

December in the Tallahassee Garden



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Rosemary is one of several herbs that can be planted now.

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Shrubs and Trees: It's too soon to start pruning landscape trees and shrubs. It's best to wait until January when the plants are fully dormant. A satisfying chore to undertake after the first frost is to remove vines that are strangling trees and shrubs. Wisteria, grapevine, kudzu, and honeysuckle can be easily seen and removed after frost has killed their leaves. Pay attention to the weather forecast and protect your plants from freezing temperatures. When temperatures below 25 degrees are predicted water the soil thoroughly a day before the predicted freeze. Apply horticultural oil spray to kill over-wintering mites, aphids and scales to affected trees or shrubs. Check citrus, hollies, gardenias and camellias since these are particularly susceptible to such pests.

Annuals and Perennials: Establish cool-season bedding plants of dianthus, pansies, snapdragons, alyssum, digitalis (foxglove) and petunias. Feed winter blooming annuals every four to six weeks with a light application of a fertilizer containing 50% slow-release nitrate nitrogen. Avoid fertilizers with high rates of ammoniacal nitrogen. This form is slow to be taken up in cold weather and tends to burn the roots. Remove spent flowers from plants as the flowers fade. Plant hardy perennials like delphinium, rudbeckia, and Shasta daisy. There is no need to fertilize hardy perennials and other trees and shrubs in December. Clean up the garden, pull up spent annuals and renew the mulch. Prevent fungal disease by keeping water off plants as much as possible and providing good air circulation around plants by allowing ample space between plants at planting. Remove weeds from flowerbeds since they are frequently host to insects and/or disease organisms.

Bulbs, Corms and Tubers: Plant pre-cooled tulips and hyacinths before December 15th. Bulbs grown indoors such as paper whites and amaryllis can be saved for planting outside later if they have been grown in soil. Bulbs grown in water will perform poorly if planted later and should be discarded after blooming.

Vegetables, Herbs and Fruit: Plant herbs that do well in winter, including parsley, sage, cilantro, oregano, chives, rosemary, thyme, and lavender. Continue planting cool season vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, radishes, carrots, cauliflower, kohlrabi, mustard, beet, arugula, Swiss chard, onions and turnips. Keep cool season weeds in check before they get too well established. Plant bare-root and container-grown fruit trees or blueberries all month.

Lawn care: Continue to rake fallen leaves and pine needles. Don't let them accumulate and smother the lawn grass. Another option is to mow them and leave them on the lawn or use elsewhere as mulch.

Houseplants: Tender tropical plants in pots may be moved inside now. Hibiscus, pentas, croton, allamanda can be potted up for the winter and replanted in the spring. If you don't mind moving them several times during the winter, they can be brought outdoors during mild periods and then back inside when freezing temperatures are predicted. Don't forget to keep them watered while they are inside. Be sure houseplant leaves don't touch the window glass during very cold weather. Most houseplants like high humidity. Kitchens or bathrooms with sufficient light are good locations. Increase humidity by grouping plants together or place the containers in saucers filled with pebbles almost covered with water.

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