December Gardening Calendar

November 16, 2015

For your holiday tree this Christmas consider a live tree that you can plant in the landscape after you remove the decorations. The recommended varieties to consider include Aleppo Pine, Italian stone pine, deodar cedar, Arizona cypress, and upright juniper. The Aleppo pine and Italian stone pine are available at some nurseries as sheared trees. They look exactly like cut trees except the root system is intact in an attached container.

Before you purchase a live tree determine where it is going to be planted in the landscape. All of the plants listed require full sun, and the pines and cedars will grow to 30 to 40 feet tall so they are not suitable for every landscape. Visit plantanswers.com for information on the final sizes and growth habits of the trees listed. For a small option look for the sheared rosemary. They make an excellent table- top plant to decorate and won’t grow to more than 3 feet tall when placed in the landscape as a garden or container plant. Onion transplants are available at area nurseries. Most are the short-day mild varieties such as 1015-Y, Legend, Granax, and Bermuda but for gardeners looking for a little more pungency, try red creole. They also store longer; 5 months vs 3-4 months.

Plant onions 2-4 inches apart in the row after preparing the soil with 4cups (2 lbs.) of lawn fertilizer per 100 sq. ft. of bed. Thin the onions to 6-8 inches between plants by the end of March so the remaining onions can produce full-size bulbs by the end of May.

It is also time to plant English Peas. My favorites are the sugar peas that you can harvest to use the pod and all. One option is to plant the peas to use tomato cages as the trellises. By the time the peas begin serious growth, the tomatoes are finished for the season.

A limited number of Coho spinach transplants will be available in December. Watch for them at your favorite nursery.

Broccoli in some early plantings are producing heads now. After the main head is harvested you can expect a second crop of small heads as side-shoots. Some gardeners like the secondary heads the best because of their more manageable size and because they were produced in cooler weather they may have a milder flavor.

Fertilize the cole crops and other vegetables every 3 weeks with winterizer or slow-release lawn fertilizer to maintain the maximum growth rate. Side dress with 1 cup of fertilizer for every four large broccoli and related plants.

 There is still time to plant cool weather annuals. Cyclamen and primula are spectacular (they are also expensive) in deep shade. Use pansies, snapdragons, stocks, calendula, dianthus, alyssum, violas and ornamental kale in full sun.

The rain has perked up the lawn. If your grass is green it is not too late to make an application of winterizer lawn fertilizer. The winterizer fertilizer releases its nitrogen quickly and it and the other nutrients are taken up and organized within the plant for winter hardiness and a fast spring green-up.

For more enjoyment from your landscape this winter consider offering seed and suet to the birds so you can observe them as they feed. Provide sunflower seed in a steel feeder with weight sensitive perches that allows cardinals, chickadees, titmice and other small birds to feed but limits access to the seed for squirrels and white-winged doves. Hang suet blocks to observe woodpeckers, kinglets wrens, warblers and other insect eaters.