



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Helpful Garden Tips for February 2023 (February 4, 2023)

by Peyton Ellas, UCCE Master Gardener

Is it spring yet? Many days in February feel like spring. But we still might get frost. Fog, rain, snow, and even hail are not out of the picture. It's a transition month. Enjoy it; summer will arrive soon enough. There's plenty to do in the garden this month!

PLANTING: You can transplant most trees, perennials, spring-blooming bulbs, and summer flower annuals this month. Plant so that the center of the plant is an inch above the soil level, and use a three-inch layer of mulch. Clippings, including leaves and small twigs from your own garden, or even straw, work if you don't have ready access to wood chips. Shred up large leaves like sycamore so rain could reach the soil. Keep mulch a few inches away from tree trunks and the base of roses and other woody shrubs.



In the vegetable garden, it's time to plant asparagus, chives, cilantro, leek, green onion, parsley, potatoes, English peas, radish, spinach, kale, and strawberry. You can also transplant cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and beet seedlings. You still have time to start from seed: onions (for setting out in April), tomato, peppers, basil, eggplant, and tomatillo. Set out dahlia, gladiolus, lily and canna. Sow California poppy and other wildflower seeds if you can keep the area weed-free and water for a few months.

MAINTAINING: Check your irrigation and make needed repairs for both sprinkler and drip systems.

Pruning can still be done on berries, grapes, deciduous fruit trees, and roses. 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. If you have plants that show signs of frost damage, wait until it's warmer to prune the brown stuff off to protect the crown and roots. 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 overwinter 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. If you haven't had any pest issues, you don't need to spray.

This is also a good month to prune ornamental grasses and ground covers like lantana, CA fuchsia, and verbena.

Earwigs and mollusks become active this month. 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. Check them each morning and drop insects in a bucket of soapy water. If you use plant-based soap, you can pour it into the compost bin and repeat it. It's very effective. The chemical control for slugs and snails is iron phosphate, which is not toxic to pets, beneficial insects, and people. As always, follow the package instructions.

Weeds give us an ever-ready garden therapy opportunity. Try to remove weeds before they set seeds. If you have a limited time, go for the worst invasives like non-native thistle and mallow and escaped ornamentals like large leaf vinca.

Pick up fallen camellia blossoms and discard them to prevent flower bud infection, which leaves ugly brown blotches on the blossoms. At the end of the month, fertilize deciduous fruit trees. Do not fertilize citrus or avocados yet.

As temperatures warm, watch for early signs of fire blight. Trees and shrubs in the rose and apple families are especially susceptible. It is a fungal disease most active as daytime temperatures rise to the high 70s Fahrenheit. Very early signs are tan or black sap oozing from **dead** bark when trees start actively growing. Later, blossom and fruit tips die back and look scorched, thus the name. The best control is to prune out diseased branches. Cut back the dead or dying branches well beyond reddish or brown streaks or patches that appear under the bark in affected wood. Fire blight is hard to eliminate, but most trees can survive minor infections. Avoid over-watering or fertilizing affected trees because rapid vigorous growth often increases the infection. Although the disease can reduce fruit production, it is not harmful to humans, and harvested fruits are safe to eat. Continue to monitor and prune affected branches as signs appear. You can safely fertilize after a blossom drop occurs.



CONSERVING: Watch your native bee nesting box for action this month. Be wary of spraying pesticides/herbicides when bees and native wasps are active. Social defensive wasps have given all wasps a bad reputation, but most wasps are very small, don't sting humans, and can be terrific allies in the garden. They can help with pollination, but they also are carnivorous for part of their lives, so they eat insects that cause harm to our plants. The website insectidentification.org has useful photos and information.

As always, compost and mulch can be added. If you have a large property, consider adding a brush pile for birds. Adding a large native shrub, like quailbush (*Atriplex*) or mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*) can attract and support birds to your garden. Think of how we can form better partnerships with our wild friends. Even small gardens can be sanctuaries for wildlife and humans. Three design principles: scale, balance, and harmony are not only about creating the garden but apply to caring for it as well. When we walk into a balanced garden, we understand we are not alone in this endeavor, and although it may feel like we are in a battle some of the time, it's a war we won't win without our nature friends. Happy Gardening!

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions:

Visalia Farmer's Market- 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears)

Feb. 3, 4, & 5 – Visalia SpringFest Home & Patio Show – Visalia Convention Center

February 11 - Rose Pruning Workshop, Woodlake Botanical Garden - 10 am – 1 pm

February 11 – Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop, Hurley School, Visalia – 11 am – 1 pm

February 18 – Gardening Central Valley Style class – Hanford Library – 1:30 – 3 pm

February 18 – Square Foot Gardening class – Tulare Public Library – 11 am – 12 pm

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

Visit our website for past articles, UC gardening information, or email us with your questions:

http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mgtularekings14/>; Instagram at: @mgtularekings

NEW! Signup for our E-Newsletter on our Home Page! https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/