

# Garden casualties from a cold winter

By Maria Fox

A few nice days and we are back to our gardens. Green is the palette against which the colorful blossoms appear. Throughout the landscape, shrubs, trees, grasses and bushes awaken side by side wearing their particular shade of spring green. All except those suspiciously brown looking ones. ... Funny, I didn't remember a deciduous shrub in that spot.

Working in the garden right now can be a little melancholy — the joy of seeing tender new growth interspersed with that which is conspicuously brown. Cautiously we inspect each plant searching for signs of life, before succumbing to the sad truth. Alas, brown is brown no matter how bright the light, or rose-colored our glasses.

Unlike the rest of the living world, when a plant dies it is removed from the ground rather than put into it. With spade, shovel and rake, the fallen friend is respectfully removed, remembered and recycled. A prayer is given that greener days await, in that great garden in the sky where days are mildly warm and a light rain falls by night.

Good thing that it's tough to get a gardener down for long — especially the Northwest version of the folk. True to their nature (the glass being half full types), an empty space in the garden must be filled. What else is a gardener to do?

The question here is not whether to plant but what to plant. This past winter was challenging for many plants. Two weeks of frozen December ground followed by a cold and unrelenting spring proved too much for some plants. Particularly hard hit are escallonia, heavenly bamboo (nandina), hebes, privet, and many herbs like rosemary, lavender and sage.

Some gardeners are of the mindset that replanting these victims of what has been called a "30 year winter" is too much of a gamble. Those lingering wounds to heart and pocketbook are too fresh to roll the same dice again. The adventurous types revel in the opportunity to discover new plants. While still others love their plants like they love their pets. Despite the fact the some types may be short-lived, they remain cherished friends that we don't want to live without. Better to have loved and lost than

not to have loved at all, right?

Cliff Sharpe is a nursery manager at Wight's Home and Garden in Lynnwood and has been on the front lines for over 18 springs. This year he is part horticulturalist, part psychotherapist, adding a dose of humor when deemed necessary, which for Cliff, happens often.

A few of his recommendations for hardy plants are: pieris, lilacs, viburnum davidi, dwarf conifers, ornamental grasses and of course, rhododendrons and azaleas.

Cliff offers these general guidelines to keep in mind when replacing lost plants: Typically, deciduous (plants that drop their leaves in winter) plants survive the cold better than many evergreen (those that remain green in winter) types. Often plant casualties have more to do with the health of the plant than the type or variety. "An unhealthy plant can also die from too much heat or water," said Cliff. "It is extremes in conditions that take the toll. Plants can be lost in any season."

He suggests that rather than fretting over your losses, think of proper care as the best insurance to keep your garden alive and going strong. Most plants die due to an environ-

ment that is non-conducive to their needs.

It all starts with the roots, and the roots need good soil. This begins with proper soil preparation and extends into the regular maintenance that is suitable for the plants involved. Gardens with both existing and new plants will benefit mightily from proper care and quality amendments like compost and fertilizer. Starter fertilizers, such as Sure Start or Smart Start, are vital for successful new plantings.

Cliff's final thoughts: "Follow the advice of qualified nursery professionals. We get calls for help every day from people who received inadequate or improper advice." Professional expertise goes along way in the nursery business, so to protect your investment, be sure your information is coming from reliable sources.

*Information courtesy of Wight's Home & Garden, 5026 196th St. S.W., Lynnwood. Contact them at (425) 775-3636 or visit [www.wights.com](http://www.wights.com).*



- Extensive Selection of Top Quality Plant Material
- Professional Advice from Nursery Experts
- 1000's of Blooming Annuals
- Fuchsias and Hanging Baskets
- NW Largest Selection of Japanese Maples
- Organic Gardening & Natural Solutions
- Patio Furniture, Outdoor Fountains & Pots



Nursery | Home Décor | Gifts | Garden

425-775-3636 | 5026 196th St SW, Lynnwood, 98036 | Online Gift Cards Available at [wights.com](http://wights.com)