

## *Horticultural Housecalls by Kato*



### **KATO'S DECEMBER GARDENING REMINDERS**

It is an excellent time to be a gardener in Texas! I'd rather plant in winter, because our ground doesn't freeze, rather than a brutal summer. Every time we get a cold snap I hope it is killing mosquitoes... Mother Nature is smart and the cold air tells our hardy plants to store up energy in their root systems. It's good for trees and shrubs to have a rest period and transplanting is best done when plants are dormant. A trick I use, when transplanting, is to dig and prepare the new hole first. This way the transplant is out of the ground and into its new home right away.

#### **HERBS**

You can plant perennial herbs any time you can find them. Rosemary, thyme, oregano, sage and bay laurel are some of my favorites because in an average winter they stay evergreen. Cool season herbs love this time of year and are great in salads and recipes. Parsley, dill, and cilantro are a few to plant color for texture (and eating).

#### **COLOR!**



Pansies, violas, cabbage and kale are staples for winter color. We have so many interesting colors and varieties to mix it up in containers and beds. Frilly Peacock kale comes in red and white. It reaches 12"-18" tall and grows upright in a vase shape. The new Glamour kale is lower and wider and bred to be super shiny; leave 18"-24" for final width when spacing. Pansies like a minimum of 6 hours of sun to bloom all winter, violas can be used anywhere including part-shade to shade. Annuals are heavy, heavy feeders so don't forget the fertilizer! Cyclamen and primrose also work in sun or shade but be aware they are only hardy to 28 degrees. If we are dropping below 30 degrees I cover with frost cloth and make sure my plants are watered.

#### **PRUNING AND GROOMING**

I only prune perennials back to the ground as they go dormant. I do remove dead material that could harbor insects or disease. Do not prune spring-flowering plants (dogwoods, hydrangeas, azaleas) until after their spring bloom as they are setting buds now.

#### **BULBS**

Continue planting perennial daffodils and leucojum even after they go on sale. As long as they are firm, like a potato, they are still good. Annual tulip and hyacinth bulbs should be planted by the end of the month. Plant tulip bulbs at least 6" inches deep so they don't flop over in spring.

#### **EXPERIMENT**

I also planted stock, snapdragons, poppies and cardoon; if they live, they get to stay.

