



Garden Tips for February 2018

by Peyton Ellas, UCCE Master Gardener

Spring has been beginning in February in recent years here in Tulare and Kings Counties, but early in the month it is still winter with snow, rain and frost possible. If rainfall is light, you should deep water your trees. Even trees without leaves (deciduous) require some water through the winter. And for all those fall transplants, you may also have to provide supplemental irrigation to keep them from suffering drought stress and not establishing a good root system before summer.



PLANTING: Finish purchasing and planting bare root fruit trees, berries, grapes, kiwis, roses, 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. Remember to first plan where you will plant; most of these are high-water-using plants, so create a zone just for these types, preferably a small zone compared to the larger zones of moderate, low and very low water-use.

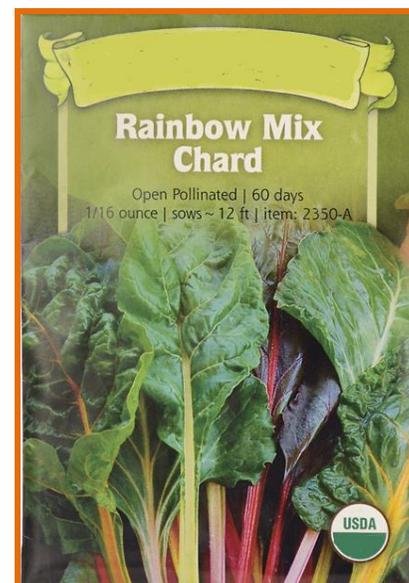
Planting is easy; just dig a hole twice as wide, but just as deep, as the root ball. Add some soil to the center of the hole and mound into a cone. Place the plant in the hole on top of the cone and gently spread the roots out, then cover with soil. Plant the roots high and make sure not to plant too 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 with two stakes to each side, 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.

Believe it or not, it's tomato time! Seed-planting indoors or in the greenhouse, anyway. Also start seeds of basil, eggplant, peppers, and tomatillos. These seeds need both heat and abundant light to germinate and grow into strong seedlings. Chard, lettuce, peas, radishes, can be seeded directly into the garden, and seed potatoes can be planted too.

Other plants to plant now are Gladiolus, Zephyranthes (fairy lily), Dahlia, Dianthus, Heuchera (coral bells), Camellia and Plumbago.

PRUNING: Prune deciduous shrubs and trees, and evergreen shrubs and perennials such as summer and fall-blooming sage, rosemary, lavender, pittosporum, podocarpus, euonymus, lantana, and verbena. You can also cut back by about a third or more geraniums, hydrangeas and ornamental grasses. Don't prune spring-blooming shrubs such as Eastern lilac and many California native plants; instead, wait until after they bloom before pruning them.



Leave frost-damaged growth on tender plants as protection for the roots until danger of frost is past, at least until the end of the month. Begin pruning as new growth appears. Don't prune frost-sensitive plants like citrus until after frost-danger. And don't fertilize these tropical plants until it's warmer.

OTHER 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 ornamental garden with at least three inches of mulch to keep new weeds from growing.

Apply a dormant spray to fruit trees 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 overwinter 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.

Camellias are blooming now. Pick up fallen blossoms and discard to prevent flower bud infection, which leaves ugly brown blotches on the blossoms.

Snails, slugs, aphids, white fly and earwigs may all be a problem this month, depending on the weather. Be ready to hand pick or use no-chemical traps when you can, spray leaves with water for chewing insects, and use the least toxic pesticide that solves the problem. Non-selective pesticides also harm beneficial insects, so only use them as a last resort.



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