

Horticulture Hints January 2020

Here we are in the beginning of a New Year once again. Where did 2019 go? Or am I showing my age by even saying that? Oh well, it is what it is. I don't know where it went.

December was fairly mild, and it looks like January (for the first few weeks at least) will be mild as well. My boat planter continues to be quite pretty: dwarf marigolds left from the summer planting are still blooming their little heads off, a bright pop of color against the deep purple Persian shields. *Seemannia sylvatica* (formerly known as one of the gloxinia family) is a lovely tall groundcover that blooms so nicely this time of year. It's what I like to call 'an enthusiastic grower', and sometimes shows up in places it wasn't expected. But I like that in a plant. I still don't know what a common name for this flower might be, so if anyone can help me out on this, please let me know. The New Year is also time for the blue sage to start blooming (thank you, Lynn B!!). On overcast days, the blue flowers practically glow. Pollinators seem to wake up just for this blooming shrub: they are always plentiful around the time that it blooms, then disappear again when it's done. The tibouchina is also in full bloom. It seems to put out a flush of blossoms after each dip in temperature.

As many of you may know, at our November monthly meeting, we had people bring cut items from their respective gardens (in bloom or not), and made a "community bouquet" for the potluck table. It was so successful that we did it again for our annual Christmas luncheon in December. This got me to thinking (sometimes a dangerous pastime!) about natural decorations in our homes. For the past several years, I have harvested the wild grape vines in the 'back 40' of our yard for a grapevine wreath. After zip tying the cut ends together, it's an easy matter to put on a leather glove and strip most of the leaves off. Then, simply roll them all into a circle and zip tie in several places to hold it together. I have previously just added a purchased ribbon bow and sprig or two of artificial flowers. But I think in the future, I may seek out more natural decorations to adorn the simple, rustic grapevine. Hollies from the front yard, with their bright red berries, come immediately to mind. How about magnolia leaves? Or maybe a length of braided palm fronds. Or dried grasses. One could get quite creative with this endeavor!

January is traditionally a fairly dry month, so a little supplemental watering of landscape plants may be called for during the month. But remember, now is not the time to fertilize lawns. It's basically sleepy-time for the little plants, and if the month is warm (as predictions are looking at this time) you may wake them up too early. Subsequent freezes could do quite a bit of harm to your lawn. And according to Citrus County regulations, you may not fertilize lawns at all during the period from November 1 through March 31.

If you haven't planted your winter vegetables yet, there's still plenty of time. Lots of things can be grown this time of year here in central Florida. Some seeds can be started indoors in anticipation of warmer weather in the spring, while others enjoy our cooler weather now, and will do better with direct seeding in the garden. Beans, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, collards, escarole, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, mustard, onion sets, peas, romaine, rutabagas, spinach, Swiss chard, and turnips will all do well with direct sow in the garden. Tomatoes, peppers, watermelons, squash, and cucumbers are better started indoors under grow lights. I experimented with several varieties of kale this winter: Dwarf Blue Curled Vates and Lacinto. The Lacinto variety is a lovely, smooth leafed variety, but for some reason didn't germinate well. I planted the seeds in October, and as you may remember, we had one of the hottest Octobers on record. It may have been too hot. The Dwarf Blue Curled Vates, on the other hand, germinated beautifully, and we're now getting abundant servings of classic ruffly kale.

If you still have some citrus trees that haven't succumbed to disease, now is a good time to evaluate them. For young trees, application of a balanced slow-release fertilizer (6-6-6) every 2-3 months during fall and winter is a good practice. During growth periods, spring and summer, increase application to every 1-2 months. A rule of thumb: application of one pound of fertilizer for each year of the plant's age, scattered out to the drip line. There are a host of fungi and diseases that can attack a citrus tree with inadequate nutrition.

Best wishes to all our gardening friends in the New Year, and happy gardening!