



# How Does Your Garden Grow?



## News from UCCE Calaveras Master Gardeners

**March 2015**

### From The Editor

Using water wisely is on most gardeners' minds in our area this Spring. In this issue Sharon Meija introduces us to water-wise fig trees and Teresa Spence discusses ways to make the most of the water you use in your garden in the 'Garden To Do List for March'.

Happy Gardening!

Odile Morrison  
Newsletter Editor

### In This Issue

- [Fig Trees](#)
- [March To Do List](#)
- [Next Open Garden 28 March](#)
- [Plant of the Month](#)
- [Volunteer Opportunities](#)

[Visit our Public Website](#)

To unsubscribe:  
[calmastergardener@gmail.com](mailto:calmastergardener@gmail.com)

### Fig Trees

*By Sharon Meija, University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Calaveras County.*

This article appeared in the Calaveras Enterprise on March 11, 2015.

There are over 700 cultivars of Fig trees around the world. These trees are one of the easiest to grow. They are ideal for a Mediterranean climate with mild, damp winters and dry, hot summers. Figs in our area need a sunny spot protected from winter winds; it takes a great deal of heat for the fruit to mature properly. If you live where temperatures drop to 10 degrees, planting the Fig in a container is a solution.

Fig trees do best in well-drained soils, but will tolerate wet soils better than most other fruit trees. Mulch the trees with compost 2 to 4 inches deep; renewing this monthly from spring to harvest provides all the nutrients necessary. Trees may reach heights of 15 to 30 feet with an equal spread; once established, they need only occasional watering.

Ficus carica 'Brown Turkey' has a variegated fruit with rusted red to purple skin, pale green shoulders and rose flesh.



Ficus carica "Black Mission" produces figs with a black exterior and sweet pink flesh. [Read more](#) Page 3.

### Next Meeting

21 April, 2015. 10am to noon San Andreas Library. Sue Mosbacher - 'Grow Your Own Bean Soup.'

**Visitors welcome!**

### Need Help?

Master Gardener Helpline  
209-754-2880

### Next Open Garden 28 March

10am to 2pm  
Topic: Growing Potatoes  
**Plant Sale 10 - noon**  
[More information](#)

## Garden To Do List for March

By Teresa Spence, *University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Calaveras County.*

- Check drip systems: turn on the water to observe leaks that need to be repaired or blocked emitters that need to be replaced. Flush the filters and clean out any accumulated sediment. If any plants have grown significantly, more emitters may need to be added.
- When the last frost has passed, plant herbs such as chives, cilantro, parsley and basil in a sunny location in the ground or in containers.
- Check plants for early signs of insect infestation, such as aphids; get rid of them with an application of insecticidal soap.

It has been a very dry winter so far; it may be a good time to consider planting a vegetable garden that uses water more efficiently so less water is needed.

The best way to water your garden is with drip irrigation: this system applies water slowly and directly to the roots of the intended plant with very little waste and no runoff. Proper timing of irrigation is important.

Examine the soil at a depth of 4 to 12 " then squeeze it in your hands; if the soil holds together without crumbling there is probably still enough moisture. If water is needed, it is best to water in the late evening or early morning. Water slowly and deeply: this makes the roots of your vegetables grow down into the soil where they can make use of moisture that is not available on the surface.

Mulching the vegetable beds with at least 3 " of mulch will cut down on evaporation, keep the weeds out and help keep the ground around the plants cooler during the summer heat.

Amend the soil in your vegetable garden: adding lots of composted organic matter will help trap moisture and encourage deep root growth.

Determine the amount of fruits and vegetables you will use to avoid wasted crops at the end of the season.

Plant your vegetables in a block or hexagonal pattern, rather than in straight lines; the vegetables will provide shade for each other and reduce evaporation.

Lay out the garden with vegetables that have similar water needs. For example, cucumber, zucchini and squash all use about the same amount of water.

Focus on vegetables that produce big crops, such as tomatoes, squash and peppers. Grow fewer varieties.

Avoid vegetables that use a lot of water but do not give a big crop, for instance, broccoli and cauliflower use a lot of water.

Plant your fruits and vegetables at the appropriate times. Start cool weather plants in late fall so they have time to set deep roots, and warm weather plants as soon as the soil is the correct temperature for them.

