

## February in the Tallahassee Garden



*Photos by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Topping crape myrtles results in weak branches that will droop under the weight of flowers and rain. A well-trained tree has beautiful trunk structure.*

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While it is tempting to try to get an early start on spring gardening now in February, it is not advisable to plant anything yet that is sensitive to frosts and freezes. However, February is one of the best months of the year for pruning and transplanting cold-hardy plants.

When it comes to pruning, one caveat is not to prune plants that bloom on last year's growth. So don't prune camellias, azaleas, and other spring-flowering shrubs now. Mid-February is Valentine's Day, the traditional time for planting red-skin potatoes and pruning roses.

Prepare your garden soil for spring planting. Incorporate organic materials such as peat moss, manure, or compost to increase the moisture and nutrient holding capacity of your soil. Do not plant tender seeds and plants until mid-March and later. The average frost free date in this area is between March 15 and 30. Be prepared to protect tender plants should cold weather threaten.

### Prune:

- Cut back ornamental grasses before new shoots appear.
- Crape myrtle trees can be thinned in February, if needed. Remove crossing and rubbing branches that make the interior of the plant too crowded. Crape myrtles do not have to be topped, however. In fact, excessive topping results in a lot of weak growth that won't hold up under the weight of flowers during the summer, especially during the rainy season.

### Trees and Shrubs:

- Late winter is the best time to plant trees and shrubs, especially bare-root stock. Plant fruit and nut trees along with grapes, blueberries and blackberries.
- When camellias finish blooming, rake up the petals that fall to prevent petal blight.
- Apply dormant oil spray or ultrafine horticultural oil to deciduous trees and shrubs that are infested with scale insects.
- Mature shrubs, growing in a well-mulched bed, probably won't need any fertilizer.

- Make shrub and tree purchases now. Nurseries are crowded in March and there will be fewer selections. Azaleas will be in bloom, making selection easier.

Rose Advice from Bill Dority, Master Gardener and President of the Tallahassee Rose Society:

- Plant roses anytime. You don't need to wait until spring.
- Experienced rosarians use Valentine's Day as a guide for proper timing to prune Hybrid T's, Grandifloras and Floribundas to a height of 18-24inches.
- Trim once-blooming climbing roses lightly after they bloom to ensure they will bloom next year.
- Trim garden shrub roses (such as KnockOut) and ever-blooming climbers lightly — no more than a third — for size and shape control. Some may want to let the initial flowering pass before they trim if there is heavy budding on hand.

Perennials:

- Divide and transplant crowded clumps of perennials.

Annuals:

- Bedding Plants add color to the early spring garden. Plant masses of petunias, dianthus, erysimum, nemesia, snapdragons, and Shasta daisy.

Lawn:

- Do not fertilize your lawn until April.
- Pull or dig out winter weeds by hand. If there is a heavy infestation of winter weeds consider applying pre-emergent herbicide next fall.

Vegetables:

- Outside; sow seeds of beets, mustard, parsley, endive, escarole, carrots, collards, English peas, lettuce, radishes, turnips, and sugar snap peas. Do this early in the month so they will produce before hot summer weather arrives.
- Plant sets of cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and onions.
- Inside start seeds now for transplanting into the garden in March and April. These include lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant. When seedlings develop their second or third pair of true leaves, carefully transplant them into individual containers.

Herbs:

- Plant herbs that thrive in cool weather. Some to try are parsley, thyme, sage, dill, fennel, garlic, comfrey, and coriander (cilantro).

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