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November is half over already and Thanksgiving is nigh. Our thoughts will soon turn to jingle bells, Christmas lights, and a baby born in a manger. There are, however, some things we can be doing right now in the yard and garden.

November is an ideal time to begin planting woody ornamentals in most of the South. Actually, anytime during the plants' inactive or dormant season between November and March is good. Fall conditions are more conducive to active root growth and plant survival because of cooler temperatures and adequate rainfall.

Mulch your shrubs now for winter protection. Suitable mulch materials are hay, grass clippings, pine bark or hardwood material, pine straw, or leaves. Placing a generous amount around each plant will help protect roots against winter cold. But beware-too much mulch can encourage root rot. Two to four inches is all that is necessary.

Finally, be sure plants go into the winter season with adequate moisture. As always, water only when the soil feels dry to the touch a couple of inches down.

November is also a good time to complete a soil test in your garden and flower beds. For just a few dollars, you can know exactly what to do to your soil to give your plants the best opportunity to thrive. The pH of the soil determines the availability of essential nutrients. Most likely, your soil will need lime, since pHs are normally on the low side (acidic) here in middle Georgia. Lime takes months to break down and do its work in the soil, so applying it now is crucial.

Remember to plant cool season annuals such as pansies, violas, flowering cabbage and kale, snapdragons, dianthus, swiss chard, and mustard. Large container plantings of these can be especially nice and trouble free.

November is time to plant bulbs such as daffodils and tulips for early spring color. Be sure to purchase varieties that are suited for our middle Georgia climate. As you peruse the flower catalogs, be sure to look for varieties that are specifically described as "hardy in the South." Otherwise, you will certainly be disappointed.

Good luck with your November plantings!

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