



Garden Tips for December 2015

by Thea Fiskin, UC Master Gardener

December is a really busy month! If you don't get out into your garden, don't panic as it will wait for you. On the other hand, if you really need a break from all the stress of the festivities, maybe a walk outside pulling a weed or two is just what you need. Is there a gardener on your holiday gift-giving list? Gardeners love to receive garden books, gloves, plants, tools, seeds of unusual plants or unique garden art for their garden.

GARDEN CHORES

Watch for frost warnings and protect sensitive plants. Move potted plants under eaves. Plants will survive better if kept moist but not over-watered.

Rake fallen leaves and add to compost or mulch pile unless there was a problem with disease or pests on the plant or tree which might survive over winter. Throw away any fruit mummies left on fruit trees. I use my leaves to mulch around my herbaceous perennial and shrub beds.

Cole crops, such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower, grow well during the winter and can be harvested as long as they are producing. When harvesting broccoli, leave a portion of the stem because a smaller head will form just below the point where the first one was cut off.

Cool season annual bedding plants and vegetables are actively growing and need to be fertilized.

After frost, cut back asparagus to the ground, and also cut back any perennials with blackened leaves or stems. I usually leave an inch or two above ground so I remember where they are. Pull up any summer annuals that have died to neaten up the garden. I shred my perennial cuttings and use them as mulch.



Winter Vegetable Garden



Rotted Camellia Blossom

UC Statewide IPM Project
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If your camellia blossoms turn brown and rot, then you may have camellia petal blight. To control, pick infected flowers and throw away. Also throw away any fallen flowers or leaves on the ground to prevent water splashing on them which can spread fungal spores onto healthy leaves.

Remove any pesky winter weeds that are popping up while they are young--preventing them from developing seeds will save you time next year and many years to come.

Prune roses and deciduous shrubs and trees after they lose their leaves. Do not prune early spring flowering shrubs such as forsythia, which should be pruned after they bloom. Consult pruning books or Sunset Western Garden Book if you are uncertain how to proceed.

CRITTER CONTROL

After leaf fall spray fruit trees and roses with a dormant oil spray to kill any overwintering aphids, mites, scale etc.

Hand-pick slugs and snails or set out bait. Control by eliminating their hiding areas under debris such as wood or pots.



Browning of Camellia Blossom

See any little white butterflies around your winter veggies? That cute little butterfly is laying eggs on your veggies that will hatch into the cabbage looper and eat holes in leaves. Larger plants can sustain some damage, however seedlings could be devoured. Luckily they can be easily controlled with BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*). Be sure to spray plant leaves thoroughly.

WHAT TO PLANT

It's nearing the end of the bulb planting season, so nurseries may have them on sale. The selection may be limited but should be priced to sell. Choose healthy firm bulbs, nothing mushy or moldy. Tulips and hyacinth bulbs should be pre-cooled in the refrigerator (away from fruit) for six to eight weeks before planting; all other bulbs should be planted right away.

Finally, cut greens for holiday decorations. Holly, firs, junipers, redwoods, magnolia, pines and podocarpus foliage are all excellent choices. Add nuts, pomegranates, pinecones and seed pods. It's time to enjoy the holidays.

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