Gardening Calendar for January

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If your landscape needs one or more shade trees, now is the time to plant them. Planting trees and shrubs in the winter gives them time to develop a root system before they must cope with the summer temperatures and drought.

The recommended varieties include live oak, Texas red oak, cedar elm, Mexican white oak, chinkapin oak, bur oak and Mexican sycamore. For information on growth rate, drought tolerance, pest resistance and other characteristics of the recommended shade tree varieties visit plantanswers.com.

For best results plant your new tree at least 30 ft. away from the house and from other trees. If it is planted to the south or west of the house the tree will contribute significantly to a reduced electric bill for air conditioning.

The planting hole should be 2 or 3 times as wide as the tree’s root ball and the same depth as the container. Back fill with the native soil taken out of the hole rather than with potting soil or compost. Using the native soil reduces the chance that water will enter the hole easily, but not drain out as easily. The newly planted tree cannot tolerate a soggy root area that does not drain.

Place 4 inches of mulch (leaves, shredded brush, or bark chips) over the root system. Wait to fertilize until the second growing season.

Water the new trees generously at planting and then every time the soil under the mulch is dry to the touch, which may be every 2 weeks during the first year.

In the vegetable garden there is still time to plant onion, spinach and cole crop transplants. Keep up the schedule of fertilizing every 3 weeks with lawn fertilizer. One cup of fertilizer for every 8 feet of row applied beside the row works well. .

Paperwhites should bloom early in the month followed by the cemetery iris. Both are deer-proof.

In the flower garden the snapdragons and petunias may stop blooming for the month if the usual cold weather occurs. Keep them watered and weeded. They will have a second bloom period in February through April. With the exception of cyclamen the other cool weather annuals should bloom through the month. Protect cyclamen with a light agricultural fabric for temperatures below 30F. The foliage is tolerant of freezing temps but the blooms will sometimes be knocked off in cold weather. If the freeze also injures the emerging flower buds, it can be a long wait before new flowers emerge.

Stay alert for forecasts of freezing temperatures that may damage your citrus. You must be prepared to cover them with fabric or blankets when freezes are forecast. The degree of need depends on the temperature and the length of time when temperatures will be below freezing.

One recommendation is to cover Mexican limes, lemons, and avocados when temperatures of 29 degrees F or less are forecast. Other less-sensitive citrus can be covered at 27 degrees. Calamundin, kumquats, Changsha tangerines and the “Frost” series of satsumas are the most cold tolerant citrus varieties. Provide a heat source to protect plants at temperatures under 24 degrees. Mechanics’ lights and poultry heat lamps work well as heat sources.