

TOTAL HOME

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Has spring arrived?

Well, spring has arrived. I think. Or maybe this is summer, or winter. Who knows? The way the weather is changing lately it's no wonder we're all confused. And if we're confused, just think how the plants feel. They get all systems on 'go', put out new shoots and then get zapped with that white stuff that has no business showing up at the end of April. How is a plant to know what to do?

For all gardeners, this crazy spring has been a challenge. During that hot spell we had my daffodils sped up and went into bloom in record time and my roses put out some tender new shoots - only to be hit with some very cold nights and more of that "white stuff". But don't worry about your spring-blooming bulbs. Bulbs like daffodils and tulips will recover from these temperature variations. The bloom time may be shorter because of this stress, but if you make sure they have sufficient water and fertilize them, they will recover to put on another show next year.

More tender shoots, like roses and early perennials, may have



CHARLIE DOBBIN

gotten a bit of frost damage and will show some blackened tips. If the damage is minor, just leave it alone and the shoot will renew its growth. If the entire new shoot has been ruined, you may want to prune these off - the plant will put out new shoots when the temperature warms up again. The strange anomalies that are occurring right now, like my roses breaking out in bud before the forsythia, are hard to cope with and harder still to know what to do. Ultimately, we must depend on the versatility and hardiness of plant growth to rebound under these conditions.

If you are in an area that is get-

ting frost and you are concerned with some of your more tender plants like roses and perennials, cover them up at night with sheets, plastic, landscape fabric or other light material - or - just let Mother Nature do her thing and hope for the best.

I know this can all be very frustrating. I have already put some plants out on my deck, taken them back inside, put them out again, taken them back in, and finally gave up and left them inside until the weather makes up its mind what it's doing. Sometimes I long for those days when we used to have slow, dependable temperature transitions. You knew exactly when to do things and it made gardening much easier. However, I remain optimistic that spring really will happen and that summer will follow. I can only hope, in feeling a moment of spite, that all the nasty bugs will suffer greatly from this weird weather and make pest control this summer an afterthought.

Charlie Dobbin, B.Sc.(Agr), is a horticultural expert from White Rose Home & Garden Centres.

Consulting a horticulture specialist

Anyone can plant trees, shrubs and flowers around a home. All you need to do is buy the plants, stick them in a hole, cover the roots with some soil and water them from time to time - right? Wrong! Unfortunately, it's not that simple. You could always try this approach, but chances are you probably won't get ideal results. Not only do some plants require more care than others, but where they are planted should also be carefully considered if you want to create the most attractive landscape.

Designing a landscape, choosing the right plants and making sure that they thrive is not as simple as it may seem. It takes quite a bit of skill, talent and knowledge. Like most people, you may not possess all these qualities. Thankfully, there are ornamental horticulture specialists who do. These experts often work as consultants in garden centres, for specialized landscaping companies, at private companies and sometimes

even for individual homeowners. These specialists possess extensive knowledge when it comes to caring for indoor and outdoor plants. They know the characteristics of various trees, shrubs, plants, flowers ... you name it, they know it! They know everything there is to know about planting, caring and pruning plants - as well as how to protect them for the winter.

Seeding and caring for lawns is another part of their job. This includes having a vast knowledge of the various types of chemical and organic products that exist for controlling and eliminating harmful weeds and insects. More specifically, they know what these products are made of, what their individual advantages and drawbacks are, as well as how and when they should be used.

Last but definitely not least, ornamental horticulture specialists are geniuses when it comes to designing stunning landscapes!

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