

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB  
JANUARY 2017 HORTICULTURE HINTS

HAPPY NEW YEAR! January means that many plants including trees and grasses are dormant or nearly so. Because of that, Florida's Arbor Day is this month – January 20<sup>th</sup> (always the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday) which coincides with the unveiling of our Yarn Bombing project. January is a great time to plant new trees in your landscape. Be sure you know how large the tree will get when mature and plan for that size. It is a shame to have to take out a perfectly healthy tree that in a few years is causing your driveway or sidewalk to buckle or whose branches are beating against the house in every breeze or that grows up around your power line.

Be sure to make the planting hole for your new tree at least double the width of the container, but no deeper, drench the soil in the hole and the root ball before planting. The soil you put in the hole should also be wetted down – that may need to be done in several lifts if the tree is in a fairly large container. Make a dam of excess soil around the perimeter of the planting hole to retain water and remember to water your new tree often. If the tree is top-heavy, you may want to provide some support until the roots are well established. Put stakes well outside the planting hole and be sure the material you use to connect the stakes and the trunk is flexible and will not damage the bark.

January is also a good time to prune those older trees. Remove crossing branches and those that rub against each other. Take out suckers from the base of maples and crepe myrtles. Shape small trees but keep in mind the natural form of the tree. Don't commit crepe murder – you can shape the crown or remove a few whole branches if the center is getting crowded. If a tree has branches too low to the ground and you want to get underneath it, you can remove a few the bottom limbs. Use sharp and clean tools. If the tree/branch is too big to trim from the ground with loppers or an extension saw – you probably need an arborist. Don't trim the trees or shrubs that bloom in the winter or spring now – wait for them to finish flowering

You can mow or trim off the tops of lirope this month if you want fresh foliage in the spring. Muhly grass and other ornamental grasses can be trimmed back too – leaving a foot or more of the base in place. If you have Asiatic jasmine as a ground cover and it is too tall or widespread, now is the time to trim it back too.

Thinking of ground covers, if you are fed up with traditional grasses and want to try something else in a sunny spot, now is a good time to kill the grass. First, don't commit to too big an area at once. Digging is easier when the root mass is diminished. Another option is to “smother” the grass with layers of cardboard or newspaper (held down with weights or pegs). If that is too much work, glyphosate herbicides work well. After the grass is gone, then you can try planting sunshine mimosa as your ground cover. It will spread to fill in the space and still allow you to put some annuals interspersed with it.

In the veggie garden, the green beans are finished but the broccoli and collards are doing great. It's time to plant more lettuce seeds. The plants are short enough to easily protect from the occasional frost and fresh salad is a bonus. Our carambola tree ( in a huge pot) gave us three huge ripe starfruit just before Christmas and has lots of other green ones but a cold snap will do them in so we keep watch and bring them inside to ripen on the counter. The tree moves onto the covered back porch with a tent and a light bulb to keep it from freezing as my hubby's commitment to tending a truly tropical fruit tree here

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