January in the Tallahassee Garden

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Plant cool-season flowers such as diascia now.

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Thursday, January 1, 2009
Tallahassee Democrat

December, January and February all usually bring some hard freezes. So don’t be in a hurry to cut back cold-damaged plants now. Damaged foliage may protect plants from further, more severe damage. Do not dig up plants that die back to the ground as many will return in the spring from the roots. You may protect plants that are not cold hardy in our area with sheets or blankets on cold nights. Be cautious when covering with plastic. Do not allow the plants to come into direct contact with the plastic. That will cause the plants to cool faster and the foliage may be damaged.

Right plant, right place
If you have not already done so, plant winter annuals this month. Most will bloom through late spring. Pick a sunny area for best blooming. Consider pansies, violas, snapdragons, dianthus, sweet alyssum, calendulas, nasturtiums, diascia, nemesia, and petunias. Plant crepe myrtles now, but be sure to select a variety that is suitable for the space. They grow fairly quickly and range from dwarf varieties (2 to 3 feet) to very large varieties that can reach fifty feet or more. Plant in full sun. Plant new roses in sunny areas. Other selections to plant now include hollies for evergreen foliage and colorful winter berries. Choose a spot in partial shade to full sun with well-drained soil. Plant blueberries and figs now in full sun. Choose at least two varieties of blueberries to ensure fruit production. Plant hydrangeas in a shady area. Herbs that may be planted now include dill, fennel, cilantro, marjoram, mint, oregano and thyme. English peas, Swiss chard, spinach, radishes may also be planted now. Plant all herbs and vegetables in full sun.
Since things are slower in the garden this month, it is a good time to consider installing irrigation, rain barrels and compost bins. Micro-irrigation, which directs water to the root balls of new plants is a good, environmentally-friendly choice. Some local garden centers sell all the components. The systems are easy to install.

Rain barrels will provide clean (and free) water for plants. Install several rain gauges around your property to keep track of rainfall and avoid wasting water. Direct water from gutters to beds and rain barrels rather than onto hardscape to prevent stormwater runoff.

**Fertilizer**
Fertilize winter annuals, herbs and vegetables monthly to ensure vigorous growth.

**Water**
Water annuals twice a week in dry weather. New shrubs and trees require a deep watering twice a week. Established shrubs and trees may not even need to be watered once a week now. Keep an eye on your plants and periodically check the soil moisture. Plants will require more frequent watering in the spring when they are no longer dormant.

**Mulch**
Maintain two to four inches of mulch in flower beds and around trees. Pull mulch away from trunks and stems to discourage rotting.

**Maintenance**
January is the time to begin pruning crepe myrtles. Cut back crossed or rubbing branches at the main trunk and remove sprouts from the base of the tree. Do not leave any stubs. Unless your crepe myrtle has outgrown its space, there is no need to shorten limbs.

Prune roses now or in February. Remove thin and weak canes and cut plants back to two to three feet tall. Prune muscadines now by leaving the main vines and cutting back everything else except short growth with two to three buds. Fruit trees may be pruned now. Pruning allows more light and air to reach the fruit and encourages new growth. Do NOT prune spring flowering trees or shrubs now; doing so will remove this year’s flower buds. Mow your lawn monthly to remove leaves and other debris from the lawn and to prevent winter weeds from going to seed.

**Wildlife**
It is important to keep bird baths and feeders clean and filled now for both year-round species and winter visitors.

**Learn More**
If you have time to be a Master Gardener volunteer with the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension, now is the time to sign up for the 2009 classes. Go to [http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/MG/MasterGardenerProgram.shtml](http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/MG/MasterGardenerProgram.shtml) for the details.

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