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Winter Gardening Tips

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This has been a wetter than normal year and the predictions are for a wetter and colder than normal winter. This usually means more cold weather damage to St. Augustine lawns and possible some plants and tender trees (particularly palms).

Continuing to apply irrigation to the landscape during periods of heavy rain only makes the matter worse and wastes water. Plants, like humans, must have oxygen in the soil to function. Heavy rainfall or over irrigation fills the soil with water and can damage plants by reducing oxygen available to the roots. The only answer is to wait for the rain to stop or cut back on irrigation to allow more oxygen into the soil. Too much water can actually kill plants, so watch it closely and don't over irrigate.

Here are some gardening suggestions for winter:

1. The St. Johns River Water Management District irrigation rules state that you can only water once a week this time of year. Be sure your timer is set properly and turn the irrigation system off during periods of wet weather.
2. Watch for brown patch fungus disease in your lawn. This disease attacks lawns when the weather is cool and wet. It is most commonly found in St. Augustine, centipede and bermuda lawns. The grass dies in roughly circular areas that may be 5 to 6 feet across. In St. Augustine grass the leaf blades rot where they attach to the runners.
3. Late December is the ideal time to begin transplanting plants if the weather has turned cool. If we have not had much cold weather, do not begin transplanting until the plants are dormant. Be sure to keep the plant out of the ground as short a period of time as is possible. Water is the magic solution that makes the difference between success and failure. Keep the plant moist, but not soaking wet. Do not fertilize plants when you transplant them, wait 4 to 6 weeks and then fertilize them. Finish your transplanting by mid February. Warm spring weather may make it difficult for late transplanting to be successful because of the water demanded by the top of the plant.
4. Begin pruning roses in late December for early spring blooms. If you prune plants heavily, you will get fewer blooms, but they will be larger on longer stems.
5. Prune your dormant shade and fruit trees (not citrus). Recent research shows pruning paint has no effect on insect or disease attack. You do not have to use it unless you think your trees look better with the cut surfaces painted.
6. Dormant pruning of grapes should be done in February. The way pruning is done depends on whether the grape is a bunch type or muscadine type vine.
7. Flowers you can plant this month:
December: Carnation, digitalis, pansy, petunia, shasta daisy, and snapdragon.
January: Carnation, delphinium, dianthus, foxglove, flowering cabbage, flowering kale, larkspur, pansy, petunia, and snapdragon
February: Baby's breath, calendula, carnation, dianthus, dusty miller, Marguerite daisy, pansy, petunia, snapdragon, and statice.

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