



Indoor projects have kept me out of the garden lately and the recent cold snap took me by surprise. Oh, I'd heard of its impending arrival but had put the thought in the back of my mind until it was obvious something had to be done and done quickly. Tender plants were moved to sheltered spots and a few came indoors. The cold weather duration was short, we never had a hard freeze, and all was well in my garden.

Now that the temperature has moderated again, it is time to get outside and finish (and in my case, start) the fall clean-up. Last year I waited too long to cut back cannas, gingers and bananas, they were mushy and stringy by the time I got to them and the pruning shears did not want to go through the mess. This year I'll cut them back within the next week or so. Fall clean up always comes at the busiest time of year, but as I cut back and clean up outside I'll keep the season in mind; rather than discard stray branches they may well be used in my holiday decorations.

The dry weather had the Camellia sasanquas flowers looking a bit peaked, but the recent rains were just what they needed to perk up. My first flowering Camellia Japonica of the year is a new one. It is called 'Fran Homeyer' and the flower is a huge 6" pale pink double. Just stunning. Mine came from the Port Royal Farmer's Market; it was an anniversary gift earlier this fall and it's a show stopper. This is a good time of year to buy camellia plants while you can see them in flower. When it comes to holiday decorating, nothing is more elegant or more "Southern" than camellia flowers floating in a shallow crystal bowl.

There is still time to plant cool weather annuals. Nothing delights those visitors from the north more than seeing our pansies and snapdragons at holiday time. If you are planting cool weather containers there are advantages to crowding the plants. Plant growth slows this time of year so additional plants make for a fuller container. A simple pot of all white pansies is striking and can be dressed up with a few sprigs of red holly or blue cedar berries. Because our growing season will continue until late spring, some light fertilization will provide the necessary nutrients. The “release” in controlled release fertilizers is somewhat temperature dependent and they work best when it is warm. During the cooler months an occasional application of diluted water-soluble fertilizer is more effective. I use a lot of parsley in my containers and my kitchen; it seems to thrive in cool weather, so I prefer an organic food such as half strength fish or seaweed emulsion.

Since this is prime holiday decorating time; look around your garden this year and see what natural materials you might use. The offerings are limitless and include, among others, driftwood, Spanish Moss, Magnolia, Acuba, dried Hydrangea flowers, evergreens, the various berries, seeds, pods, cones and grape vines can all be used in wreaths, swags and arrangements. Don't forget our edibles; the home grown citrus, loquats, pomegranates and persimmons; delicious and beautiful. We have such abundance here in Beaufort; look around, be creative, thankful and joyous this glorious season.