August in the Tallahassee Garden

Photo by David W. Marshall, Leon County UF-IFAS: Pentas is among flowers that can be planted now to flourish in the summer heat.

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For those gardeners who bemoan the fact that they have too much shade, this is your month! Those of us with sunny yards are sorely tempted to skip garden chores this month, but a few hours of work now will pay big dividends later.

Right plant, right place

Though this is generally not a good time to plant, there are a few selections that will survive being planted during the heat and humidity of August. For sunny areas, consider pentas, perennial peanut, and *Dicliptera suberecta*. Pentas provides summer color (red, lavender, pink or white) and will attract both butterflies and hummingbirds. If you’re looking for a groundcover, try perennial peanut. It’s a low growing plant that has bright green foliage and yellow flowers. It prevents erosion and is drought-tolerant. Once established, it will die back in winter but return early each spring. *Dicliptera suberecta* is another great low maintenance plant. At the Leon County Extension demonstration garden we stuck small pieces taken from another plant in the ground in full sun with no irrigation other than an initial watering, and they have filled in the area in spite of the drought conditions. The gray-green foliage and red-orange flowers provide great contrast in a sunny bed. Lantana, melampodium, ‘Summer Wave’ torenia, and periwinkle (*Vinca*) can also be planted now. Cosmos, zinnia, Mexican sunflower and cleome seeds may be sown this month.
For fall color, plant lion’s ear (*Leonotis Leonuris*), cigar plant (*Cuphea micropetala*) and Philippine violet (*Barleria cristata*) in a sunny spot now. Plant beans, peas, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, pumpkins, and squash now for a final harvest before winter. Toward the end of the month start broccoli, cauliflower, collards, and turnips for a fall garden. Sow seeds for basil, chives, cilantro, dill, parsley, sage and thyme.

**Mulch**

Mulch is particularly important this time of year. Rain and heat cause organic mulches to break down rapidly so make sure that you maintain two to four inches of mulch around trees and plants. It will keep the soil cooler and help to retain moisture as well as inhibit the growth of weeds.

**Maintenance**

Cut back tired-looking annuals and remove spent hydrangea blooms now. Butterfly bush and perennial salvias can be cut back now to encourage new blooms. Knockout roses will produce a flush of new blooms if cut back now. Crepe myrtle and chaste tree (*Vitex*) will also reflower if spent blooms are removed. August is a good time to propagate azaleas, hydrangeas and oleanders using tip cuttings. Put the pots in a shady spot and keep them moist. Prune out dead canes on roses and cut back tall bushes to 30-36”.

Lawn problems are very common in August. Look for chinch bugs in St. Augustine lawns. Fungal problems are also common in hot humid weather. When treating lawn problems, follow label directions carefully and treat the damaged area and a buffer around it. It is not usually necessary to treat the entire lawn.

**Fertilizer**

Roses and annuals may be fertilized now with a 15-0-15 product. On roses, spread the fertilizer well beyond the drip line and water it in. Fertilize annuals very lightly.

I’m not suggesting that all of these tasks need to be completed this month. Choose those that seem doable to you, then head for the air conditioning!

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