

January in the Tallahassee garden

By Katherine LaRosa, Master Gardener

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Shrubs and Trees: Many gardeners list pruning as their favorite gardening task. January is the perfect time for most pruning projects. While foliage is absent or sparse it is easier to view the structure of trees and shrubs and to plan how the structure can be improved by selective removal of limbs and branches. Prune out dead or crossing limbs. Prune trees and shrubs that do not flower in the spring. Spring flowering plants should be pruned after they flower. Keep track of rainfall and water occasionally during dry spells.

Flowers: Seeds of most spring-flowering annuals can be started inside for later transplanting. Prepare soil and beds for spring planting. Add organic matter such as compost, peat moss or composted manure. Continue making monthly light applications of fertilizer to established beds of winter flowering annuals such as pansies, calendula, and snapdragons. Perennials such as coneflowers, pentas, lantana and plumbago, damaged by the cold, shouldn't be cut back until early spring. Leaving the dead foliage gives the plant roots some protection from more cold weather. To protect the roots of tender tropical or succulent vegetation which has been killed, cut back the foliage and mulch with six inches of pine straw or leaves.

Roses: Prepare beds for planting. Choose a spot that gets six hours of sun a day. Have a soil test done now so that if you need to add lime you can do so several weeks before planting. (Pick up a soil test kit from the master gardener office.) Dig the bed and add organic material. Later in January or early in February, begin planting your new roses. Decide whether you want high-maintenance hybrid tea roses or something easier such as old garden roses. Established roses should not be pruned until February.

Fruit Trees: Plant deciduous fruit trees and cold-hardy citrus. Fruit trees need six hours of sun a day.

Citrus trees should be located where they will be sheltered from the north wind and where cold air will not settle and collect. Plants with morning shade will suffer less damage from a hard freeze.

Peaches, plums and nectarines need an annual pruning to keep the fruit within reach and to allow more light to reach developing fruit. Pruning stimulates new growth for next year's crop.

Most fruit trees should be sprayed with horticultural dormant oil spray to kill overwintering pests. This is available in garden centers. Read and follow the directions.

Vegetables and Herbs: Sow seeds of English peas, snow peas, spinach, mustard, collards, lettuce, beets, cabbage, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, shallots, radishes, turnips, and parsley. Plant potatoes mid-January to mid-February. Inside start seeds of basil, peppers, tomatoes, eggplants, and leeks for transplanting in March. After

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the seeds sprout place the seedlings in very bright light to keep them from getting spindly.

Lawn care: Continue to keep the leaves off healthy areas of the lawn. If they're left on the lawn for several weeks they will kill the grass.

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