

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
December Chores

Gardening in Central Texas does not follow the calendar. We can garden most of the year here and when we can't get outside, we can plan and study to make our landscape more beautiful. Even though it is December there is still much to do in the garden.

Now is the time to plant spring flowering bulbs such as daffodil, narcissus, jonquils, tulips, and hyacinth. If you are hosting deer and squirrels in your garden, you may not want to plant tulips or hyacinth. Daffodil, narcissus and jonquils will naturalize and repeat bloom and they are deer resistant. Plant them at a depth twice the height of the bulb.

Feed the microbes in your soil by blowing or raking your fallen leaves to the lawn area. Mulch the leaves several times with the lawnmower. These tired, brown leaves are full of nutrients and will benefit your soil health.

Snapdragons, pansies, petunias and dianthus can be planted now. They will not freeze and will bloom until the weather gets hot again. Add a slow release fertilizer to the soil to keep them happy and be sure to water all winter.

Refresh your mulch to bring it up to 2-3 inches around plantings. Keep the mulch away from the trunks and stems to prevent rotting. The mulch will keep in moisture and protect against temperature extremes.

Plants need 1 inch of water per week even in winter. Do water when necessary, especially before a freeze. Moisture will help the plant survive cold conditions. Because of the drought conditions this past summer, water will be crucial for the plants this winter.

Do plant trees and shrubs. Planting now will give them all winter to establish their root system and get stronger to survive the coming heat. Dig the hole no deeper than the pot and twice as wide. Water both the plant and the hole several times before planting. Tease the roots, plant with native soil, mulch and water regularly.

Feed and water the birds. We have many hungry winter visitors migrating through our area. (I had a rufous -sided towhee the other day.) While all birds need fresh water, some eat only seed, others have a diet of insects, and berries. Provide layers of trees and shrubs for protection and berry producing plants like possum haw holly and yaupon holly.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

In the photo: Common dianthus is a cool season plant that will bloom fall through spring. If it is given shade and water it will bloom most of the year. Other cool season plants are petunias, pansies, snapdragons, and ornamental cabbage.

