

January in the Tallahassee Garden



Photos by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: pansies, dianthus. "Replace freeze-damaged annuals with cold-hardy annuals such as dianthus, snapdragons, pansies, ornamental cabbage or kale, and petunias."

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January is typically our coldest month. Take advantage of any warm sunny days to get out in the garden. Pruning and planting trees and shrubs are jobs best performed in January so put these high on your gardening to do list.

Shrubs and Trees: Prune trees and shrubs which do not flower in the spring. When pruning remove dead branches and any that cross, removing the ones growing toward the center. This improves air circulation and emphasizes the structural form of the plant. Don't prune dogwoods, redbuds, azaleas, spirea, fringe trees, gardenias, climbing roses, camellias, and other spring flowering shrubs until after they bloom.

Flowers: Tender annuals, tropicals and succulents suffer immediately from freezing temperatures. These should be cut back or removed soon after freezing. After cutting back plants with rhizomes such as cannas, firespike, bananas, and gingers, mulch with six inches of pine straw or leaves. Bananas do not have to be cut all the way to the ground. Unless freezes are unusually severe this winter, new growth will emerge from the stem in the spring at whatever height you left the stalk. So, if you have a clump of banana plants, you may wish to stagger the cutting heights on the various stalks so that the plants are different heights next spring. Replace freeze-damaged annuals with cold-hardy annuals such as dianthus, snapdragons, pansies, ornamental cabbage or kale, and petunias. Make monthly light applications of fertilizer to established beds of winter flowering annuals. Woody plants such as lantana and plumbago shouldn't be cut back until early spring. Leaving some cold-damaged material protects the plants during future freezes. Besides, in spring you will know how far back the cold damage occurred and at what point you need to cut.

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 but not in a low spot where cold air will settle and collect. Peaches, plums and nectarines need annual pruning. Annual pruning keeps fruit within reach, allows more light to reach developing fruit, and stimulates new growth for next year's crop. Most fruit trees should be sprayed with horticultural dormant oil spray to kill over-wintering pests. This is available in

garden centers. Read and follow the directions.

Lawn care: Our lawn grasses are dormant now and don't need mowing. Continue to keep leaves off healthy areas of the lawn. Service your lawn mower. Drain the gas, change the oil and spark plug, and lubricate. Sharpen the blade.

Vegetables and Herbs: Plan your vegetable garden for the year. Decide what you will plant and when and where you will plant it. Even the simplest of plans is better than none, especially when planning for crop rotation. Order seeds for hard to find varieties. Sow seeds of English peas, snow peas, spinach, mustard, collards and parsley. Plant potatoes mid-January to mid-February. Inside start seeds of basil, peppers, leeks and lettuce for later transplanting.

Roses: Get a soil test done (pick up materials from the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension at 615 Paul Russell Road), and prepare your beds for planting. Choose a spot that gets six hours of sun a day. Dig the bed and add organic material. If your soil pH is below 5.5, you may have to add lime. But don't do this without a soil test or you could over-lime.

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