

By GEORGE ROBERTSON, M.D.

Seeing the wilted flowers after the last killing frost brought a touch of sadness as I surveyed the garden and yard. I had heard that the cold weather was coming and at the same time I knew I couldn't protect those sensitive plants indefinitely. Even if I covered them tonight, what about tomorrow night and the night after that? Sooner or later I would have to give them up to the inevitable consequences of winter.

The killing frost had nipped the young buds of my winter squash vines. It had put an end to the growing season and stopped even the cold weather crops in their tracks. The Impatiens growing by the front walk were now a lifeless crumple of faded green. The herbs growing in the backyard were beat down but surviving. The influence of the frost was broad reaching and final.

But there were some good consequences of the killing freeze. It meant that I would not have to mow the grass again until spring. It also put the finishing touches on the leaves that were increasing their beautiful colors along the roadside. The maple trees lining my neighbor's yard were now a deeper orange and yellow as the last sap drained from them and the green chlorophyll gave way to the other colors beneath.

The weed patch by the mailbox now was becoming brittle so that my weed sling (my low-tech energy-saving answer to the bush hog) could now chop off the once thick green cover to turn it into a bear area again. I could slice through the weeds and identify the egg cases of the praying mantis insect and expose the old moss undergrowth of the surface roots below.

The seed pod of the milkweed would now pop open releasing its promise of new life in the form of a parachute into the wind, helping me to reaffirm that even in the cold and darkness of death there is the hope of new life. So even as the leaves on the oak trees were becoming brown and crumpled and brittle, new buds for the next year form beneath, pushing them out into the chilling wind. And I can appreciate the cycle of life that also ends in death.

Editor's Note: George Robertson is a physician with Family Medical Associates, PC, in Lebanon.

Frost, it happens to everyone

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