

Newcomers Learn that Fall Is Important Gardening Time Here



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Fall is the best time to plant many flowers, such as these 'First Love' dianthus, in our area.

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“Gardening in this area surely is different.” This is a common statement made by gardeners who have moved to our area from up North or out West. Newcomers must be willing to search out locally adapted gardening information and apply it. Otherwise, they are in for several years of learning things the hard way by trial and error.

Although adjustments must be made in the kind of plants grown, fertilization practices and watering techniques, one of the biggest mistakes made by transplanted gardeners is in the area of timing. When you do certain things here is as important as how you do them.

Some glaring examples of improper timing can be seen when new residents begin flower and vegetable gardens. Some flowers that are early-spring planted in the north and Midwest are best established in the fall here. October is the recommended time for transplanting petunias. They are relatively cold hardy here, flowering from late winter until May or June. Spring planted petunias, on the other hand, provide only a few weeks of color. Other flowering bedding plants that should be started in the fall, from October through November, are delphinium (including larkspur), bachelor buttons, dianthus, statice, stock, digitalis (foxglove), pansy, snapdragon, sweet peas, and shasta Daisy.

Clumping perennials are also divided and transplanted in the fall rather than in the spring here. September is considered to be the ideal month for dividing the bulbs of amaryllis, which is one of our best bulb producing perennial flowers.

The time to plant certain vegetables is much different in this zone too. Our mild winters allow us to have something growing in the garden during every month of the year. We grow both warm season and cool season

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vegetables. The cool season or winter vegetables are easier to grow, so I often recommend that new gardeners start with that group. September is the prime time for planting seeds of beets, carrots, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, parsley radish and turnip. If plants are available at the garden center, use them to start broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards and lettuce.

Strawberries and bulbing onions produce well, but they must be started at a seemingly ridiculous time to newcomers. In order to get a maximum yield from strawberries we grow them as an annual, setting out plants in October or November. The day neutral varieties must be used, instead of the more popular nationally known varieties. Recommended varieties for our area include Chandler , Florida 90, Sweet Charlie, Selva, Dover , Oso Grande and Florida Belle.

Bulbing onions can be locally grown that rival even the best that are shipped in from other areas. To do this, the short day varieties must be used and plants are set out in the fall. Recommended varieties are Excel, Texas Grano, Granex, White Granex and Tropicana Red. Bulbing onions can also be seeded in September for transplanting to the garden at a later date. Bunching onions and multipliers can be started from August through March.

Question of the Week: I grow hibiscus plants in containers. Each year I remove them from the pots, root prune, and repot them. They are not flowering well. What am I doing wrong?

Answer: Do not root prune when transplanting, except to cut any large circling roots. They should also be moved to a larger container when repotting is necessary. The rule of thumb is shift to a container that is at least two inches wider in diameter.

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