



MG Confidential: Startling Revelations of Gardening Folly
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For Summer Around Here

Welcome to the most recent chapter of MG Confidential, where experienced Master Gardeners reveal their most humiliating blunders. Yes, under strict conditions of confidentiality (some of the worst offenders have undergone identity change and relocation), tales of plant abuse are exposed. These brave souls have stepped forward to try to prevent fellow gardeners from falling into their grievous ways.

Errors fall into certain repeating themes. A most “fertile” area of blundering I call “Deer, Oh Dear.” Here’s a sampling:

Gardener A: “Deer don’t read plant labels or gardening reference books.” Sure, go ahead and plant things that are labeled as “deer resistant” or “deer proof” at the local nursery, or recommended by the sturdy standby Sunset’s Western Gardening Book. But don’t be surprised if YOUR deer munch gaily on the small bay laurel tree, the scented geraniums, or the glorious oriental poppies. They will sample just about anything depending on the time of year or the state of growth. They often nibble at younger plants when first planted, yanking them up before discarding them half eaten. Pepper spray or panther urine or bags of hair or voodoo dolls -- all are pretty ineffective.

Another tragic tale was from Gardener B who planted bare root trees in late winter, neglecting to protect them with a fence or wire cage. Her flawed reasoning: that deer wouldn’t be interested in something that was just basically a stick with bark and no leaves. So wrong! The starving winter visitors gaily stripped the bark from the saplings -- killing all of them!

4-8-2020

Beyond the murderous remedies proposed by some vengeful gardeners (“Shoot them!”) there are a few proven strategies. Fencing, of course. Usually 6-8 feet is sufficient. Beyond the armed fortress approach, it’s wise to check what plants are surviving in your neighborhood. It’s not foolproof, but if multiple crape myrtles have survived into adulthood up and down your street, you can probably grow one too. Native plants might be a consideration, since they have co-evolved to live with (or in spite of) deer.

Another theme: Plants Grow! You might think this is so obvious as to be insulting, but so many of us forget this. That adorable little lemon cypress that you picked up in front of the grocery store in the 4-inch pot WILL grow into a 15-foot specimen with any encouragement. Yup, right up into the eaves of the house, or forming an awkward pillar, shading out your perennial bed of sun-loving plants.

Another common error is overcrowding. In an attempt to get the lush look of a mature yard, we plant the California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*) or Bee Sage (*Salvia apiana*) a foot apart. Then we spent our waning and weakening years digging them out and separating them, replanting where there is space. IF there is space. Resolve here and now to give those young plants room to grow. Place mulch over the temporarily bare soil and your new garden will be lovely and sustainable.

Theme 3: Sweet Memories? Many of our Master Gardeners are in their golden years. Mature? Vintage? Silver Tops? Meaning that our memory capacity has lost some of its edge. Sad tales abound such as this one: “I forgot where I planted the crocus bulbs, so I spent late winter pulling out all the first little leaves, believing they were weeds.” Just makes you want to weep doesn’t it? Or the ever-popular spring ritual of the puncturing of the irrigation system as, enchanted by the warm spring air, you start to dig in the garden. Make a garden diary or diagram or indelible labeling system as a memory aid.

And lastly, there’s Garden Fact or Fallacy, or “I Read It on the Internet.” The tragic tale of Gardener X: “I read that digging salt into the soil around my beautiful geraniums would eliminate the weeds. You guessed it -- the geraniums turned brown and died a painful death, while the weeds flourished.”

Or in a war with marauding squirrels, Gardener Y “painted a combo of Vaseline and cayenne pepper onto the trunk of my apple tree.” She did get a great crop of apples that year, but “to my horror, the apple tree died the following year.” The treatment had killed the bark.

You know the moral of the story: Don’t believe everything you read on the internet. Or even necessarily your friends’, neighbors’ or relatives’ advice. Get science-based information on your gardening questions. A great source is the UCCE website or the local Master Gardener help line.

In response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) and recent California Department of Public Health and El Dorado County Health & Human Services guidelines, UCCE Central Sierra will cancel all El Dorado and Amador County Master Gardener public events and classes. This cancellation remains in effect through April 30th, and will be updated as public health guidelines change.

4-8-2020

We realize our public classes are valued by County residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge. We will attempt to offer our cancelled classes and events at a future time if feasible; please refer to our website <http://ucanr.edu/edmg> which will be updated with the latest changes as they occur. Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. We are still available to answer home gardening questions via email mgeldorado@ucanr.edu or call (530) 621-5512, or contact us using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Looking for garden inspiration, while our garden is closed due to COVID-19, our website has pictures, plants lists and much more. http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see <http://ucanr.edu/master> gardener e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.