

Garden Through the Fall and Winter Here

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Success in gardening often depends upon knowing local climatic conditions. Our northwest Florida weather is like nowhere else in the country. We are in a unique zone, somewhere between temperate and subtropical. This location allows us to grow a wider range of plant species than just about anywhere else in the country.

Near the coast, winter temperatures can drop as low as the fifteen to twenty degree F range.

Further away from the coast, our winter temperatures can drop as low ten to fifteen degrees F. Cold periods are brief, usually lasting no more than two or three days. Of most concern are our rapidly fluctuating winter temperatures. Winter temperatures can drop quickly following a warm period and temperate zone plants are often caught in a semi-dormant state. Some cold injury is not unusual, even on normally cold hardy species.

Most people don't realize that some irrigation of most landscapes is needed during the winter.

Extended dry periods during the colder months are not unusual.

With our unusual north Florida weather in mind, following are a few winter gardening tips:

Allow temperate zone woody shrubs to slow down and enter dormancy by withholding high-nitrogen fertilizers in the fall.

Irrigate landscape plantings thoroughly one to two days before a freeze is expected.

Well-watered plants tolerate freezes much better than drought-stressed plants. Continue planting cool season vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, radish, carrots, cauliflower, kohlrabi, mustard, onions and turnips through the fall.

This is one of the most ideal times to plant trees and shrubs. Our relatively mild winters allow for root growth and a jump on establishment before hot weather arrives next year.

Wildflower seeds need to be planted in the fall here.

Rake pine needles and leaves and use them as mulch in flower, shrub, and vegetable beds. Don't mulch thicker than two to three inches, though. Mulch should be even thinner within a foot or two of the trunks of plants.

Establish cool season annuals for winter and early spring color. Bedding plants of snapdragons, dianthus, pansies, and petunias are in good supply at local nurseries and garden centers.

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Finish dividing and transplanting the clumping perennials such as daylilies, mondo grass, ajuga, and lirioppe.

Locate local sources or place orders for fruit trees. Dormant trees are normally shipped during December and January for winter planting. Stick with varieties proven in our area, though.

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