Learn the water needs of the fruits and vegetables you plant. Knowing when your plants need the most and the least amount of water will help you decide when to irrigate. Many plants are over watered; not only is that wasteful but it can be detrimental to the taste of the fruit or vegetable. Plant only what can be properly irrigated with your available water.

## Next Open Garden 28 March 2015

*Each month Maggi Blood sends a press release to local newspapers. This article is based on the release for March.*

The Calaveras County Master Gardeners' Demonstration Garden will be open on Saturday, March 28 from 10AM – 2PM.

YES! A plant sale this month 10am to noon.

The French call potatoes, 'apples of the earth'. These 'apples of the earth' require specific techniques during planting, but reward the gardener with delicious gems not available in the grocery store. Join us at 10:30 for a facilitated discussion of planting, water management, disease and insect control.



Find answers to your home gardening questions, including plant and pest problems. When the garden is not open, home gardening assistance is offered by Master Gardeners through the help line at: 209-754-2880. The public may leave a message regarding a problem and a Master Gardener will return the call.

## ...Fig Trees

*continued from Front page*

**Pollination:** In the "Common Figs", including the Brown Turkey and Black Mission Fig, pollination from a wasp or another tree is not required. They are called self-fulfilling because the flowers that bear fruit are perfect, containing both male and female parts

**Pruning:** A fig tree can be trained into nearly any shape or size. You can allow it to mature into a large, beautiful shade tree with a single trunk or multiple trunks. The branch structure can be developed from an early age to create a jungle gym for climbing or limbs to sit on. Large well-drained trees may require only light annual pruning. Alternatively, you can also prune Fig trees so severely so that fruit can be picked without use of a ladder; Fig trees may also be espaliered.

To successfully prune the trees, you need to understand their bearing habit. Most Fig tree varieties bear two crops: one in early summer and another in late summer and fall. Buds for the first crop form the previous fall and over-winter as expanded buds arrayed laterally along the "one-year - old branches.

The second crop forms the following summer on the current season's shoots; this later crop usually has more fruit than the first. Severe winter pruning can eliminate or reduce the first crop, but the tree will usually form a substantial

second one. As a general rule, thinning out the canopy by 1/3 should produce a good first crop. While Fig trees do not require summer pruning, some thinning of shoots is warranted to reduce crowded branches in trees that are kept short.

**Harvesting:** Figs are harvested when just mature; once harvested, this fruit may further change in color, texture, and juiciness, but will not improve in sweetness or flavor. Figs are ready for harvest when they release easily from the tree. Some varieties, including the Brown Turkey and Black Mission Fig, have two crops per year, early and late. The "breba" (first crop) matures in early to midsummer and the second crop matures in late summer or fall.

Fruit production decreases when there is a cold spring or cloudy summer. The harvest stage depends on how you plan to use the fruit. For immediate fresh eating, fully ripe is ideal. For canning, the fruit should be firmer; for drying, fully ripe.



Figs can be eaten fresh or they can be frozen, pickled, or dried for future use. For best flavor of dried figs, allow them to partially dry on the tree and then complete the drying process on drying trays. You can let them fall naturally, but pick up quickly to avoid insects and disease. Figs can be used in many dessert dishes and make great jam.

This beautiful tree might be a great choice for your yard.

## Plant of the Month

This month's "Plant of the Month" is Sweet William or *Dianthus barbatus*. This species is native to Southern Europe

and parts of Asia and is a popular ornamental plant for your flower garden. It is a short lived perennial that grows 1 to 2 feet tall but will readily reseed to give you new plants. It will grow in zones 3-9 and blooms in spring and early summer. The flowers range in color from white, pink, red, and purple to variegated patterns and is a great cut flower. It attracts bees, butterflies, and birds.



Sweet William plants will be available in the plant sale on 28 March, 10am to noon in the Demonstration Garden.

### Master Gardener Coordinator

Debbie Powell  
dipowell@ucdavis.edu  
(209) 754-6473

### Master Gardener Board of Directors

Bev Eckland, President  
Terri Bishop, Vice President  
June Wilcox, Secretary  
Bev Vierra Pennington,  
Demo Garden Coordinator  
Dolores Ransom, Member Liaison  
Odile Morrison, Youth Programs & Special Projects