

Get Out There and Dig in the Dirt



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Fall is the time to seed cool-season annual flowers such as larkspur.

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To me this is the beginning of the best season in Tallahassee. With the return of drier and cooler weather my energy is renewed and I feel like planting, as well as doing other garden chores.

Like I need an excuse to buy new plants, but really, it is the BEST time to plant. Trees and shrubs, as well as winter annuals are the obvious choices, but don't rule out a new perennial bed. Planting now gives perennials a chance to develop good root systems before they have to produce those beautiful spring and summer flowers that delight us humans. Now is also the time to begin the fall and winter vegetable garden, a far more enjoyable endeavor than the spring and summer one.

Winter annuals to plant now are alyssum, calendula, dianthus, diascia, foxglove, nemesia, pansy, petunia, and snapdragon. Poppies, bachelor buttons and larkspur are easy to grow from seed. In general I would plant later in the month, since October can sometimes be rather warm and these annuals prefer cooler temperatures.

Daffodils are the main bulb that comes to mind in fall, but there are others which grow quite well in northern Florida and can be planted now. Some popular ones are amaryllis, hurricane lilies and irises. Many bulbs are not suited to our climate and therefore will not return next year. This does not mean you cannot plant them. Just treat them as annuals. Lilies come to mind as they are a particular favorite of mine. They do not require chilling in the refrigerator as do hyacinths and tulips.

Why not be trendy and plant a vegetable garden? Be careful though, it is lots of fun to grow food and you may get hooked. Don't let not knowing how get in the way. There are plenty of garden coaches as well as seeds and plants at the local nurseries. They even have classes and books on the subject! Some good fall vegetables to plant now are beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, onions, and radishes. Green leafy vegetables to grow are collards, kale, lettuce, mustard greens, spinach, Swiss chard, and turnips. Each year I like to try something new and this year I am going to try parsnips. Don't forget the winter herbs cilantro, parsley, and fennel to season your home-grown vegetables.

Fertilizing, especially winter annuals and vegetables can be done now. Don't overdo it with the shrubs and perennials though. Winter is coming and you don't want to encourage too much new growth which could get nipped by colder temperatures.

The winter weeds will soon start germinating in your grass. You can weed them by hand if you want the exercise and prefer this method. However, you can also apply a pre-emergent herbicide. Select a product containing atrazine or isoxaben. Corn gluten meal, a nontoxic by-product of corn processing is also used. Pre-emergent herbicides should only be applied to established lawns. Follow directions carefully.

The garden writer Henry Mitchell said "There are no green thumbs or black thumbs. There are only gardeners and non-gardeners." So get out there and dig in the dirt! Be a gardener!

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