

HEAT IN AN EMERGENCY

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Where do you turn when the power has failed? Emergency generators won't start! The greenhouse is cooling! Panic!

When all else fails, there is one last thing you can do to save your crop from freezing. Use "smudge balls" made of newspapers!

Begin with a single crumpled sheet of newspaper. Wrap another sheet around it. Then another and another until you have a ball 15-20 inches in diameter. Place it and other balls like it in the walks of the greenhouse and light them.

Burning newspapers don't produce a great deal of heat. But they do produce a lot of smoke. Smoke effectively reduces the loss of heat by radiation, just like heavy clouds keeping night temperatures from dropping. It is important to fill the house with smoke before it gets cold. Then, a little heat from the burning newspapers will help to maintain the temperature above freezing.

Making the newspaper ball is something of an art. Packed too tightly, it may go out. If too loose, it will burn too rapidly. With a little practice, you can get it right.

Will the smoke damage the crops? You bet. Soot all over. A new fragrance too. But if your power outage is short, little harm will be done. This small physical problem outweighs freezing.

Is this procedure dangerous? You bet. Don't burn down your greenhouse. Place the newspaper balls in places where nothing else will burn. In walks. On empty benches. Near exits.

After a while it becomes hazardous to enter the house to light new paper balls. It is difficult to see. Flashlights barely penetrate the gloom. The smoke is so irritating that you are limited to the distance you can carry a lighted ball, put it down and get out before you have to take a breath. And be sure to have an observer who can help in case you trip in the dark.

When the crisis is over, think back over the things you could have done before the power failed.

1. Have a generator capable of operating your heat source and run it monthly to keep it in good condition. Be certain to have a supply of gasoline readily available.

2. Have a supply of salamanders and kerosene for fuel.

3. In lieu of salamanders, keep a supply of methanol (wood alcohol) on hand. This can be placed in an open container and lit to provide heat.

4. Charcoal briquets.

Smudge balls of newspapers may be primitive, messy, and smelly, but they do work. Even in a large range there may be a house or two that deserves a last ditch effort to save the crop.

If the power fails, don't panic. Think. And when all else fails, use smudge balls of newspapers to forestall a freeze.