This Month in the Tallahassee Garden

Photo by David W. Marshall, Leon County Extension UF-IFAS: Firebush (*Hamelia patens*) is among perennials that can be planted now.

Elizabeth Schmidt is a Master Gardener Volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County, http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/

Thursday, March 6, 2008
Tallahassee Democrat

Right Plant, Right Place

This is an exciting month for the Tallahassee gardener. There’s a lot to do in the garden, and the nurseries are bursting with beautiful plants. There is still a possibility for a hard freeze, so don’t plant tender selections until mid-April. Trees and shrubs can still be planted this month, but do so as soon as possible. Tree and shrub roots need time to get established before the stress of summer heat. If you can’t wait to start planting flowers, choose annuals that do well in cool weather like snapdragons, dianthus, and nasturtiums. Plant in full sun for best flowering. Broccoli, kale, cabbage, spinach, potatoes and onions thrive in cool weather and may also be planted this month. Plant thyme, dill, oregano, mint, and rosemary this month. Later this month add seeds for snap beans, pole beans, lima beans, cantaloupes, sweet corn, squash and watermelon. Vegetables and herbs require full sun. Wait until April to set out warm weather annuals like impatiens and begonias, herbs, and tomatoes and peppers. Warm weather herbs include dill, fennel and basil. A cold spell now could kill these tender plants.

March is a good time to choose and plant azaleas. Since they’re in bloom you can be sure of getting the color that you want. For the greatest aesthetic appeal, plant a mass of one color. Both azaleas and dogwoods, which can also be planted now, prefer filtered sunlight.

Perennials that may be planted now are lantana, Brazilian sage (*Salvia guaranitica*), firebush (*Hamelia patens*), cigarette plant (*Cuphea ignea*) and Princess flower (*Tibouchinia spp.*). All like full sun. Vines that may be planted in March include: Carolina jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), Confederate jessamine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*) and the less aggressive American wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*). Plant ornamental grasses this month as well. Just be sure to choose a sunny spot. Plant a fig tree now. This is a fast grower and is not particular about soil although it prefers full sun.
Soil

Soil is one of the most ignored elements of gardening. For new beds, the soil should be turned or tilled to a depth of one foot. Add organic matter (composted leaves, manure, etc.) to enrich soil and improve drainage. You may be lacking other elements but have a soil test before adding these. Pick up soil test materials from the Leon County Extension office at 615 Paul Russell Road. Adding unnecessary elements can backfire. For existing flower beds, add a top layer of compost and mix it in with the existing soil. Good soil makes good plants.

Fertilizer

Wait until two to three weeks after your lawn greens up before fertilizing, generally in April. Centipede lawns are usually the last to turn green. If you used a winterizer fertilizer last fall and the centipede lawn looks good now, you may opt to skip a spring application. Fertilize young shrubs and trees this month, but established, mature trees and shrubs which are well-mulched don’t need additional fertilizer if they are doing well. A good general use fertilizer for this area is 15-0-15 with 7.5% slow-release nitrogen. Fertilize palms with a special palm fertilizer.

Mulch

Mulch existing and new plants to a depth of two to three inches to protect roots and conserve water. Pull the mulch a few inches from the base of the plant to discourage rotting. Consider using leaves as mulch. They’re free and their use is a good ecological practice. If you purchase mulch, try to avoid cypress mulch; choose pine straw, pine bark or melaleuca mulch.

Maintenance

Prune azaleas, spirea, quince, forsythia and loropetalum when they have finished blooming, if they need it. Pruning later in the year will remove next year’s flower buds. Finish heavy pruning of trees and shrubs now. Get out there and get dirty!

###