

COLD SNAP: CHILLY TEMPS WILL LINGER

By Amy L. Edwards

ORLANDO SENTINEL

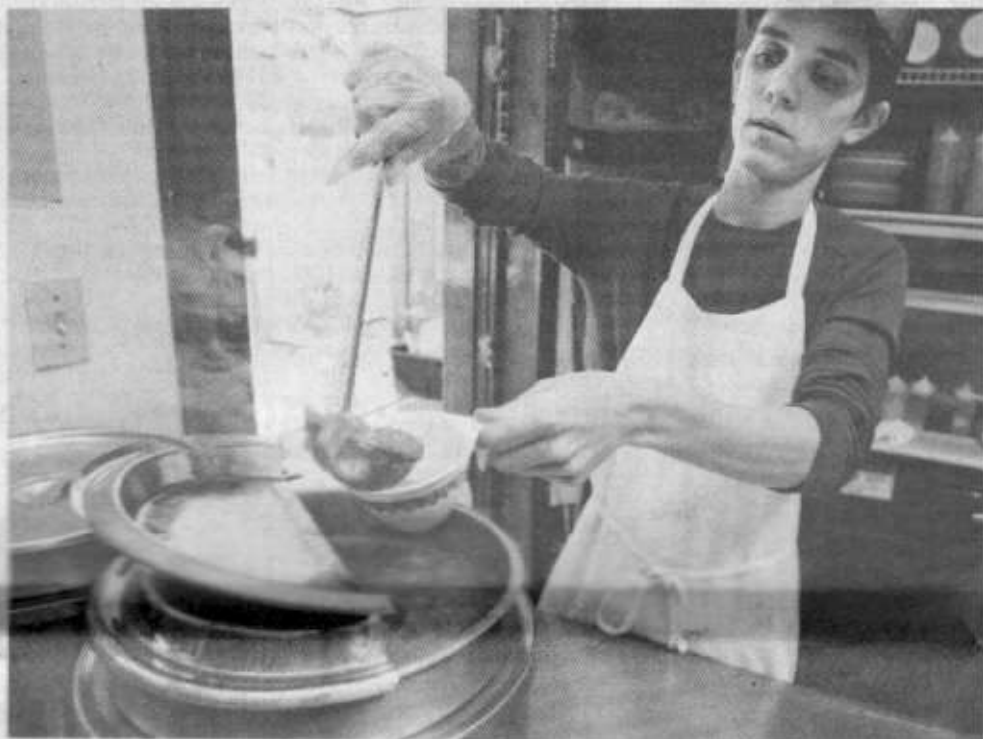
If your winter wardrobe is like many Central Floridians' — consisting of some decades-old sweaters and a denim jacket — now may be the time to invest in a few new pieces.

That's because these chilly temps are here to stay for a while.

This morning's temperatures were forecast to dip into the upper 20s. Today's high is supposed to reach a mere 51 degrees.

At retailers such as TravelCountry in Altamonte Springs, the cold weather has brought a welcome uptick in customers looking for cold-weather clothes ranging from gloves to beanies to jackets.

Fleece items have been particularly popular with locals.



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Cook Matt Butcher serves a hearty soup for customers at Dandelion Communitea Cafe. The cafe, on Thornton Avenue in Orlando, has had lots of requests for warm soups and teas.

What's the forecast?

Each day this week will be more of the same in Central Florida — Wednesday's high will be about 55, and the lows Thursday morning are expected to dip into the upper 20s.

Expect freeze watches and warnings throughout the week.

"It's kind of an unusually long streak of cold weather," said National Weather Service meteorologist Tim Sedlock.

Reinforced cold air seeping down from Canada is to blame. Even after a bit of a warm-up Thursday (the high is expected to reach 63), another front will come through Friday, dropping temps again.

Utility companies and homeless shelters are already prepared for the cold. There are several things you can do as homeowners and pet owners.

Pets

There is a misconception that it's OK to leave dogs outside during cold weather, according to Orange County Fire Rescue.

Pets should not be left outside for extended periods in freezing weather. They, too, are susceptible to hypothermia.

Small and short-haired dogs should wear sweaters when taken for walks during cold weather, the fire department reports.

Cats may seek heat from a warm car engine. So before you start your car, knock on the hood or honk the horn to scare off any felines.



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Landscaping

If you have a yard full of lush, tropical landscaping, plan to keep your plants covered throughout the week.

And make sure you cover them properly, advises *Sentinel* columnist Tom MacCubbin, an urban horticulturalist emeritus with the University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service.

Plastic coverings, MacCubbin said, are useless.

The material has to go over the plant and cover it to the ground.

Certain plants can survive in cold temps — ligustrum, roses and crape myrtles — so you don't necessarily need to worry about covering them.

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MacCubbin said plants can remain covered as long as the temps don't rise too much above 60 degrees.

Plumbing

Don't use all of your spare sheets, blankets or towels to cover your landscaping. Keep enough to wrap your outdoor plumbing, too.

"Your plumbing and water lines are a lot like your plants," said Kirk Vail, president of the Florida Association of Plumbing, Heating and Cooling Contractors. "Anything that's exposed to the outdoors ... should be wrapped or covered with as much as you can get around it."

Central Floridians who have wells and pressure tanks need to wrap tanks properly, he said.

Vail also pointed out that solar panels need to be protected. If you aren't sure if your device has adequate freeze protection, consult the installer.

Heating

OUC spokesman Sheridan Becht suggests setting your heating system to turn on at 68 degrees. People who have small children or the elderly living in the home may want to put it higher than that.

Now is also a good time to make sure filters are clean; a clogged filter will use more energy, he said. And always have the fan on auto.

It takes more energy to heat your house than it does to cool it. Optimum times to lower the settings are during the day

when you're at work, and at night, when you can throw on an extra blanket or sweater, Becht said.

Meanwhile, OUC is prepared. Becht: "We're bringing crews in earlier than normal so they're on hand early in the morning as customers start waking up. They're available if they need to run out and replace any fuses or those sorts of things."

Shelter opens to all

The Coalition for the Homeless of Central Florida in Orlando has suspended its normal \$1-a-night fee and opened its doors to anyone seeking shelter from the cold. The open-door policy will continue through Wednesday.

The organization's three shelters housed 623 people Sunday night — 274 in the men's pavilion, and the remainder stayed at the organization's two shelters for women and families.

The cold brought in several dozen homeless people who don't normally stay at the shelter. "On an average night, we get about 600 people — between the people participating in our programs and the men's pavilion," coalition spokeswoman Muffet Robinson said.

Blankets, coats needed

The shelter needs full-size blankets and coats for men, women and children. Donations can be dropped off at the coalition office, 638 W. Central Blvd., Orlando.

"This is the only time during the year that we take gently used clothes, and we're accepting coats," Robinson said. "We don't have the storage space for clothing donations, so we usually ask people to take it to our partner organizations."

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