GARDENS OF THE MONTH

January 2011	209 E. Amelia Street
December 2010	415 Cathcart Avenue
November 2010	612 E. Harwood Avenue
October 2010	701 Hillcrest Avenue

WINTER BLOOMERS (NO, NOT UNDERWEAR)

By Jeff Thompson, RLA, ASLA

This article is not about thermal underwear, regardless of how appealing that may seem. It's about how to get a little color in the winter landscape.

This winter makes the second in a row to have freezing temperatures in downtown Orlando, which is actually a fairly rare occurrence. The last freeze before these consecutively cold years was ten years ago, which is indicative how infrequent freezes usually are here.

So with everything so brown, it's time to appreciate what color can be found in the garden this time of year ... even if the color is green.

Camellias are blooming right now and they look fantastic.Some great performers for Orlando are 'Henry Huntington' with large pink flowers and 'Sweetie Pie,' which is mostly white with a few pink tears on a petal or two. One type that is somewhat uncommon is called 'Cinnamon Cindy.' She is one of the few camellias that has a fragrance, and in this case it's a hint of Cinnamon. These camellias are available from Erinon Nursery on Plymouth Road, just north of Apopka.

Leu Gardens just had its annual Camellia show in mid-January, but there will still be many varieties blooming in the garden through February. Leu has one of the largest Camellia collections in the country and the largest collection in the east. And as a note of interest camellias were introduced to America through Charelston, South Carolina and it is there at Middleton Place where the 'Mother Camellia' still resides.

As far as annuals go, Pansies and Snapdragons are good winter growers. A recent alyssum introduction is called 'Snow Princess.' She blooms well in winter, like all alyssum, but her claim to fame is that she thrives through the summer, too! And plants such as lavender and delphiniums that grow in warmer weather elsewhere actually thrive in our winters.

Green is a color, too. There are plenty of vegetable 'greens' that thrive in our winters. All kinds of lettuce will tolerate downtown winters. Consider planting arugula, romaine and bib lettuce. Kale, purple cabbage, red lettuce and Swiss chard are 'greens that give a garden a nice splash of color through the winter.

Cooler temperatures make it easier to garden as well. This is a great time of year to put down mulch or get caught up on weeding. Winter is also a good time to move or install plants that tolerate cold temperatures, like junipers, azaleas or any plants native to this region.

So the cooler winter temperatures don't have to be a bad thing, it just depends on what you do while it's cold.

Happy (and warmer) gardening!

WHAT'S COOKING IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD?

Looking for an easy dessert perfect for cool weather?

Easy Berry Cobbler
12oz bag frozen berries
(mixed berries add more flavor)
1 cup sugar
1 "tube" of hard chilled/frozen sugar cookie dough

Pre-heat oven to 350F

Stir frozen berries and sugar until well covered then pour into baking dish

Cut hard chilled / frozen dough into "coins" and place over berries, (jam-up but not over-lapped), until berries are fully covered

Sprinkle cookie coins lightly with sugar

Cook for approximately 30 minutes or until cookies are golden brown and berries are bubbling

Serve hot and topped with whipped or ice cream

Serves 6 to 8