but good irrigation and mulching along with avoiding late season fertilization can be an asset in buffering trees from stress.

Questions about evergreens have been flooding Extension lately. First, we received winterburn injury questions, which can be more related to desiccation than actual cold. Hopefully by now new growth is emerging from those bronzed conifers. Then, there were questions about what seems to be outright winterkill. These could be borderline zone 6/7 species, such as Arizona cypress or Cryptomeria or others that may have gone into the winter already weakened. If plants survived, new growth should be apparent by now. Suffice it to say no signs of growth are not good at this point. If you do see new growth, be careful with your pruning to not add additional stress. Also keep in mind that damage may be variable within the plant (and its location within the landscape), and that could impact plant shape and aesthetics in your landscape. Watch it over the summer, and be prepared to slowly nurture it back to good health, and form or consider a fall replacement. Remember, [fall is a great time to plant in Tennessee](#).

However, the most common question we have seen we’ll just call the Leyland phenomenon. These overused screen plants have long struggled with diseases, such as Seiridium canker, and additional stress due to high or low moisture levels. However, the recent winter weather may have been the final straw that piled on previous stressors and sped up their decline. If this was the case in your landscape, this may be the year to [investigate other screen options](#) and replant with less stress- and disease-prone trees.

It’s been a crazy winter and spring season, but we may get to salve our landscape wounds with some new plant purchases!



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#### In summary:

- Get in there and inspect your trees closely before starting the saws
- Prune carefully on plants showing regrowth and focus on reducing stress through good moisture and nutrient management
- For declining trees like Leyland cypress, this year could be a great time to try new options



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