



P.R.E.P.A.R.E. for Spring in Your Garden

by Susan Sevier, UC Master Gardener

PLAN

Point yourself in the right direction. As your garden is resting in the winter chill, now is the time for you to dream, research, and plan for the months ahead. Spend some time online, perusing seed and plant catalogues, pouring through gardening magazines or books, and perhaps sketching out how you want your yard to look. Maybe you have always wanted a cottage garden look or to go more Mediterranean or perhaps this is the year to put in a totally sustainable garden with low water usage. Maybe Mel Bartholomew's Square-Foot Gardening book has inspired you to put in a vegetable garden this spring. Our Master Gardener website provides much guidance to help you get started planning. Check out, for example, under "local gardening information" our "Gardening Central Valley Style" handout and plant list or our local seasonal Vegetable Planting Guide.



Evaluate what you have

RAKE

Perhaps your yard still has those autumn leaves waiting to be raked up and discarded either into your compost pile or green waste bin. Remember that sometimes spent blossoms and leaves can harbor disease. Depending on what your plans are for your garden, this can also be a worthwhile time to stir up the earth and till it prior to your spring planting.



Amend the soil

EVALUATE

What have you got? What do you need? Can you move some plants around? Are some in the wrong place, like getting too much shade or too much sun? Have you got some weed patches that need to be attacked right now? How is your irrigation system? Does it need attention? Are some areas of your yard too dry or too wet? How are your tools? Now is the time to clean, sharpen and oil them.

PRUNE

Speaking of tools, get your pruners out! Now is the time to

prune your dormant perennials, trees, and shrubs. Pruning invigorates plant growth and bud formation. Diseased, dying and injured wood needs to be removed, as do crowded or crossing branches. Rather than “topping” mature trees, it’s just as fast to thin out some branches of the tree canopy. This restructures its shape and increases air and light circulation which reduce disease spread. Many opportunities to learn how to prune are available. Check out our webpage on landscape trees.

AMEND

Soils can always use more organic matter, and since you have been tilling, why not amend now? Amendments, like compost, humus, steer or poultry manure indirectly influence plant growth by improving the soil’s physical condition. You have spent some time evaluating your garden, and maybe now you realize that your soil may benefit from gypsum. It will loosen clay soils and get rid of excess sodium at the same time. Sandy soils need compost to help retain moisture.

REDUCE, RE-USE, RECYCLE, RE-PURPOSE

Every season of the year merits attention to our environment’s natural resources. Part of your spring preparation should include planning for reducing waste. Hopefully using less water by planting more climate-appropriate plants, using more mulch, beginning a compost pile, recycling old barrels to use as planters, and sharing plants and produce are part of your plans.

ELIMINATE

Divide and conquer! Out with the old, in with the new! It may be time to let someone else enjoy a plant that is not thriving in your yard. For example, I had a persimmon tree that couldn’t produce fruit because I mistakenly planted it in deep shade, so my neighbor adopted it and now it is planted in the sun. Most of us have clutter in our yard that detracts from the whole appearance. Our yards deserve “spring cleaning” just as much as our houses do. Eliminate your old ways of thinking about your yard and get a fresh start.



February 7, 2013