

December Gardening Calendar

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It is still prime time to plant adapted shade trees and shrubs in Central Texas. Consider Texas red oak, live oak, cedar elm, Mexican white oak, bur oak, chinkapin oak, or Mexican sycamore for shade trees. With our mild temperatures the plants spend the rest of the winter developing a root system so they can better face the challenges of summer heat and drought. If you want to consider smaller or more unusual trees look at anaqua, loquat, lacey oak, Chinese pistache, or Mexican plum. Anaqua, and Mexican plum provide both food and cover for birds in addition to being attractive. Loquat grows to 30 feet in the sun or shade and produces the Japanese plum.

Another option is to purchase a live Christmas tree and plant it in the landscape after the Holidays. Arizona cypress, Deodora cedar, Italian stone pine, Aleppo pine and Japanese pine all work well. Visit plantanswers.com for more information on how to successfully use a living tree to meet your Holiday and landscape needs.

Add spinach to your winter vegetable garden early in the month and onions later in the month. Allow 18 inches between the spinach plants in the row. Plant onions initially 2 inches apart so you can use up the extra plants as green onions through the winter. By mid- February there should be 6 inches between the onion plants so they can produce a full-size bulb for harvest in late May. Harvest kale, chard, broccoli, cabbage, collards, and cauliflower from the garden as you can use them. A key to successful vegetable production is providing plenty of fertilizer. "Winterizer" or slow-release lawn fertilizer work well.

If you have garden beds in the shade, consider cyclamen and/or primula for spectacular color. The foliage is hardy but protect the blooms by applying a fabric (Insulate) cover if temperatures are forecast to be 30 degrees or less. In the sun pansies usually make it through the worse that our winter offers and keep blooming all winter. Snapdragons, stocks, dianthus, calendulas, and petunias will quit blooming late in the month if we get the usual cold spell. They will resume blooming in late February.

November 1 is the target date for the fall lawn fertilization, but it will work in early December if your grass is still green and you use a "winterizer" fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio such as 18-6-12. "Winterizer" fertilizer has a fast release nitrogen source so the grass can take it up quickly and organize it in the plant to provide cold resistance over the winter and a fast green-up in the spring. It does not work if your lawn is dormant from the cold or went brown with the summer drought.

There is still time to get your wildflower seeds spread. The mixes designed for Texas work well. Soil preparation is not necessary, but the seed must reach the soil and not be shaded. There is a worthy exception to the required sun situation. If you are interested in providing an early nectar source to butterflies and bees obtain and plant some blue curl seed. It will grow in the shade. Wild Seed Farms offers the seed over the internet if you can't find a source from a fellow gardener. It is a wonderful source of nectar to fill the gap in early spring before milkweed, mistflower, and zinnias are available.