

Friday's Feature

By

Theresa Friday

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Fabulous fall

October marks the start of Florida's dry season. Autumn is on its way and cooler, dryer weather is just around the corner. Because of the nice weather, October is one of the busiest and best times to work in the garden or landscape.

October is a good time to prepare beds for the cool season flowers. As temperatures drop, plant calendulas, dianthus, flowering cabbage and kale, mums, pansies, petunias, Shasta daisies and snapdragons.

Planting pansies will ensure a colorful fall garden. However, avoid planting them while the weather is warm. Also, be careful when fertilizing flowering kale and cabbage. Excess nitrogen can make them more susceptible to cold damage.

Just about all of the cool season vegetables can be successfully started in the garden during October. Most grow and produce better when planted now, rather than planted in the spring. You can plant seeds of beets, carrots, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, parsley, radish, spinach and turnips. You can also obtain young plants and establish broccoli, cabbage, collards, onions and strawberries.



The recommended planting time for strawberries might seem odd to gardeners who are from other regions. In Florida, we must use day-neutral or short-day varieties and plant them from early October through the middle of November. They grow vegetatively during the winter and produce berries from early March until early June.

Varieties of strawberries that produce well under our conditions include Camarosa, Sweet Charlie, Oso Grande and Chandler. Set plants twelve inches apart in prepared beds or plant them in planters, barrels or in "strawberry jars."

Strawberry plants should be destroyed after harvest and replaced with new plants each fall. They are not

grown as perennials here in Northwest Florida because of disease issues. Anthracnose fungus builds up under our environmental conditions, and will eventually cause the plant to decline and fail.

Finally after months of rapid growth, lawn grasses are gradually slowing down and will eventually go dormant with the shorter days and cooler temperatures. Allow this natural process to occur by withholding high nitrogen fertilizers. Encouraging growth this late in the season will increase the risk of your grass being killed by harsh winter temperatures.

Overseeding of the permanent lawn with annual ryegrass can be done during late October and early November. Though a well kept cool season lawn can be attractive, it requires a commitment. Regular mowing, irrigation and a couple of light, supplemental applications of fertilizer will be required during the winter in order to keep the lawn looking its best.

Large patch, a fungal disease, can come and go all winter if the weather is mild. It is the disease most common as the weather cools, especially on St. Augustine. This fungus generally is most active in October and November, especially during rainy periods.

Areas of grass affected by large patch can have a yellowish or orange cast that then turns tan or brown. Spread can be rapid. Fortunately, the grass often recovers in the spring, but the disease also can kill the grass. If you decide to treat, fungicides labeled to control lawn diseases are available at your local garden supply store.

October is the month that most pine trees shed their needles. Pine needles make excellent mulch for flower, vegetable and shrub beds. Pine needles can be used alone or in combination with other organic materials. Pine needles are attractive, not easily removed from beds by wind or rain, and don't "mat down" excessively.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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