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Holiday Gardening Chores are Very Few

by Michelle Le Strange, UC Master Gardener

With the short days of winter and the long list of things to do this time of year, most of us aren't spending much time in the garden. Plus, baby it's cold outside! If you're too busy to give the garden attention these days, you're in luck. Most plants will roll along quite well on their own with very little help from you at this holiday time of year.

There are only a couple of maintenance duties that we really need to keep up like raking of leaves and pulling of weeds. My fescue lawn is getting mowed once a month and watered lightly once a week and it looks fantastic. I am more focused on seasonal pruning and shaping of evergreen and deciduous shrubs. Also bringing the garden indoors for holiday décor helps set me in the mood for pause and reflection of the year.

Leaves: I have been raking leaves since Halloween and (keep your fingers crossed) I think that I am just about finished at my house. I really don't mind raking leaves, it is a little bit of exercise during the winter that I actually enjoy. My garden is not huge, but my trees are, so I gather most leaves into the bin for greenwaste recycling. I use as many as I can to mulch my herbaceous perennial and shrub beds.

There is a small area in my yard dedicated to composting. Because of the small particle size, dried leaves layered with grass clippings make a very hot compost pile with very little work for the gardener.

Weeds and pests: Keep pulling winter weeds before they flower to prevent a gigantic crop after the holidays. Now is also a good time to try to get a hold on any perennial type weeds trying to take over your yard. For many people that weed is oxalis also called creeping woodsorrel. The ground is moist and the heart-shaped leaves of oxalis are relatively easy to see right now as many of our ornamental plants are more exposed. Spend a few moments each day cruising the yard to pick weeds. Tackle an area at a time and the job won't seem so hard.



Trifoliate heart-shaped leaves of weedy oxalis are easy to recognize.

It also seems you can never let your guard down for snails and slugs. Watch where their slimy trails lead and bait or hand pick them to keep them under control.

Holiday décor: While we are scouting for weeds we can also look around the garden to see what can be used to make the house festive for the holidays. Gardens can provide evergreen cuttings from pines, firs, junipers, redwoods, magnolias, pittosporum and podocarpus. Berries from pyracantha, toyon, holly, and cotoneaster look great in arrangements and then there is a myriad of pine cones.



Cuttings of succulents such as jade, sedum, and echeveria last all month and mix well with ornaments. Dry some pomegranates and persimmon slices for a California Christmas touch. Go out with the children and gather pine cones and decorative seed pods. Leave them natural or spray paint them in glittery holiday colors or fake snow.

Drape your decorated greenery across the mantle or make holiday arrangements to grace your entryway, inside or out. When trying to entertain kids I prefer making swags instead of wreaths for hanging on lamp posts or under porch lights. They are fun and easy to make and the kids enjoy giving them to some of the neighbors on the street, especially the single and elderly. Enjoy the holidays and pass the spirit along!

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