

## Things to do in the winter garden

Gardeners can get a jump on the spring season by doing some things during the winter. In fact, some practices are best done at this time of year.

Apply a spray of horticultural oil emulsion to dormant fruit trees. This is a relatively non-toxic method of controlling overwintering pests such as scale insects. Gardeners who grow peaches, plums and nectarines should not leave out this spray application. It's necessary on these pest-sensitive fruits to control white peach and other scale insects.

Container grown plants can be transplanted almost any time of year. But bare-root trees and shrubs should be in the ground promptly. Dormant season planting allows time for establishment before hot weather arrives.

Prepare and stick hardwood cuttings to root hibiscus, crape myrtle, fig, althea, forsythia and other deciduous plants. Anyone who has not tried this simple method of propagation can get specific information from your UF/IFAS County Extension Office.

Start seeds of warm season flowers and vegetables indoors for transplanting outdoors in spring. Approximately 5 to 6 weeks is required to grow vegetable seedlings such as tomato, pepper and eggplant to a transplantable size. Flowers generally take longer from seeding to a transplanting size, about 8 to 12 weeks.

There is still time to plant some of the winter vegetables. Look for transplants of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, leek and bunching onions. Others can be started from seed, including beets, carrots, celery, kohlrabi, mustard, English peas, radish and turnips. Irish potatoes are also started in January and February from the cut tubers. Some garden supply outlets sell "Seed potatoes" locally. Use these instead of grocery store potatoes.

Set out cold hardy flowers such as foxglove, pansy, petunia, and snapdragon. These hold up well during our brief winter frosts and freezes and flower much longer than if planting is delayed until spring.

Have a soil test done. Don't wait until spring, because laboratories are swamped with samples at that time of year, causing delays. Your UF/IFAS County Extension Office can provide a kit containing instructions, a form, bags and a box for mailing the sample.

Beds that are bare now, but will be planted in spring, can be enriched by adding and incorporating organic amendments now. Apply peat, mushroom compost, manure or homemade compost. Incorporate with the existing soil by tilling or spading to a depth of six inches. This allows time for increased biological activity to occur and settle down before planting next spring.

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