



**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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## Winterize Your Trees

### Care and Protection for Dormant Trees



Trees in fall are in a state of serious change and reorganization. The tree is becoming dormant. A tree heading toward winter will sense the changing temperature and light and obey the dormancy controls built into the leaf. The mechanisms, called "senescence", tells a tree to close down for coming winter.

Trees may look inactive going into winter but the fact is they continue to regulate their metabolism and only slow down some physiological activities. This decrease in photosynthesis and transpiration begins a tree's dormant phase. Trees still continue to slowly grow roots, respire and take in

water and nutrients.

Winter is a difficult time for a tree. A dormant tree still needs to be protected (winterized) to remain healthy and free from diseases and insects. Bad news is, winter weather encourages destructive pests to snuggle in and wait for spring to revive their destructive lifecycles. Small investments in your time can pay off big come spring.

#### Pruning -

Prune dead, diseased and overlapping branches in late fall. This will form and strengthen the tree, encourages new, strong growth in the spring, minimizes future storm damage and protects against over wintering disease and insects. Remember that dormant pruning has another benefit - it is easier to do during winter dormancy than in spring. Correct structurally weak branches and limbs. Remove all deadwood that is clearly visible. Properly prune branches that can touch the ground when loaded with rain and snow. Foliage and branches that are in contact with soil invite undesirable pests and other problems. Remove damaged and declining twigs, branches, bark, and any new sprouts that have grown at the tree base, or along stems and branches.

## 2007 Master Gardener Program

Classes will start on Jan 11, '07 and conclude on Mar. 29th. Class hours are 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. every Thursday. Program will be held at the Bamboo Farm and Coastal Garden.

For more information on this program, visit our web site at: <http://www.caes.uga.edu/extension/bryan>

## 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

## Mulch and Aerate-

Young trees are especially vulnerable to fluctuations of temperature and moisture and need mulching protection. Mulch is good insurance that both conditions will be evenly managed during cold and drought. Mulching is a good practice for both dormant and full-growing, vegetative trees.

Spread a thin layer of composted organic mulch to cover the soil several inches deep. Cover an area at least as large as the branch spread. In addition to protecting feeder roots, mulch also recycles nutrients directly to these roots. Aerate soils and compacted mulch if they are water-logged or poorly drained. Saturated and dense soil can suffocate roots. It is critical not to damage tree roots in the soil as you do this so work only on those few inches at the surface crust.

## Fertilize and Water -

Fertilize, by top dressing, over the mulch with a balanced fertilizer **if the essential elements are in short supply within the soil. Be sure to use nitrogen lightly, especially under large, mature trees and around newly planted trees.**

You do not want a vegetative "flush" of growth during late fall periods of warming. Large applications of nitrogen cause this growth.

Dry spells in winter or hot daytime temperatures will desiccate a tree very quickly. Watering may be needed where soils are cool but not frozen, and there has been little precipitation. Winter droughts need treatment with water the same as summer droughts, except it is much easier to over-water in winter.

## Dormant Spray -

A dormant spray may be a good idea for deciduous trees, ornamentals, fruit trees and shrubs. But remember not to spray until after you prune. Obviously, you will lose much of your effort and expense if you cut off treated limbs. Choice of chemicals is important. Dormant sprays include lime, copper and sulfur combinations to kill overwintering microorganisms. Dormant oil controls insects and their eggs. You may just need several types of sprays and oils to be effective.

Avoid spraying any of this material in the hot sun as it can damage dormant buds. Call me or your local county Extension Agent and we will be able to give you specific chemical recommendations.



## November - December

### Mulch Flower Beds Before You Plant

Before adding plants to any flower or shrub bed, make sure you rework the soil. Add 2-3 inches of organic matter by scattering it over the bed and working it into the existing soil. For the past eight months microorganisms, fungi, mold and earthworms have been feasting on the existing organic matter and breaking it down. This is the reason that the beds seem to shrink. Adding organic matter annually keeps the beds fluffy and workable. It is also a great source of slow release fertilizer. Pull off the existing mulch ONLY if you plan to use it again after the bed is worked up, otherwise till it in. This will help enrich the soil even more. Once all of this is accomplished then re-mulch the bed and stick in the plants. Always mulch and then plant. Doing it the other way only creates a lot more work.

### Annuals

Finish planting annual flowers by the end of November. Your selection starts to decline or look really picked over by mid-December. Pansy is the most popular cool season flower. Snails, slugs and pill bugs (rolley-polley) are always a problem this time of year. These critters feed at night. It is so frustrating to spend all weekend beautifying your yard and then find half your plants clipped off at the soil line on Monday. An organic way to discourage snails and slugs is to encircle the flowerbed with diatomaceous earth. They do not like crawling over the tiny, razor sharp particles. Another method is to bury, only to the rim, small cups of beer. They are attracted to the yeast smell and crawl right in. Pelletized poisonous baits applied every couple of days will also help save your plants.

### Bulbs

Tulip and hyacinth bulbs that have been in the refrigerator should be planted by late December. They will not bloom fully, if they have not received the required chilling. Dormant amaryllis bulbs should be plentiful at stores and make great Christmas gifts. When planting, make sure not to bury the neck. The tall bloom makes the bulb top heavy, so plant it in a clay or heavy decorative pot. Place the pot in a sunny location and keep it moist. When the flower stalk appears, start turning the pot to keep it growing straight upward.

