

The Potting Shed is a free monthly newsletter from the University of Georgia Extension in Bryan County. We provide science-based information to help Coastal Georgia gardeners. Have a question or need help, contact your local County Extension Office.
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THE YULETIDE CAMELLIA

I asked my office manager for some idea on what to write about. Her suggestion was to give folks a few hints on taking care of holiday plants after the holidays. Well that is real easy for me. My suggestion is as follows: Be sure to save room in your garbage can for all the poinsettias that you spend so much money on this year to decorate your home. My wife did not spend as much this year as she usually does, but she still bought five or six poinsettias at \$8.00 to \$10.00 each, coming to a grand total of about \$50.00. She could have purchased two camellia plants for that price and we could have enjoyed them for years to come.

This year I purchased three camellias. And my favorite one is the Yuletide. This camellia can be found in many of the same places the more common Camellia sasanquas are located, near old homes and public buildings.

The Yuletide bears loads of red flowers coupled with bright yellow stamens. It is considered compact in form. Many of these plants develop naturally into a conical or Christmas tree shape. We buy most other holiday plants on a yearly basis, but Yuletide is a plant that will bloom every year for the holidays. It also offers the structure needed in the winter landscape because of its evergreen nature.

Sasanquas are more sun-tolerant than the Camellia japonica and usually will withstand temperatures ten degrees colder in the winter. I've noticed a lot of sasanquas around older houses. New homes seem sadly void of both sasanquas and Camellia japonicas.

We are right in the middle of the best time for planting woody shrubs and trees. By planting woody ornamentals as soon as possible, root growth will increase dramatically before next spring. In fact, I have been to several garden centers in the last few days, and they are loaded with all sorts of camellias, ready for planting. Even though top growth may have ceased, roots continue to develop in the cooler 40 to 50 degree days. When new leaf growth begins in the spring, the root system already will be established and able to supply the plant's requirements. Research indicates that planting now will give plants almost a full growing season's advantage over those planted next spring.

Camellias, just like all shrubs, need to be put in a rich, fertile, well-drained bed, separate from the lawn area.

Check out the Yuletide camellia and you may find that this camellia will be your favorite, too!

Coastal Georgia
Master Naturalist

We just completed the Fall session of the Coastal Georgia Master Naturalist program. We are taking applications for the Spring 2007 course. This is an environmental educational program for people who wish to know, change and preserve the relationships between habitats and our ecosystems. There are ten days of study, one day a week. Classes are conducted on pertinent sites in coastal Georgia.

Areas of Study:

Geology

Plant Succession

Birding

Endangered Species

Forestry Management

Wildlife Habitats

Water Management

Agriculture-IPM

Aquatic & Wetlands

Marshes

Tree Identification



Just enjoy....

This is what you have worked for all year!

January - February

When it's wet, cold and dark for 14 hours a day, gardening is not generally a high priority, BUT plants still need some attention. Leaves must be removed (mulch mowed or raked up) from the grass. Deciduous trees (oak, maple, cypress) and summer blooming shrubs (roses, crepe myrtles, hydrangea) should be pruned. Bare-rooted or container grown fruit and nut trees can be planted. The weather is perfect for moving plants that need to be relocated in your landscape. And finally, seeds for summer flowers or vegetable gardens can be ordered.

Annual Flowers

An annual plant completes its life cycle in one growing season. It germinates, grows to maturity, blooms, sets seed and dies. The seed formation is what triggers the plants decline. Removing faded flowers, "deadheading", prevents seed formation, promotes heavy flowering and prolongs the plant's life. Cool weather does not seem to bother the germination of some seeds. You can still sow seeds of sweet pea, California poppy, nasturtium, larkspur and stock in well-prepared flowerbeds. These winter annuals grow best during mild winters and tender new growth may need some protection during freezing temperatures. Fertile, well-drained soil (but with ample moisture) and full sun are key ingredients for success.

If you're not much on pampering plants, then California poppy, *Eschscholzia californica*, or nasturtium, *Tropaeolum majus*, may be the cool- season annuals for you. There are a few stipulations. They both prefer sandy, poorer soil (rich soil inhibits bloom), and ample moisture ONLY during seedling stage. After that, they both prefer drought conditions. This is probably the reason that poppies do well as wildflower plantings on roadway medians. The orange colored poppy is the original wild version. Cultivated varieties with pink, cream, violet and crimson blossoms are also available. Nasturtiums tend to create a rather untidy mound but add a conspicuous prize to any garden. Edible, spurred orange, yellow, gold or scarlet blossoms are nestled among round leaves.

