

The Dirt on Hill Country Gardening

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Seasonal Things

Cold, cold weather is upon us, and January just promises to bring more of the same. Be certain that your pipes are protected as the temperature plummets. The current cold weather is not bringing any moisture with it. For those plants that you care for all summer or plants that you've put in the ground this fall, it is advisable to water every 10 days or two weeks when there is no rain. Roots keep growing all winter long, even though plants appear to have stopped growing above ground. The moisture also helps plants through cold spells. If you haven't already mulched everything, get this chore behind you. This includes cutting your indigo spires, Mexican bush sage, and other plants back to the ground and mulching over them. Anything that freezes to the ground will benefit by having a heavy mulch over it through winter. This may be raked back when spring gets here.

The best thing about this cold weather that has finally come upon us is that trees have gone dormant, and it is perfect for planting new trees or transplanting trees or shrubs that have volunteered in a place that they don't belong. When planting and transplanting in cold weather, be careful that you don't leave the roots of trees exposed to the cold for more than a few minutes. The roots can freeze and cause damage. It is also imperative that you be sure during planting that you water well and eliminate all the air pockets into which the cold can filter down and cause root damage.

After planting during cold weather, it is okay to mulch with a loose mulch thickly around the base and trunks of trees. Usually it is best not to mulch up the trunk of a tree, but a newly planted tree is an exception. Roses will also appreciate a mulch covering the crown of their roots. This mulch should be pulled away from the roots in the spring and left to cover the root zone, but not cover the crown of the trunk during the warm months.

Personal Plant of the Week. Recommended plant of the week is the Wax Myrtle (*Myrica pennsylvanica*). This semi-evergreen to evergreen shrub is large, up to 15 feet tall with a spread of 12 feet. There are some beautiful specimens at the Bank of the Hills. These can be used as a hedge or pruned into a small tree. Indians used the berries for soap and candles, and birds find them delicious. Wax Myrtle tolerates all types of soil and is resistant to types of root fungus in the Hill Country.

Chores for this week.

- Prepare for more cold weather.
- Cover your pipes.
- Mulch, if you haven't already.
- Plant cold tolerant plants and trees.

We encourage your questions, comments, or your own "Personal Plant of the Week" by writing David at dsteiny@ktc.com.