



# When the Chosen Get Frozen

Somehow our omnipotent Gardener can see the potential for new life when all we can see are fruitless branches.

Last winter, the unthinkable happened in Southern California. It got cold. On January 17, the beach city of Malibu picked up three inches of standing snow—the first measurable snow in 50 years! It was headline news—the air full of reporters in choppers videoing children and adults alike gathered in joyful hordes to celebrate the miraculous.

But not everyone found our winter storm so miraculous. California's citrus industry lost as much as 75 percent of the orange crop, and I watched in agony as my very own lemon and avocado trees were blighted by the chill. The tender buds on my camellias froze into bits of hail and dropped off the bushes. My yellow hibiscus was decimated.

I had no idea what course of action to take. Should I cut the frozen branches off? Or should I give up, rip my beloved plants from the ground and start over? In my state of despair, I received this advice from a friendly gardening guru: *Don't prune too soon.*

"Why not?" I wondered. My garden was unsightly. It was so painful to look at the brittle, deteriorating branches. I needed a second opinion, so I turned to the source of all superfluous knowledge—the *Google* search engine. In a few keystrokes, I was enlightened by growers all over the country. Almost all recommended refraining from pruning too soon.

Apparently, a plant's internal healing process needs time to work, and during that time, the frost-burned portions protect the rest of the plant. Premature removal of frost-burned areas leaves new growth vulnerable and exposed, and the plant could be damaged worse than ever if more cold follows.

As I pondered the future of my trees, my wandering mind was struck with the parallels I could see between trees and the human soul. The Bible refers to the godly as flourishing palm trees (Psalm 92:12), trees planted by the water that produce fruit (Jeremiah 17:8) and oaks of righteousness planted to display God's splendor (Isaiah 61:3). Jesus even calls God a Gardener—a Gardener who prunes

his vines to remove the dead branches and cause fruit-bearing branches to produce more fruit (John 15:1-3). So pruning is obviously necessary, but according to *Google*, if you prune too soon, it could be life threatening. So, how does one decide when to prune?

It was at this point in my quest that I found the parable of the barren fig tree. It goes something like this:

*A man planted a fig tree and kept coming back, season after season, to see if there was any fruit on it. He was continually disappointed because there was nothing. Finally he said to his gardener, "I've waited and waited and there hasn't been a single fig! Cut this thing down, because it's just taking up space."*

*His reaction seems rational to me. No fruit? Maybe it's even brown and shriveled? It must be time to prune or just remove the tree completely. It's useless in its barrenness, right?*

*Not according to our Gardener. He says, "Hold up! Give it another chance. Leave it one more year, and I'll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer. Then make your decision." (paraphrased from Luke 13:6-9).*

Our Gardener won't prune too soon. In his tender mercy, he offers extraordinary patience during our barren seasons. When we're frost-bitten and fruitless, he chooses to actively tend to us, paying us "special attention." Somehow our omnipotent Gardener can see the potential for new life when all we can see are fruitless branches.

So, if you've been *frostbitten* lately, and you feel like the damage is so great there's no choice but to be pruned or removed from the garden completely, my recommendation is to sit and wait for the Gardener.

Ask him to assess your injury and not prune until the worst has passed. Trust him to provide the nourishment to sustain you. He loves you, and he longs to restore your soul to abundant health so that you will have many a fruitful season. □

—Susan Reedy