



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Helpful Garden Tips for November 2020 (October 31, 2020)

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November is one of my favorite months in the California garden. Fragrances are earthy and fresh, especially after a rain, with hints of spice and healthy soil. I watch leaves descend, winds sway even large tree branches, and sheets of rain (hopefully!) wash off a year's dust. Birds and even some late butterflies, moths and bees work feverishly to gather enough stored energy for hibernation or migration. The mornings are crisp and winter-cap weather, the afternoons can still hold a weak warm sun, or even a few days of bright above-normal temperatures. Since we all know our water supply depends on abundant mountain snow, we rejoice when we see snow-capped peaks after a good storm and there is still optimism that the upcoming winter, when our part of California receives the majority of the year's precipitation, will be cold and wet.

PLANTING: November is still a good month to plant trees, shrubs, perennials, ground covers, wildflower seeds, and cool-season annuals. Once the soil has been saturated by the first rains of the season and the air is cool and moist, the plants will experience little shock when being transplanted. This is especially true in the well-mulched garden. Frost sensitive plants including citrus, avocado, native plants from Baja California or the Channel Islands and many kinds of succulents from all over the world, should be protected through winter, or wait until spring to plant them. This is an especially good month to plant those California and Mediterranean woody shrubs that don't thrive with too much summer water. This includes manzanita, ceanothus, lavender, coffeeberry and buckthorn, bush lupin, flannel bush and rosemary.



Time to plan spring bulbs like daffodils and narcissus in a site where they will get a full day of sunshine at least through early summer. Purchase bulbs that are firm and without spots of mold. Plant the bulb three times deeper than its height. Usually the pointed end of the bulb is placed up when planting. Add a handful of high-phosphorus fertilizer mixed with soil to the base of the planting holes. Natural sources of phosphorus are animal manure, bones, and bat guano. All spring bulbs should be planted by Thanksgiving.

If you grow dahlias, November is the month to dig and divide overcrowded tubers. Store them in a cool dry place until re-planting in February.

You can still plant winter vegetables in November, including greens, broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage, especially early in the month when the soil is still warm. Close planting creates a mini climate that is more balanced and speeds up growth. Thin extra plants as they grow if needed. With greens, from beets to lettuce, thinning seedlings provides nutritious micro-green salad ingredients. Use mulch like straw or old hay to keep the soil temperature even.

MAINTAINING: After the leaves fall, begin pruning deciduous shrubs and trees, not only to shape them, but to prevent storm damage. A tree without gaps in the leaf canopy may have broken branches because of wind. Open space by removing a few branches all the way at the trunk with thinning cuts. You should never top landscape trees. Our Master Gardener website has more complete instructions and illustrations on pruning trees the right way.

Fall and winter blooming plants and vegetables can be fertilized. Do not fertilize California native plants. The exception is you can provide your manzanita with a very weak dose of fertilizer for acid-loving plants like azalea and camelia. Do not fertilize avocado, citrus, palms or other frost sensitive plants.

If your peach or nectarine tree had deformed leaves during the summer, it probably had "peach leaf curl". This is a fungal disease that affects fruiting, and if severe, it can cause the tree to die. To control peach leaf curl:

- Rake leaves when they fall. Remove any mummies and discard. Do not add these to your compost pile.
- Spray trunk, branches and the ground underneath the tree with a copper-based fungicide or a Bordeaux mixture (a slurry made of hydrated lime and copper sulfate). You can also use a synthetic fungicide. Products need to have 50 percent copper to be truly effective, so be sure to check the label.
- One application is usually enough, however, if we have a wet winter, then again before the flower buds swell in the spring.



Peach Leaf Curl

spray

If you can, grind up pruned branches and leaves to use as mulch. I grind up everything I can fit in my grinder and haven't had a problem with over-wintering pests. But if you know your plant clippings have a disease or major insect issue, send those to the green waste, and you will need to purchase mulch. If we live in the city, it is sometimes hard to convince ourselves and our neighbors to use ordinary ground up plant materials instead of uniform bark nuggets. Any kind of mulch is better than nothing, so just do what works for you.

If the month is on the dry side, remember to deep water your trees and large shrubs, even if they have lost their leaves. But your irrigation controller should be adjusted downward even if we don't get a lot of rain. Cooler nights and shorter days mean that most plants will not need as much water, and water-logged roots and drowned micro-organisms could be a problem you won't see until next year when the plants try to start growing again. If you have a water budget feature on your controller, November can mean fifty or forty percent of July. If you have a smart sensor controller, it may be doing this adjustment for you, but if you're not sure, find out so you aren't wasting water and harming the garden. Too much water also contributes to soil loss from erosion.

You may want to stop dead heading your roses to encourage them to stop blooming and settle into dormancy. All plants require a dormant period to thrive into old age. Some of our native plants go dormant in summer. We are more familiar with plants like deciduous trees and roses that go dormant in winter. Don't fertilize or try to keep them going too long. It is their season to wind down in preparation of a winter rest.

CONSERVING: If you have non-native milkweed, usually with orange or yellow flowers, make sure the flowers are pruned off by now to encourage Monarchs to migrate. The cold of winter will kill the butterflies if they stick around. You can check and refill bird feeders with fresh seed and check after rainstorms to make sure the seed isn't moldy. Consider leaving some seed stalks on some of your grasses and perennials for birds to forage this winter.

In the edible garden, add straw, old hay, alfalfa pellets and/or compost to fallow beds. If you take care of the soil, your plants will be stronger and better able to resist pest pressures next spring, making it possible to save time and money and reduce the need for synthetic chemicals. Keep after the weeds that use up nutrients. It's too late to solarize soil, but you can cover with weed cloth or other fabric that allows air and water exchange until spring.

Happy Thanksgiving! Happy Harvest!