

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB  
HORTICULTURE HINTS FOR DECEMBER 2018

Tis the season for decorating our homes inside and out for the holidays. Have you tried decorating with native plant cuttings? During Heritage Days over the weekend, the Duval House had containers of holly, magnolia and loquat, in keeping with the materials that were available when the house was built in the 1860s. Those made very effective indoor decorations. You can fashion a wreath base from wild grape vines and attach magnolia leaves and small citrus fruit for a door decoration or arrange fan palm leaves in a striking spiral pattern for a different, more contemporary look. Of course, these won't last for the entire holiday season, but could be used for a party or visits by family and friends.

Looking for colorful landscape plants that are in blossom for this time of year? Turks Cap mallow (*Malvaviscus penduliflorus*) has bright red hanging flowers that look like a hibiscus about open but they never do. Although Florida Friendly, they are not native. In our Zone 9, they are cold hardy, may need trimming of dead branches in the spring and should be grown in a sunny area. This is a medium shrub-sized plant.

Also non-native but live plant material, makes great holiday décor, with bright red poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) and Christmas cactus, which is really a succulent (*Schlumbergeria bridgesii*) being the best known. Live cut trees from "up north" need to be purchased early in the season, have their bases cut off and stuck in a bucket of water or wet sand as soon as you bring it home. It will keep best if in a shady spot outdoors until ready to bring it in for decorating. Sometimes you can find a live potted cedar tree which can be planted in your yard afterwards, truly going green! Don't keep it in the house for long.

We've already had temperatures near or just below freezing. I found a couple of plants in my yard, like a Persian Shield in a pot, that took it hard. Other plants showed no signs of stress at all. When we have early cold snaps, it seems to me that we have more freezes through the winter. We'll see if that is true this winter. Have a plan for protecting cold-sensitive plants that you want to keep.

The first head of cauliflower for this year is on the menu this week. Home-grown don't get as big as the giant heads you see in the supermarket, but they are really tasty. Every stir-fry for the past month has included broccolini from the garden and leaf lettuce is abundant now. On the other hand, the cherry tomato plant has grown like gangbusters and has lots of blossoms, but only a couple tiny green fruit.

Have you noticed the lovely early camellias? There are two at the Duval House right beside Old Floral City road. Look for some in your neighborhood. These are the sasanqua type which have smaller, more delicate leaves and grow to shrub-size. Later in the winter and on into spring, the larger japonica types, that grow to be trees will bloom. Look for a variety called "Yuletide" for a Christmas-time bright red bloomer, as another way to have "free" holiday decorations in your yard.

What is your "pesticide IQ"? Do you know that there are LOTS of different types and if improperly used or disposed that they are a real problem for the environment? There are insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, rodenticides, miticides and molluscicides; they come in powders, granules, sprays, liquid concentrates and ready-to apply liquids. Do you have grandchildren or pets that could come in contact with all the bottles and bags you have around the house, garage or greenhouse? It is worth your time to stop and carefully read the label directions before you purchase a product to be sure it is designed to do what you need for your landscape, that you know the proper way to use it and that you protect yourself while applying it. When you are ready to use the product, **READ AND FOLLOW ALL THE LABEL DIRECTIONS**. Don't mix a larger batch than you can use in one application and never discard leftovers down the drain, in the yard or in a waterway. The Citrus County Solid Waste Management facility on SR 44 in Lecanto has special free collection days for residents on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9am to 1pm to discard hazardous waste – yes everything that is a pesticide is a hazardous waste. Four times a year, they also have Saturday's when that nasty stuff is accepted. Businesses can use these events but have to pay for the service.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR