



Getting into the *Spirit* of the *Holidays*

■ ■ By Jon George

With mild winter weather, North Central Florida has the perfect climate for spending time outdoors. The holidays bring plenty

of opportunities to gather family and hang last-minute lights on the shrubs out front, or to get out and create a new tradition like planting your own Christmas tree.

We are blessed to be able to garden here year-round, and New Year's gardening activities abound. Citrus trees, many recovering from previous years' freezes, are now ripe for the picking. Try cold-hardy Satsuma oranges, which have a sweet fruit with a loose skin that peels more like a tangerine. Roses and many dormant fruit trees can be planted in cooler temperatures, giving them a chance to root in before warm weather returns.

Light freezes can be expected at this time of the year. No worries about planting trees and shrubs, though, because the ground here never freezes. Save water and turn your irrigation systems down — or off — during freezing weather.

a

Plant your own Christmas Tree

Give your family the gift that keeps giving for years to come. Consider a container-grown living Christmas tree that can be planted outdoors after the holidays. Choose a 15- or 30-gallon container to make sure the height is adequate for decorating.

Deodar Cedar, Native Red Cedar, Leyland Cypress and the conical Red Robin Holly all make suitable specimens here in Gainesville. Try draping the nursery pot with holiday fabric, and make sure to include a plastic saucer underneath to protect your floor or table from moisture.



b

Create your own wreath

Invite family and friends with a fresh wreath gathered from the garden. For this fun project, a quick survey of the backyard yielded some late blooming Limelight hydrangeas (which look good even when dried), and the silvery foliage from a butterfly bush. Some other options could include holly or ligustrum foliage for evergreen effect.

Start with a base of hand-cut straw or eucalyptus. Tie ribbon in a loop for hanging on the door and then insert foliage and blooms into and through the straw base, securing with green florists' wire. A red ribbon tied into a bow completes the look.

Poinsettias offer another easy way to decorate for the holidays. Select from an array of reds, pinks and whites. Look for foliage that has not been crushed by shipping or wilting from lack of water and group in containers indoors and out.



California Holly Berries



Poinsettia

c

Plant a seasonal garden

Now is the perfect time for planting your personal garden oasis. Cooler weather means less transplant shock and a chance for plants to develop a larger root system for next spring. Try annuals for instant color. This tropical water garden in Northwest Gainesville received a winter makeover with white and red petunias fringed by silver Dusty Miller.



Jon George

is the owner of Cottage Gardens, Inc., a Gainesville-based landscape design and installation firm. Jon has been gardening in North Central Florida for more than 30 years. You may contact his staff at www.TheCottageGardener.com or at cottagegardensinc@yahoo.com.



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