

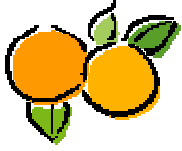
Let's Talk Gardening

December 2, 2005

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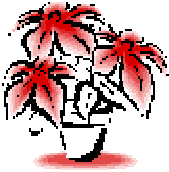
The Country Gardener

December Can be a Fun-month for Gardeners



Remember last week we talked about picking Satsuma tangerines? Just after writing that, Dr. Jerry Parsons sent out word that his group would be picking them on Tuesday, November 29th. A dozen or so people turned up at the Agriculture Experiment Station in Uvalde and harvested TONS of tangerines. Of course we ate all we could before putting any in the boxes and we'll probably all pay the price tomorrow, but, it was worth it. If you'd like to buy some, they're gonna be on sale this weekend at a couple of nurseries; Milberger's on 1604 and Fannick's on Holmgren Road off W.W. White. I don't know how much they'll be selling for, but whatever it is, as I said, they're worth it. Tree-ripened Satsuma tangerines are kinda like home-grown tomatoes; hard to beat.

Poinsettias



If you have your Christmas poinsettias already, you need to be sure that you keep the soil moist. You should check it daily because the humidity in the house is pretty low when the heater is on and will dry out the soil pretty quickly. As Dr. Parsons pointed out in a recent article, the easiest way and probably the safest way is to add 3-4 ice cubes to each pot. It's easy to do, won't drown the roots, and you won't have a mess on your hands. Like most other things in gardening, more is not better. 3-4 in a one-gallon pot is plenty if you do it every day.

Christmas Tree

If you have or will be getting a cut tree for your holiday celebration, you need to be sure that it gets plenty of water, too. In the same article, Dr. Parsons pointed out that store-bought, cut trees were harvested on a mountain someplace far away, hauled down the mountain, shipped in refrigerated train cars to their destination and placed in the retail outlets--all this time without any water. The very first thing you need to do is cut off about an inch of the base to open up the tree's drinking mechanism and stick the tree in a bucket of water. Check the water daily for several days before you bring it into the house as it will "drink" up to a gallon per day. When you bring it in, cut off the bottom inch or so of the bottom again and put the tree in its stand where you again add water and check it daily. Even inside, the tree will take up 1-3 pints of water per day during the season. The warmer your house is, the more water it takes. Check it daily when you check the poinsettias. Don't allow the container to dry out or you'll have a tree dropping its needles (and possibly a fire hazard) all over the place.

Other Trees

As we've been saying for a while now, it's time to plant the trees you want to have in place by spring. Planting them now allows the root system to start developing before hot weather sets in next summer. Remember that it takes about 2 years for a tree's root system to develop to the point that the tree can sustain itself on just ground water and rain.

There are lots of trees that do very well in our cruddy soil. We call most of them "native trees" because they flourish in this part of the country. As you probably already know, most of the trees that do well here are in the oak family. We have white oaks and red oaks. White oaks typically don't drop their leaves until the spring (live oaks and Monterrey oaks). Red oaks are the ones that turn color and drop their leaves in the fall (Texas red oak is the most popular one). The chinquapin (pronounced "chink-a-pin") oak has leaves which look almost exactly like live-oak leaves, but they're about twice as big. It grows to about 60 feet x 35-40 feet. The Shumard red oak gets about the same size and changes colors in the fall.





Other trees which are spectacular in the fall are the maples. The shantung maple is a small tree which only gets about 25 feet tall and about 20 feet wide. The Uvalde Big-tooth Maple will get to about 60 feet in our soil. They both have leaves which change colors in the fall.

Be sure to dig a hole two-three times as wide as the container the tree came in but no deeper. Don't buy special soil to plant a tree. It's better for the tree if you plant it in the soil in which it's gonna be growing for the rest of its life.

If the tree came staked in the pot, remove the stakes and let the tree stand in the wind. That way, it can stiffen its trunk as it gets used to the wind. If you leave the stakes on the tree too long, it can never stiffen its base and when you take the stakes off, it'll just fall over. Been there, done that. Not fun.

Water newly planted trees weekly for the first couple of months. Let the hose trickle for about an hour or more until the hole you originally dug is full.

Send your ideas, questions, or comments to gardener@gvtc.com.