OUR NORTHERN NEIGHBORS SPEND TIME IN THE WINTER PLANNING FOR SPRING THAW. THIS FREEZING WEATHER KEEPS A LOT OF USindoors trying to keep warm. IT IS A GREAT TIME TO OBSERVE WHAT SURVIVED, PLAN FOR SPRING FLOWER B ED S AND PLANT COLD HARDY VEGETABLES.

RED AND GREEN ARE HOLIDAY COLORS, BUT BROWN IS THE COLOR OF MANY LAWNS AND LANDSCAPES AFTER THE RECENT FREEZES. AS YOU DRIVE THROUGH THE NEIGHBORHOOD, NOTICE THE VARIETY OF WINTER FLOWERS THAT ARE THRIVING. CAMERLIA S ARE COLD HARDY SHRUBS THAT BLOOM DURING OUR COLD WEATHER. FLOWERS CONTRAST NICELY AGAINST DARK GREEN SHINY LEAVES. SOME SELECTIONS BEGIN BLOOMING IN NOVEMBER WHILE OTHERS ARE NOT IN THEIR PRIME UNTIL JANUARY. CAMERLIA COLORS VARY FROM RED, WHITE, PINK AND COMBINATIONS THAT LOOK LIKE PEPPERMINT STIPES OR SPATTERS. FLOWER FORMS VARY FROM SINGLE LAYERS OF PETALS TO FULL, RUFFLED PEONY TYPES.

’RED RUFFLES’ AZALEAS BEGAN BLOOMING IN THE FALL AND CONTINUE THROUGH THE COLD WEATHER. MANY OTHER TYPES WILL SOON BE BLOOMING, RANGING IN COLOR FROM PINK, LAVENDER, PURPLE, RED, CORAL AND ROSE. AZALEAS ARE THE RHODODENDRONS OF THE SOUTH. MANY GARDENERS HAVE TRIED, BUT NORTHERN RHODODENDRONS DO NOT GROW WELL HERE.

LEU GARDENS, AN ORLANDO CITY PARK IS A GREAT PLACE TO OBSERVE THE DIVERSITY OF CAMERLIA S AND AZALEAS FOR OUR AREA. IT IS LOCATED IN NORTH ORLANDO, EASILY ACCESSIBLE OFF I-4 FROM THE PRINCETON EXIT. FOR A SMALL DONATION AT THE GATE, YOU CAN WANDER THROUGH THIS PUBLIC BOTANICAL GARDEN AND SEE THEIR WONDERFUL COLLECTION OF CAMERLIA S AND AZALEAS AS WELL AS MANY OTHER COLD HARDY LANDSCAPE PLANTS. SUPPORT THE GARDENS THROUGH A MEMBERSHIP FOR RETURN VISITS AND SHOP AT THE GIFT STORE FOR FLORIDA GARDENING REFERENCE BOOKS AND GARDEN ART.

THERE ARE SEVERAL TYPES OF BEDDING PLANTS THAT ADD WINTER COLOR IN SPITE OF FREEZING WEATHER. PANSIES, PETUNIAS AND SNAPDRAGONS ARE POPULAR IN LOCAL LANDSCAPES. CALENDULA AND DIANTHUS, A TYPE OF CARNATION, ALSO ADD COLOR WHEN OTHER PLANTS HAVE BROWNED FROM WINTER FROST OR FREEZING TEMPERATURES. THESE COLD HARDY PLANTS GROW WELL IN COOL WEATHER BUT WILL NEED TO BE REMOVED AND REPLACED WITH WARM SEASON ANNUALS IN MAY OR JUNE WHEN PLANTS DECLINE FROM THE HEAT. ADD COLOR TO BRIGHTEN YOUR DAYS BY PLANTING A GROUP OF AT LEAST THREE PLANTS OF THE SAME TYPE IN THE GROUND. CONSIDER THAT WE ARE IN A DROUGHT AND NEW PLANTINGS WILL NEED WATER FREQUENTLY TO GET STARTED. RATHER THAN SPOTTING PLANTS HERE AND THERE THROUGHOUT YOUR LANDSCAPE, CONCENTRATE PLANTS IN HIGHLY VISIBLE BEDS FOR THE MOST EFFECT. IT IS ALSO EASIER TO WATER WHEN PLANTS ARE GROUPED TOGETHER.

YOU CAN ALSO PLANT COLD HARDY ANNUALS INTO CONTAINERS FOR PORTABLE POTS OF COLOR. PLANT INDOORS, WHERE IT IS WARM, AND THEN SET POTS OUTSIDE WHEN IT IS WARM ENOUGH TO MOVE AROUND. IT IS TOO COLD FOR SOME OF US NATIVE FLORIDIANS TO PLAY OUTSIDE BUT YOU CAN SPEND THE TIME INDOORS PLANNING FOR SPRING PLANTING IF, I MEAN WHEN, THE WEATHER WARMS.

COLD HARDY VEGETABLES THRIVE WITH A LITTLE FROST. PLANT THEM IN ROWS, IN FLOWER beds OR IN CONTAINERS. BEETS, CARROTS, CHINESE CABBAGE, LETTUCE, TURNIPS AND MUSTARD GREENS GROW EASILY FROM SEEDS AND ARE ATTRACTIVE ADDITIONS IN LANDSCAPE PLANTINGS.

MANY TYPES OF VEGETABLE TRANSPLANTS ARE AVAILABLE IN GARDEN CENTERS. LEARN WHICH ONES ARE COLD HARDY AND WHICH ONES ARE TENDER AND REQUIRE SPECIAL COLD PROTECTION IF SET OUT BEFORE POTENTIAL FREEZING WEATHER IS OVER. IF WE ARE LUCKY, OUR LAST THREAT OF FROST OR FREEZING TEMPERATURES WILL BE MID-FEBRUARY.

COLD HARDY VEGETABLES FOR TRANSPLANTING INTO THE GARDEN NOW INCLUDE BROCCOLI, CABBAGE, COLLARDS, CAULIFLOWER AND KALE. TOMATOES, PEPPERS AND EGGPLANTS ARE TOO SENSITIVE TO SET INTO THE GROUND NOW WITHOUT FREQUENT COLD PROTECTION.
Onion sets planted now will not produce enlarged bulbs but will grow into green onions in a few months. Even small green onion plants can be harvested. Special varieties must be planted in the fall to yield bulbs. Red skin and white potatoes can be planted now. Wait until after frost to plant sweet potatoes and yams. Potato "seeds" are whole potatoes that are cut into pieces and planted into the garden. Let them grow 3 to 4 months and then harvest a few potatoes at a time or cut the tops and then dig all of the potatoes.

Fresh strawberries are in the market now, but the best time for Florida planting is October or November. Plants will not have spectacular yields if planted now, but they make attractive plants and produce fresh berries even if you don't have enough to make jam.

Master Gardeners have planted demonstration vegetable gardens and a landscape area at the Osceola County Extension office on highway 192 next to the rodeo between Kissimmee and St. Cloud. Stop by to see how the gardens made it through the cold. Talk to the Master Gardeners, get hands-on experience and practical answers to common plant care questions. Volunteers are in the vegetable garden on Monday mornings and in the landscape on Wednesday mornings from 8 a.m. until 9 a.m. Call (321) 697-3000 for more information or to get fact sheets on a variety of topics. Log on to the internet and go to http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu and the consumer horticulture and Master Gardener link for answers to many plant questions.