



## October Garden Tips 2015

by Thea Fiskin, UC Master Gardener

It's here! The best month of the year in the San Joaquin Valley for planting. Cooler evening temperatures and warm soil make ideal conditions for adding new plants to your garden, and if we are lucky enough to get some early rain it's even better.

**PLANT:** Now's the time to plant herbs, shrubs, trees, California natives, winter vegetables and even winter annuals. There are a few exceptions, bare root fruit trees and roses won't be available until January. Frost tender subtropicals, such as bird of paradise, bougainvillea, citrus, and palms will have to wait for spring.

This is the month we would usually plant winter annuals. In normal years, fall rains help establish winter annuals and foggy weather does away with the need to water them in winter, however they are relatively high water plants and with the drought, avoiding mass plantings would be a good idea. Instead I'll plant a few pots on my front porch. My favorites are ornamental kale, pansies, snapdragons, and fragrant stock. Sow seeds of larkspur, California poppies and other wildflowers, and hopefully, early winter rains will get them started.

In the vegetable garden, plant beets, carrots, lettuce, spinach, snow peas, and Swiss chard from seed. In the nurseries, there should be six-packs of broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower. Herbs can be planted now, except for basil, which is very frost tender. It's also time to plant garlic. Break apart garlic bulbs into individual cloves, and leave on the paper husks. Make sure the pointed end is up when planting. No room for a formal vegetable or herb garden? No problem, they can be incorporated right into your flower and shrubs beds or into a large pot.

Perennials really benefit from being planted now rather than spring; they will have fall, winter and next spring to get established before the heat of next summer. There are hundreds of drought tolerant plants to choose from and the nurseries in our area are stocked full and are ready to give you great planting advice.

**WATER:** Continue to water until the rains arrive, then plan to shut off your irrigation system until spring. Make sure to deep water all trees until they are dormant, place the hose around the drip line of the tree, not at the trunk.

**WEEDS:** When the rains finally come, the weeds will follow. Keep up your weeding--some winter weeds produce thousands of seeds, so it is important to keep them under control. If you have a large property, hoe or hand pull as many weeds as you can, then apply a preemergence herbicide to protect against winter weeds, but remember a preemergent cannot be used where you have planted seeds. Be especially careful when using postemergence herbicides and follow label directions exactly. Spray with care and never during a breezy day, when the spray can drift onto plants you want to keep--or worse your neighbor's plants.

**COMPOST:** As you clean up planting areas, rake up the fallen leaves and fruit to put in your compost pile. Discard any diseased litter and weeds with seeds. Think twice about putting any plant with seeds into your

compost bin--unless your compost gets very hot, those seeds will sprout wherever you put it. I have seen gardens with "volunteer" tomatoes everywhere.

**FERTILIZE:** Annuals, perennials, and cool season lawns will benefit from an application of fertilizer to promote new fall growth. Do not fertilize frost tender plants, such as citrus or palms, as the new growth will be susceptible to frost damage.

**PRUNE:** Cut back perennials if they are finished blooming. Hedges and other evergreen shrubs can be clipped to their desired size and shape. Roses are an exception; pruning is done in January to avoid frost damage on new growth.

Watch as fall changes the color of the foliage and be amazed how plain green leaves suddenly transform to shades of orange, red, and gold. Some of the best plants with fall color are ginkgoes, oak leaf hydrangea, Chinese pistache and maples. Look for them in their fall color at local nurseries and consider adding them to your garden.



"Ruby Slippers" Oakleaf Hydrangea

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