December in the Tallahassee Garden

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Photo by Iowa State Extension: Cilantro, known as coriander when grown for the seeds, is one of several herbs that can be planted now.

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The days are short but beautiful and the garden calls you to come outside and share the beauty of a winter day in Florida. It is a bit late for winter annuals but worth a try. Plant petunias, dianthus, diascia, foxgloves, nemesia, snapdragons, and violas. Some fun winter flower seeds to plant include bachelor’s buttons, poppies, calendulas, larkspur and love-in-a-mist. Remember that annuals need regular watering, fertilizing and deadheading to bloom their best.

Now is time to dig those tulips and hyacinths out of your refrigerator and plant them outside. Just be sure they have been chilling for six to eight weeks. It is not too late to plant other spring flowering bulbs such as irises, anemones, daffodils, and lilies.

Cilantro, fennel and parsley are wonderful winter herbs. You can tuck these into your flower beds and trim cuttings all winter to use in cooking. Then in spring they produce flowers which are attractive to beneficial insects that will patrol your garden and munch on those nasty aphids and caterpillars. Fennel produces very showy yellow umbels that make excellent cut flowers. Cilantro and parsley flowers aren’t as showy but add a nice touch of greenery to winter and spring bouquets.

The winter vegetable garden is vibrant and tantalizing this month. The taste and tenderness of greens improves with cold weather and if you need another excuse to eat them, greens are some of the healthiest food on the planet, rich in vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients. Make a salad and throw in some baby carrots, radishes, and green onions. If you didn’t get your vegetable garden planted in October or November, do not despair! You can still plant beets, bok choi, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, mustard, onions, radishes, and spinach.

December is the perfect time to plant trees. Try placing an understory tree like chalk maple (Acer saccharum ssp leucoderme), blue beech (Carpinus caroliniana), two-winged silverbell (Halesia
diptera) or rusty blackhaw (Viburnum rufidulum) amongst your pines and oaks. You and the squirrels will get years of enjoyment from your tree and your entire neighborhood will breathe easier. A mature tree produces as much oxygen in a season as ten people inhale in a year!

Don’t forget to take care of your grass by raking it free of leaves. Even though it is not growing right now it still needs that light from the sun to look its best. Throw the leaves onto the compost pile or use them as a mulch for vegetable and flower beds.

Plant a pretty pot with violas, Goldilocks lysimachia and some Tete-a-Tete daffodils. Put it in a sunny spot which you will pass by everyday. This will give you months and months of pleasure. The violas will bloom on and off from now until well into spring. Goldilocks will drape its yellow tresses over the sides and shimmer in the breeze, and in spring the bright faces of the daffodils will brighten each day for weeks. For your front door you can make a boxwood wreath. Take a bunch of ten to twelve inch boxwood cuttings and soak them in water for 24 hours. Trim them to about six inches. Attach them in groups of three to a wire frame wreath with floral wire, working your way around the wreath until you reach the beginning. Tuck the stems of the last group under the tips of the first group. Decorate with ribbons and pine cones. Smile every time you enter your house. ###