

VALENTINE'S DAY

By Joan Bergsund

Oops, did Valentine's Day catch you unprepared? Saturday, February 14th is the day we honor loved ones with a gift, flowers, and an unexpected act of kindness or a special card, hand-lettered or carefully chosen. Everyone qualifies: young and old lovers, moms and dads, kids, special friends, and all combinations thereof.

If you actually forgot, I have a few suggestions. Nurseries, florists and markets have bouquets ready-to-go. You can consider the following ideas for next year, or don't wait. Do them now!

In my family we often give one another lavishly designed coupons, good for something thoughtful to occur in the future. It might be a pancake breakfast prepared and served by the kids, a picnic of crusty French bread and a jug of wine among the wildflowers, a dinner at a favorite restaurant, a hike along one of our ditches, a bicycle ride along the back roads, or some onerous task happily undertaken. Offer to prune those roses, organize the bills, wash the windows, and take him/her fishing, clean out a closet, plan a trip for next summer, plant a container with a combination of interesting colors and foliage, take over all pet care for the season. Be creative. Let your imagination be your guide.

Did you say plant a container? Check the garage for a big old pot not in use. Then fill the first few inches with gravel, broken terra cotta pot pieces, or even "popcorn." Next comes the soil – planters mix from the nursery is best. Then plant a combination of leaf textures and colorful annuals, ground covers or perennials. Select colors that work with the overall landscaping plan. Just be certain they all have the same water and sun requirements. If you're a novice, let your nursery person be your guide.

Here's another idea. This time of year look for ornamental quince, blueberry, pear or forsythia. Cut long branches and bring them indoors. Smash the thick woody stems with a hammer for maximum water intake. Place them in a tall vase and watch spring's beauty unfold as the tight buds bloom in the warmth of your home.

You're now better prepared for next Valentine's Day. Good luck!

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

This is a good time to survey your garden, plan for the coming year, and make decisions about what goes, what stays. Sit down with your honey, your garden books and seed catalogs, and make a plan. A little thought regarding design helps here. What are you trying to achieve? Play space for the kids? Pretty flowers? Herbs for the cook? Whatever you decide, you'll probably get a better effect by planting a mass of one variety rather than a smorgasbord of many.

To determine what does well in your garden you may have to succumb to trial and error. There are many factors to consider: the quality of your soil, your elevation, water availability and the site. Will you install an irrigation system to assure adequate water to each plant? Will you concentrate on natives and drought-tolerant plants to minimize water use? Have you amended the soil by adding humus or compost? I have urged my gardening friends to "do less...and enjoy it more." Keep your plans reasonable, at least

for the first few seasons. Will you do this work yourself or hire someone? Let your age, experience and energy level be your guide.

You can call the Master Gardener hotline for help (209-533-5912) or drop by the Farmory in Columbia, Wednesday 12:00- 3:00 or even on most Saturdays, 12:00- 3:00 pm. You can also join us at Open Garden Days which are usually the first Saturday of the month from 10:00 – 1:00pm located at Cassina High School at 215 So. Barretta Str. In Sonora.

Happy Valentine's Day!

Joan Bergsund became a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener in Tuolumne County in 1994. While living in Tuolumne County, she concentrated on California native plants and drought-tolerant species that need little water. She now lives in Marin County.