



University of Kentucky  
College of Agriculture,  
Food and Environment  
*Cooperative Extension Service*



# Extension Notes

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HORTICULTURE

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## Hollies and Laurels and Winter Damage

Hollies and cherry laurels are common landscape plants that add a bit of winter interest in the garden. They are referred to as broad-leaved evergreens, like magnolia, boxwood, and rhododendron.

The question of the month in Pulaski County and elsewhere in the state, is why did all the leaves fall off my holly/laurel? Those two plants in particular seem to be the ones being reported with damage.

The usual description is that the leaves turn gray/yellow/brown and (sometimes) fall off (see photos). If this describes what you've seen in your own yard, read on.

Broad-leaved evergreens, as opposed to needled evergreens like pine or spruce, lose much more water during the winter than needled evergreens. Water loss increases during periods of strong winds and sunny weather even if temperatures are low.

Fall of 2022 in Kentucky was very dry. Going into winter, it's important for broad-leaved evergreens to have ample soil moisture so that when those winter winds begin to blow, the roots can take up enough water to replenish the loss.

Over Christmas in 2022, the state experienced a steep drop in temperatures, the winds blew hard for at least 48 hours, along with 2-3 inches of snow and negative temperatures.

Any broad-leaved evergreen exposed to these strong winds was going to have a hard time taking up enough water if irrigation was not previously supplied in the fall. On top of that, soil temperatures could have dropped such that the roots were not able to function.

## HOW TO PROTECT BROAD-LEAVED EVERGREENS

There are several ways to protect your broad-leaved evergreens:

1. Site broad-leaved evergreens where they won't take the brunt of winter winds. This usually means planting them on the eastern side of a building or in a courtyard. They should be planted in a protected location.
2. Established broad-leaved evergreens that are exposed to wind should be loosely wrapped in burlap to create a wind screen. The burlap should be promptly removed in the spring. Canvas or a wood-slat fence will also work to deflect wind.
3. When autumn rainfall is deficient, irrigate prior to when winter winds begin to blow.
4. Watering during transient ground thawing on warm winter days can help rehydrate plant tissues.
5. Mulch around the base of the plant. This will help keep soil temperatures insulated, preventing the ground from freezing so the roots can supply water to the leaves.

For more information about winter damage or if you have concerns about your plants, call the Pulaski County Extension Service office at 606-679-6361.

Like [Pulaski County Horticulture](#) on Facebook, follow [@hortagentbeth](#) on Twitter, and [kyplants](#) on Instagram. If you want to have text reminders sent to your phone about upcoming horticulture programming at the Pulaski County Extension Service, text '@gardenerst' to 81010 (do not include the quotation marks).

If you are interested in programs such as winter seeding native plants or heat treating your seed or even making your own honey bee hive box, take a look at our upcoming events on our new website (<https://pulaski.ca.uky.edu>) or call our office at 606-679-6361.

The 2023 Living on a Few Acres program has been scheduled for February 10-11. There's a fee of \$15 per person or \$25 per two from the same family. Please see our website or call our office for more information.

The Pulaski County Extension office will be closed for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday on January 16. We will reopen January 17 at 8am.

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Hollies experiencing winter desiccation injury (Photo ask2.extension.org)



Winter damage on laurel hedge (Photo: Eric Harshman, Transylvania University)