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Tallahassee Democrat

Florida observes Arbor Day on January 22. Celebrate by planting a tree. This is the ideal time to plant trees and shrubs in north Florida, because they are dormant now and will have time to develop their root systems before the stress of hot weather arrives.

Right Plant, Right Place
Bedding plants which can be planted during the winter months include snapdragons, pansies, petunias and Shasta daisies. Cool season vegetables including cabbage, beets, lettuces, turnips and broccoli can still be planted this month as well as cool season herbs like parsley and cilantro. Choose a location with full sun for best results.

Camellias may be selected and planted this month. Nurseries have an excellent selection of blooming camellias now. Camellias should be planted in partial shade in well-drained soil.

Fruit trees and cold hardy citrus can be planted now. Choose a sunny location and plant citrus where it will be protected from the north winds.

Water
Since plants and grass are in somewhat of a dormant stage now and temperatures are low, water needs are minimal. The exception is with new plants. They must be watered several times a week. When planting, consider grouping plants to facilitate easier watering.

Fertilizer
Fertilize annuals, herbs and vegetables lightly every month using a 15-0-15 slow release product. Do not fertilize grass, trees or shrubs until spring.
Mulch
Maintain a three to four inch layer of mulch in beds and around trees. Pull away from the stem or trunk of plants to prevent or reduce rotting.

Maintenance
Trees and shrubs can be pruned this month. The exception is spring-blooming plants--wait until they have finished blooming before pruning them. Heavily pruning them now will significantly decrease blooming. When pruning, make cuts just outside of the branch collar instead of leaving stubs. Citrus and other fruit trees should receive their annual pruning this month. Pruning allows more sun and air to reach fruit and stimulates growth.

Lawns should be mowed occasionally during the winter months to discourage weeds from going to seed and to remove leaves and other debris from the lawn.

Cover tender plants on nights when the temperature drops below freezing. Use old sheets and blankets. Watering a day or two before a hard freeze may also offer some cold protection as a moist soil will hold more heat. Wait until spring to remove cold-damaged foliage, as leaving the damaged foliage may serve to protect the plant from future freezes. Many plants that die back to the ground in winter will return in the spring.

This is a good time to prepare beds for spring planting by incorporating organic matter into the soil. It’s also a good time to dig new beds since weed activity is minimal.

Wildlife
Continue to clean and fill bird baths and feeders all winter. Many species over-winter here and winter visitors are abundant. Even leave the hummingbird feeder up. Surprisingly some hummingbirds are sighted here even in the winter.

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