



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Garden Tips for February 2021 (January 30, 2021))

by Peyton Ellas, UCCE Master Gardener



February is a busy gardening month in our area, even with fog, rain, snow, cold weather and general gloom. Can you tell it's not my favorite month? But some of you love cold and fog and even I recognize the important of the seasons. So, on we go with dreams of spring, cheerfully taking care of the following garden tasks:

PLANTING: When planting in winter, have mulch ready to tuck up around the plant wherever the soil has been disturbed. This helps to protect the roots from freezing temperatures. If you don't have wood mulch, use pest-free leaves or even straw as a mulch. Straw or old hay is good in the edible garden since it will decompose over time and become a useful soil conditioner and encourage earthworms. Edibles to plant directly into the ground include asparagus, chives, cilantro, leek, green onion, parsley, Irish potatoes, English peas, radish, cabbage plants, spinach, kale, strawberry, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussel sprouts and beet plants. Start from seed the following: onions (for setting out in April), tomato, peppers, basil, eggplant, tomatillo. In the flower garden, February is the month to plant canna, dahlia, gladiolus, Lilium, Zephyranthes (fairy lily), Heuchera, plumbago, campanula, poppies, Limonium (statice) and Lobularia (alyssum.) You can also sneak in a last sowing of California native wildflowers--but be prepared to hand water if rains don't keep the soil moist, and to keep the weeds from shading your flower seedlings. Annual weeds generally grow faster than desirable wildflowers!



As always, when planting trees, shrubs and perennials, plant in a wide hole that is only as deep as the container soil level, or even plant a little higher. The worst thing you can do with many of today's modern low-water-use plants is to plant them in what will become an inverted pyramid once the soil settles.

MAINTAINING: February is a good month to do your irrigation check and repair of both sprinkler and drip systems.

Opaque bottles placed sideways in the garden bed, small tins with oil or stale beer, or rolled newspapers or cardboard tubes can all be traps for earwigs, slugs and snails. The chemical control for slugs and snails is iron phosphate. Diatomaceous earth (DT) or traps can control earwigs before they become a huge problem.

Weeds give us an ever-ready garden therapy opportunity. It's already weed-eating time for many areas. Try to get to weeds before they set seeds and if you have a limited time, go for the worst invasives like non-native thistle and mallow.

Pruning can still be done on berries, grapes, deciduous fruit trees and roses if they are still looking dormant, which means no bud break and no sap flowing. Do not prune camellias, forsythia, Eastern lilac, California lilac, California native sage, coyote mint, penstemon, quince and other spring-flowering shrubs or trees until they finish blooming. Do not prune frost-damaged plants until new growth begins in the spring. I know the brown foliage is not attractive, but pruning the cover exposes new growth and the crown to late season frost damage. After pruning fruit trees, apply a dormant spray before the buds swell but when the air temperatures are at least 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Products containing copper are used to control some diseases, like peach leaf curl.

Products containing oil kill insects and their eggs that over-winter in the cracks and crevices of the tree. Choose a calm day with no imminent rain in the forecast and follow the directions on the container exactly.

Camellias are blooming now. Pick up fallen blossoms and discard to prevent flower bud infection, which leaves ugly brown blotches on the blossoms. If you still have cool season lawn such as fescue, late in the month is the time to fertilize. End of the month can also be the right time to fertilize deciduous fruit trees. Do not fertilize citrus or avocados yet.



CONSERVING: Smart gardening is practicing water conservation year-round, which includes growing healthy, climate-adapted plants that are resilient to drought and heat, especially in the ornamental garden. In the modern California garden, we use synthetic chemicals only as needed. The UC IPM website (ipm.ucanr.edu) has pest notes for just about everything and gives the latest expert recommendations on effective and safe practices following the mantra of "least toxic first." Gardening should be enjoyable and rewarding and not a constant battle. If your garden is not your happy place, consider modifying your maintenance practices or the plants you are trying to grow. Watch your native bee nesting box in action this month. Watch for bird nests before pruning. Enjoy the transition from winter to spring. I will try to enjoy the cold weather. Summer will be here soon enough.

In accordance to the Stay-at-Home guidelines, the Master Gardeners have cancelled all public events at this time, but if you send us an email or leave a message on our phone lines, someone will call you back!

Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325; Kings County at (559) 852-2736

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