

October gardening in Northwest Florida

October brings welcomed relief from summer's heat. And it is a great time to be outside in your garden.

David Marshall, UF/IFAS Extension Agent in Leon County, and I provide ideas on things to do during October in your landscape and garden in today's article.

Fall is the best time for planting shrubs. Fall planted shrubs have all winter to grow roots and so will be better established when spring and summer heat again arrive. Your newly planted shrubs will need regular waterings. An efficient way to provide water is through a micro-irrigation system with an emitter over the rootball of each shrub. Such systems are inexpensive, easy to install and can mean the difference between success and failure with your new plants.

This is the best time of year to plant petunias. They will bloom a little now. But they will grow through the winter and really explode with color in spring. Petunias prefer the cool season and usually are not damaged by our winter weather. It's the heat of summer that does them in. 'Vista Bubblegum' is David's favorite cultivar. But you may have a tough time finding it because of its popularity.

As the weather cools down later this month, plant other cool-season annuals, too. Nemesia, diascia, sweet alyssum, calibrachoa, pansies and violas are among the lower-growing flowers that are great for beds and containers. For taller plants, try dianthus, dusty miller, snapdragons and Flambe® Yellow chrysocephalum or strawflower. Be sure to plant all these flowers in full sun or they won't perform very well.

Late October to November is the time to seed cool-season annuals. Larkspur and bachelor buttons are probably the easiest. But poppies and sweet peas are relatively easy too. Find a sunny spot in an established flowerbed. Pull back the mulch. If the soil isn't compacted, rough it up a little with a steel rake. If it is compacted you may need to till or spade it lightly. Don't plant the seed too deep. Sow seed on the soil surface and press or rake them into closer contact with the soil. Keep the soil moist, at least until seedlings emerge and establish some good roots.

This is a colorful time of year for many fall-blooming perennials. The list includes firespike, Philippine violet, cape honeysuckle, tibouchina, cigar flower, firebush, Mexican bush sage, pineapple sage, candlebrush Senna and sky vine.

Now is the time to plant cool-season vegetables such as beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, collards, kohlrabi, mustard, bulbing onions, radishes, spinach, strawberries, and turnips. Herbs such as parsley, sage, thyme and rosemary can be planted now, too.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, September 28, 2011