



Master Gardener Newspaper

Volunteer Program

Tulare/Kings Counties

UC
CE

Garden Tips for February 2016

by Thea Fiskin, UC Master Gardener

Spring is coming! It is time to get a head start on your spring garden now. Valentine's Day is also this month. Buy your sweetheart a blooming plant to grow in the garden or have inside the home or office. If your sweetie is a gardener, consider a basket of seed packets or a garden tool to make garden chores easier.

Bare root plants: Don't delay! This is the last month to plant bare root fruit trees, berries, grapes, kiwis and roses. Don't forget bare root flowering shrubs and vines: clematis, forsythia, lilac and flowering quince. They may look like sad little twigs now, but they will add color and fragrance to your garden.

Planting is easy--dig a hole twice as wide, but just as deep, as the root ball. Add some soil to the center of the hole and mound it into a cone. Place the plant in the hole on top of the cone and gently spread the roots out, then cover with soil. Plant high and make sure not to plant too deeply, because bare root plantings will settle. After planting, water to settle the soil, and then add a thick layer of mulch to retain moisture. Avoid staking new trees; most bare root trees do fine without the addition of stakes. If you must stake, do it loosely so the tree trunk can bend with a breeze. Don't leave the tree staked for longer than a year because staked trees usually form much weaker trunks.



Veggies and Herbs: You can start the seeds of basil, eggplant, peppers, tomatoes and tomatillos indoors now. Place them in a south facing window where they can get plenty of light. Seeds of chard, lettuce, peas and radishes can be planted directly into the garden.

Have you ever tried growing potatoes? I grew them for the first time last year in an old wash tub and had great success. Buy seed potatoes from a nursery or catalog that carries certified seed potatoes. To prevent soil borne diseases do not plant potatoes from the grocery store or those left over from your garden last year. For more information on growing potatoes see the UCANR Leaflet 2802 Growing Potatoes.



Critter Control: Snails will be making their presence known, munching on your favorite plants. Use snail bait or hand pick. This will help to prevent them from laying eggs and having a larger snail population later on.

Garden Chores: Pull weeds now when they are small and before they form flowers and seeds. Weeds can be placed in the compost pile as long as there are no seed heads. Cover your garden with three inches of mulch to keep new weeds from growing.

Pruning can still be done on berries, grapes, deciduous fruit trees and roses before spring growth starts. Do not prune camellias, forsythia, lilac, quince and other ornamental spring flowering shrubs or trees until they finish blooming.

Do not prune frost damaged, woody plants until new growth begins in spring. Pruning now could start new growth early which would be vulnerable to any late frosts. Damage may not be as bad as you think; new growth may come from limbs that look dead. In grafted plants if the plant dies all the way to the graft then the new growth will be from the root stock, you will either have to re-graft or replace the entire plant. Usually our last frost is in the middle of March.

After pruning fruit trees apply a dormant spray before the buds form. Products containing copper are used to control some diseases, like peach leaf curl. Products containing oils kill insects and their eggs that are overwintering in the cracks and crevices of the tree. Choose a calm day with no imminent rain in the forecast and follow directions on the container exactly.

Harvest ripe citrus fruit. They will not ripen after picking. If you have extra fruit consider donating to a local food bank.

Camellias are blooming now. Pick up fallen blossoms and discard to prevent flower bud infection. Pansies and other winter annuals should be fertilized. Pinch the faded flowers and any seed heads to keep them blooming. Cut ornamental grasses now before spring growth arrives.

Houseplants: Fertilize house plants once they begin showing signs of new growth. Check soil moisture. Plants dry out quickly when we have the heaters on. Turn plants frequently so they won't grow sideways toward the light. Are your plants getting long and leggy? This is a good time to cut back dracaena, dieffenbachia and rubber plants. Make cuttings about 4" to 6" long, dip cut end in rooting hormone and insert in pot with potting soil, keep moist.

Take advantage: While you're waiting for the weather to warm up, why not add to your gardening knowledge? On February 12-14, the Master Gardeners will host a booth at the Visalia Home and Patio SpringFEST at the Visalia Convention Center. Please come by with all your gardening questions, we love talking about gardening.

January 30, 2016