### House Plants

It is not unusual for us to want to cheer up our homes with blooming plants during the early winter. Seasonal favorites include poinsettia, Thanksgiving or Christmas cactus, cyclamens, gloxinia, African violet, kalanchoe and crown-of-thorns. None of these will tolerate deep shade for long periods of time. In order to keep the plants alive, you must rotate them in and out of dark rooms every other week. Water only when the soil two inches down feels dry. This means sticking your finger into the soil, not just looking at it. Never leave water sitting in the plant saucer for longer than 6 hours. The plant has soaked up all it can and the roots will start to suffer.

### Lawns

Warm season grasses are going dormant. By December the Zoysia, Bermuda and Centipede should be mostly a tan color. St. Augustine will be the last to harden off during the winter. This is the reason that it is so susceptible to freeze damage. Sow ryegrass seed if you want a green lawn during the winter or have just finished building a new home. You will have to mow on a regular basis to keep it

looking good. Continue to mulch or rake up leaves/needles as they fall. If you are raking up piles of leaf blades and dead stolons/runners, then there's a good chance you have a turf disease (brown patch, take-all, dollar spot, etc.) Take a small sample of the grass blades and stolons/runners to your local Extension office for analysis, free of charge.

## **Perennial Flowers**

Tidy up perennial plants by cutting back faded foliage and spent flower heads. Save only the largest, most filled out seed. Mark the location of existing plants before removing all of the foliage if you plan to add new selections. This will keep you from damaging or digging up established dormant plants. Plant debris (flower stalks, dried foliage, fallen leaves and pine straw) can be added to the compost pile. Any diseased (daylily rust) or insect (scale) infested plant material should be raked up and bagged or destroyed.

Prune the chrysanthemums after they have finished blooming. Basically, lower the plant by cutting it in half. This helps keep them from getting too spindly and breaking apart. Chrysanthemum cuttings are extremely easy to root. Simply take the healthiest pieces, remove the spent flowers and cut into 6-inch sections. Remove the large leaves from the bottom 2 - 3 inches of the stem and then stick the cutting in potting soil. Some people will dip the cutting in rooting hormone, but with mums this is not necessary. You're guaranteed success, if you stick three cuttings in a shallow, 6-inch plastic pot. The only way to kill them is if you forget to water or if you keep the soil too moist. The correct amount of moisture is the key. Transplanting rooted cuttings is a great way to fill in bare spots between the mum plants and expand the evergreen planting. The most productive flowerbeds are located in well-drained soil that is exposed to full sun or light shade.

## **Trees and Shrubs**

Camellia is the South's most prized winter flowering shrub and tree. Camellia sasanqua and japonica are the most common varieties grown in the south. The sasanqua types have a better cold hardiness track record and mainly bloom in the fall and early winter. Japonica blooms are generally larger and start in the winter and early spring. If you mix these two types then you are guaranteed to have something flowering all winter long. Camellias have a smorgasbord of flower types and colors. The flowers are classified as single, semi-double, anemone, peony, rose form double and formal double. The colors are just as varied but basically grouped into white, pink, red or variegated. I will list a few varieties that are considered perfect for beginner camellia growers, such as: 'Sparkling Burgundy,' 'Donation', 'Debutante', 'Royal Velvet', 'Pink Perfection', 'Professor Charles S. Sargent' and 'Grand Slam'. Camellias grow best in partial shade. In sunny locations, the plants may not go dormant and suffer damage during severely cold winter. Too much sun may also cause scald or yellowing of the leaves. Camellias like well-drained, slightly acid soil with a good dose of organic matter (3-4 inches tilled deep). Removing all but one bud per branch gives bigger and better quality flowers. Blooms that are open during freezing weather will be destroyed, so pick and float them in a bowl inside. The tight unopened buds will not be affected and will bloom later. As far as insect and disease problems, the Camellia is susceptible to scale and flower blight. For scale problems, spray the entire plant with a summer weight or dormant oil and insecticide mixture, when the temperature is between 40F and 85F. For flower blight, pick off and destroy infected flowers then spray with a fungicide to break the fungus' spore release cycle.

## **Vegetables**

Transplants of broccoli, cauliflower, onion and cabbage are still available and can be planted without fear of freezing weather damaging the heads. Vegetables such as red leaf mustard, curly leaf mustard and curly parsley are grown more for ornamental flowerbeds rather than food for the table.



***Muhlenbergia: capillaris***

**SIZE:** Up to 3 feet tall with plumage, up to 2 feet when plumes are absent.

**GROWTH RATE:** Moderate.

**HABIT OF GROWTH:** A clumping (bunch) grass.

**FOLIAGE:** Grass leaves are shaped like thin tubes.

**FLOWERS:** Masses of thin plumes in colors ranging from whites to pinks to reds and purples in the late summer to early fall.

**LANDSCAPE USES:** As a groundcover for borders, mass plantings and natural areas.

**NATIVE HABITAT:** Various natural varieties found in pine flatwoods, sandhills, moist hammocks, and beach dunes.

**LIGHT REQUIREMENT:** Full sun to part shade.

**SOIL REQUIREMENT:** Wide pH range and soil type.

**WATER REQUIREMENT:** Highly drought tolerant.

**SALT TOLERANCE:** Highly salt tolerant.

**CULTURE:** Easy to grow, but as a clumping grass it should be planted a minimum of two feet apart. Requires periodic watering to establish, but no additional water after establishment.

**PESTS:** None.

**PROBLEMS:** None.

**REMARKS:** Not very attractive as a specimen plant, but perfect for borders, mass plantings, natural areas, and areas where maintenance is not desired. Excellent for areas with salt problems and higher pH. Plumage in fall is outstanding and causes heads to turn when seen along highways.