

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB JANUARY 2018 HORTICULTURE HINTS

Happy New Year to all! Let us all be thankful that, unlike our friends and relatives who live "up north", we don't have morning low temperatures in the -20s. However, it looks like our weather will bring us several days with frosty/freezing overnight lows. So don't wait to put your tender plant protection scheme in place. Find a protected place (garage, greenhouse) for tropicals in pots. For those plants that are in the ground, remember that a frost blanket has to reach the ground and stay there to protect the plant; if it is windy, use weights (rocks, bricks, empty pots) to hold the edges in place. Any foliage that does get nipped can always be trimmed back in February/March to get rid of the ugly parts. Remember that heavy covers can cause damage to the plants too, so consider giving the cover some support.

I got a couple of great books for Christmas. One is a picture book of the State Botanical Garden of Georgia in Athens near where my son's family recently moved. I look forward to an in-person visit because the garden is designed to be lovely at any time of year.

There are several fine gardens we can visit closer to home. Kanapaha Gardens in Gainesville has guided walks on the first Saturday of every month from 10 am to noon. They are open every day except Thursday. The admission charge is \$8. The USF Botanical Garden in Tampa is open daily, with a charge of \$5. The Henry Leu Garden in Orlando is open daily with an admission charge of \$10, although they have free admission on the first Monday of June, July, August and September. They have many special events scheduled.

The second book among my Christmas presents is a history of the White House gardens, All the Presidents' Gardens. It was fascinating to learn about the changing styles, plant selections and uses of the WH grounds through two centuries. Some of the Presidents and First Ladies were highly interested and involved, while others didn't care much at all.

The program for the January 12 meeting will be very interesting with a focus on native plants for our gardens. Our speaker, Marcia Clutter, is a member of the Citrus Chapter of the Native Plant Society. They sponsor a springtime plant sale, for which she will have information about making an order, either for yourself or for the club.

Camellias, both *Camellia japonica* and *Camellia sasanqua*, are in blossom now. Although not natives, they do make the Florida Friendly list. The sasanquas are generally smaller overall, with smaller leaves and are earlier to blossom, (fall through winter). Japonicas blossom winter through spring. Both are slow growing; you can keep larger varieties at shrub size with trimming right after blossoming, however large old specimens of japonica can get to be 20 feet tall and wide. They need acid soil of any texture that can drain. They must have part shade to shade, so they are good as an under-story beneath large trees (like oaks). I learned my lesson when one of my oak trees needed a major trimming and the camellias underneath got sunburn and failed. Camellias are susceptible to insects and fungus. The payoff is the beauty and variety of their flowers. White, pink, red and lavender blossoms range from one to six inches across, single or double. Ron and Edding Reichelderfer grow them locally in their nursery and usually offer some at our plant sale. Although they don't normally do retail sales, they may open for garden club members by appointment.

Some of my hibiscus are in full bloom now, and have nearly outgrown their space at 6 feet wide and 10 feet tall. Their one-day bright red blossoms, combined with a white camellia graced my Christmas table. They will probably be frosted back this month.

Cauliflower and broccoli from the vegetable garden also are favorites of my family for Christmas dinner (or any winter table), even the little grand-kids love those veggies. The green and white mixed with red pepper makes a festive dish. I have friends who love collards from my garden, especially when I bring them to pot luck dinners already cooked.