



## Garden Tips for February 2017

by Thea Fiskin, UC Master Gardener

February means Valentine's Day, don't forget your sweetheart. A blooming plant for the home, office or garden is always appreciated. Hard to believe but Spring will be here shortly, so time to get a head start on your spring garden now!

**BARE ROOT PLANTS:** Time is running out to purchase and plant bare root plants such as 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 ugly ducklings right now, but they will grow into swans, with color and fragrance for you to enjoy.

Planting is easy; just 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 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 the roots high and make sure not to plant too deep. Water to settle the soil, and then add a thick layer of mulch to retain moisture. Avoid staking new trees; most bare root trees come without the addition of stake. If you must stake, do it loosely so the tree trunk can bend with the breeze. Don't leave the tree staked for longer than a year as doing so could make the trunk weaker.

**VEGGIES AND HERBS:** Now is the time to start seeds of basil, eggplant, peppers, tomatoes and tomatillos indoors. Place them in a south facing window where they can get plenty of light. Seeds of chard, lettuce, peas and radishes, as well as seed potatoes, can be sowed directly into the garden. 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.

**CRITTER CONTROL:** With all the new growth, snails and slugs will be having a feast 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 your compost pile as long as there are no seed heads. Cover your garden with at least three inches of mulch to keep new weeds from growing.

Pruning can still be done on berries, grapes, deciduous fruit trees and roses--as long as spring growth hasn't started. Do not prune camellias, forsythia, lilac, quince and other spring-flowering shrubs or trees until they finish blooming.



Do not prune frost-damaged woody plants until new growth begins in the spring. Pruning now could start new growth early. March could have a late frost this year, so don't get spring fever yet! In grafted plants, if the plant dies all the way to the graft, then the new growth will be from the root stock. In this case, you will have to regraft or replace the entire plant.

After pruning fruit trees, apply a dormant spray before the buds swell. Products containing copper are used to control some diseases, like peach leaf curl. Products containing oil kill insects and their eggs that over-winter 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.

Harvest citrus fruit when it is ripe, as citrus does 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 which leaves ugly brown blotches on the blossoms. Pansies, snapdragons, and other winter annuals should be fertilized. Pinch faded flowers and any seed heads to keep the plants blooming. Cut ornamental grasses now before spring growth arrives.

**TAKE ADVANTAGE:** While you are waiting for the weather to warm up, why not add to your gardening knowledge? On February 10-12, the Master Gardeners will host a booth at the **Visalia Home and Patio Spring FEST** at the Visalia Convention Center. Please come by with all your gardening questions as we love to talk about gardening! You can also find us at the **Farmer's Market** in the Sear's parking lot, every Saturday from 8 am until noon.

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