If your flowerbed needs a tall border, then try planting rocket larkspur, *Consolida ambigua*, or stock, *Matthiola incana*. They both have upright, column type stems of fragrant flowers that are great for cutting. Both have antique colored blossoms of pink, blue, peach and lavender. The larkspur foliage is lacy and dark green, while the stock has larger, strap like, gray-green leaves.

Most garden centers will have annual flowers still available in pint-sized containers during January and February. These are perfect for filling in the empty gaps in your flowerbed or adding a fresh look to patio and porch containers. Many of the annuals listed above will be available. Plus, look for calendula, sweet alyssum and hollyhocks. Remember to feed established pansies, snapdragons, ornamental cabbage and kale plants with an immediate release complete fertilizer (no 0's in the three numbers).

Bulbs

Bulbs are basically storage tanks for plants that go dormant during cold or hot weather in order to survive. Bulbs are sold during the dormant state. The spring blooming bulbs are on SALE right now. While shopping for bargains, make sure that the bulbs are still viable. Select ones that are firm, large and free of blemishes. Bulbs such as Iris, crocus, snowdrop, grape hyacinth, daffodils and jonquils can still be planted to create drifts of color. Remember: Bulbs produce the best show when planted in large numbers.

Fruit Trees

Most fruit trees/shrubs/vines will grow in Georgia. Some are very labor intensive due to our large insect populations and the plant's susceptibility to disease. The easiest fruits to grow are blueberry, fig, Oriental persimmon and blackberry. Muscadine, pecan, strawberry and pear are considered moderately hard to grow. Peach, apple and plum are the most difficult. When I say 'hard to grow', I am referring to a plentiful yield of edible fruit with minimum human activity (spraying, watering, pruning, etc.).

Winter is the best time to prune fruiting plants. Before pruning Muscadine vines, you should understand that fruit clusters are formed on new growth, which only arises from last year's wood. You cannot strip the entire trunk and get fruit this year. The vines lateral arms (cordons) are normally trained on a trellis. Cut back all previous summer shoot growth off of the cordons, BUT leave a 4-inch long vertical branching fruiting arm (spur) every 6-inches on the cordon. The spurs will have 2-3 vegetative buds on each. These buds are where new growth and berry clusters will occur this spring. Pruning Muscadine vines for the first time is very intimidating, but you must be aggressive.

Pear and apple trees are pruned to a modified central leader. This means that you tier or stair step the branches, but keep the overall height shortened. If the fruit is out of ladder range, then the tree is too tall.

Peach and plum trees are pruned to an open center. The branches that are growing straight upward should be removed. Once again a tier or scaffolding effect is what you're looking for. After pruning, the overall tree shape should look like an opened, upside down umbrella.

Lawns

Fall leaves must be removed either by raking or mulching with your mower. If you planted winter ryegrass, mow it regularly. Now is an excellent time to fill in those low areas that are holding water. Try to level out areas that always get scraped bare by the lawn mower. Put out a pre-emergence herbicide to control early germinating weeds such as crabgrass, goose grass, clover, henbit and chickweed.

If you were going to start a new lawn this year, then begin preparing in late February. Get yards of organic matter or soil conditioner delivered. Generally, you want at least 5 inches of organic matter spread over the entire surface. Then, till it in when the soil is relatively dry. Do not till when you can squeeze water out of a handful of soil. Tilling on wet ground is worst than doing nothing. It destroys and compacts the soils structure. The most important task is to get a soil analysis to determine lime and fertilizer recommendations.

Trees & Shrubs

Be on the lookout for hard and soft bodied scale insects on the back of evergreen leaves and on plant stems. Spray with a dormant oil to smother them. If you need added control then spray the next time with an insecticide.

Trim and shape up evergreens. Cut out the dead wood in your flowering shrubs. Prune shrubs that bloom during the summer (after May), such as Abelia, barberry, Buddleia, smokebush, Rose of Sharon, crape myrtle, oleander, tea roses, Clethra (summersweet), old fashion hydrangea (not oak leaf or big leaf variety) and summer-flowering varieties of Spirea.



Native Plant of the Month

Leucothoe axillaris

Coastal Leucothoe, doghobble, is outstanding in masses and is a good choice for enclosed city gardens. It is commonly used in the landscape as a specimen, ground cover, and border plant. This shrub is also impressive when naturalized along wooded stream banks. Coastal Leucothoe should be grown in a partially or densely shaded site; it grows best in areas that receive morning sunlight. The soil in its natural, Bald-cypress dome habitat has a high organic matter and silt content and is acidic. This makes

Doghobble a good choice for shaded, wet sites. This plant can be rejuvenated into vigorous growth in the center of the plant if the 2 and 3 year old canes are removed after bloom. I have some of these planted in my landscape.