

March in the Tallahassee Garden



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: As warm weather arrives to stay in late March, it will be time to begin planting tropicals for the summer and fall, such as yellowbells (*Tecoma stans*).

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All it takes is a trip to a local nursery to awaken the gardener in you this month. The weather is perfect for getting outside and playing in the soil. Now that you've had a couple of "easy" gardening months, it's time to get to work.

Plant

Plant tropicals late this month for bold color through the fall. For sunny areas, try pentas, hibiscus, bush allamanda (*Allamanda nerifolia*), yellowbells (*Tecoma stans*), thyralis (*Galphimia glauca*), red powder puff (*Calliandra haematocephala*), false bird-of-paradise (*Heliconia psittacorum*), croton, crossandra, and magilla perilla.

Vines that may be planted this month include butterfly vine (*Mascagnia macroptera*), Carolina yellow jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), cross vine (*Bignonia capreolata*), trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*), and flowering trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*). Mandevilla and allamanda are annuals here, but will provide color until frost. For best results plant these vines in full sun.

Herbs to plant now are thyme, rosemary and oregano. Wait until all danger of frost has passed before planting dill, fennel or basil. Plant seeds of snap beans, pole beans, cantaloupes, squash, and watermelon in a sunny area now. Set out tomato plants.

Annuals to plant early this month include petunias, nasturtiums, lobelia, snapdragons, and dianthus. Wait until late March or early April to plant summer annuals like impatiens, torenias, narrow-leaf zinnia, and caladiums.

Fertilize

Wait until two to three weeks after your lawn has greened up to apply fertilizer. Be patient. This might be in late March but may not be until mid-April. Use a 15-0-15 product with 7.5% slow-release nitrogen. Fertilize roses now, and any other shrubs on which you wish to encourage growth. There's no need to fertilize large mature plants that have reached the desired size, though, unless they're showing signs of a deficiency. If you didn't fertilize fruit trees and pecans in February, do so this month with a product which contains zinc and other minor elements.

Water

March generally brings drier weather, so it's a good time to measure rainfall and calibrate your irrigation system or sprinklers. Aim for one-half to three-quarters of an inch per irrigation per week for lawns and established trees and plants. New plants, annuals and vegetables will need supplemental water more frequently. A simple drip or micro-irrigation system that can be attached to a spigot will make watering these new plants much easier and more efficient.

Mulch

Check mulch in beds and around trees to maintain it to a depth of two to four inches. Mulch keeps soil from drying out and enriches it over time as it decomposes. Avoid high "volcano mounds" of mulch around plants. Pull mulch away from the trunks of plants and trees, maintaining an inch or so of air space around the trunk.

Maintenance

Before planting, loosen soil in beds with a tiller or garden fork. Till in compost or other organic matter to improve drainage and soil quality. Make sure you set new plants at the same level, or ten percent higher than they were in their pots. Firm the soil around them, then mulch and water well until they are established.

If needed, cut back spring blooming shrubs, like azaleas, as soon as they finish blooming. Cutting them back after June will remove next year's flower buds.

Divide crowded perennials like daylilies, Shasta daisies, chrysanthemums, and black-eyed Susan. Replant in rich, well-drained soil in a sunny spot.

Wildlife

Water sources, brush piles, feeders and houses will encourage birds and other wildlife to visit your yard often.

This sounds like an exhausting list of garden chores, but no one is ever "finished" in his or her garden. Just choose the tasks that inspire you and get started.

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