



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

January 2021 Garden Tips (December 26, 2020)

by Peyton Ellas, UCCE Master Gardener Advisor

January can be a busy month in our central valley and foothill gardens. Hopefully we will be dodging rainstorms and working on foggy days. That's what our gardens rely on for health later in the year. On the other hand, there are some jobs that can easily be put off or skipped altogether this year. Is that heresy to say? Sometimes, taking garden care too seriously can make us forget this should be enjoyable. Gardens are never perfect. It will never be "finished." Enjoy the time you spend in it as much as possible. And if other parts of your life take priority, relax. You may find some surprising things happened that you quite like. If you have a few hours to spend in the garden this month, here are some suggestions:



PLANTING: January is bare root planting month, for everything from roses to fruit trees, berry and grape vines and some vegetables. Soak the roots in a bucket of water for a few hours before planting.

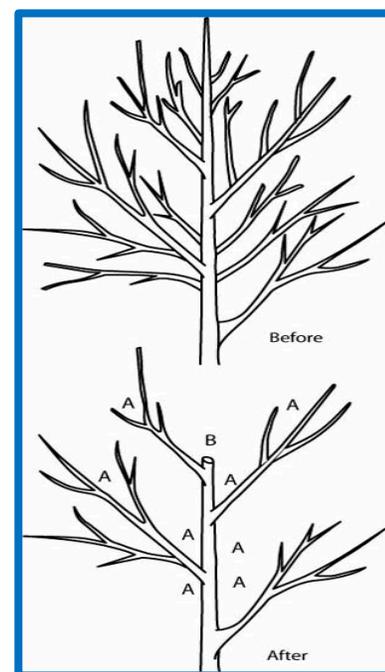
- Bare root fruit trees: apple, apricot, cherry, fig, pear, plum and many others are now available. Check their pollination requirements; not all fruit trees are self-fertile, and some will require a cross pollinator. Notice the number of chill hours required. Our winters average 700-800 chill hours.
- Bare root roses: hybrid teas, floribundas, climbers, miniatures, and shrubs are available. All do very well in the San Joaquin valley.
- Bare root berries and grapes. Plant grapevines, cane boysenberries, blackberries, raspberries, blueberries, and strawberries. There is nothing like fresh-grown berries, and they are so easy to grow.



You can also start planting beets, carrots, leek, lettuce, onion, parsley, radish, seed potatoes, onions, peas, radish, spinach, artichokes, and asparagus directly in the garden this month. Begin sowing seeds for summer annuals and vegetables like tomatoes and peppers in a protected location where you can keep the seedlings warm and they will receive enough light.

MAINTAINING: January is the month to spray dormant oil on deciduous fruit and almond trees and roses to prevent or control over-wintering insects. Spray the branches, crotches, trunk, and the ground beneath the tree's drip line. Hold off spraying if rain is forecast, or if the temperature is below 45 degrees, and never spray oil on walnut trees. Spray copper spray or synthetic fungicide on peach trees to control peach leaf curl. Other ways to limit over-wintering insects and disease issues are to keep your orchards clean of old leaves, old fruit, and weeds.

January is a great month for pruning deciduous trees, shrubs, and roses. Keep pruners & loppers sharp. Sterilize the pruners or loppers in between plants. Use a 10% bleach solution (1-part bleach to 9-parts water) or white vinegar. Remove all broken, diseased, or crossing branches first. Two basic cutting techniques are used in general pruning: thinning and heading. Thinning cuts remove entire branches, resulting in a more natural look. Thinning cuts are also used to allow more air circulation and light into the interior of the tree and are the cuts to make



Thinning cuts

first. You might want to take a break midway through and step back to examine the tree from a short distance. You want to end up with a tree that looks balanced and well-structured.

Heading cuts shorten branches and should only be used on small branches. Use heading cuts judiciously to shorten over-long branches. You can take off about a quarter of the previous season's growth on these newer smaller branches if you want to keep the tree smaller. Make sure to cut back to an outward facing bud to direct new growth away from the interior of the tree. Prune from the bottom up and from the inside of the plant to the outside. Don't be too nervous about it. Healthy trees will recover and re-grow.

Cut back and divide perennials. Remove dead leaves from rose canes and deciduous trees and shrubs you don't prune off. Fertilize perennials, annuals, emerging buds. I don't recommend fertilizing California native plants or woody shrubs and perennials from Mediterranean climates. The species generally prefer soils lower in nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium.

Apply pre-emergent herbicide this month to lawns and garden beds later in the month. Read and follow the package directions carefully. If you don't choose to use chemical weed control, lightly till your young seedling weeds frequently to keep your garden beds fairly free of weeds. You may also replenish mulch this month or top dress with finished compost. Finally, don't forget to monitor or turn off your irrigation controller. You will want to deep water your trees, shrubs and perennials and water your lawn if we have an extended dry period but don't waste water and threaten the health of your plants by over watering. That means don't water as much as you would in the spring, fall or summer during these cool days, cold nights. Remember, fog can also provide moisture to plants. It's one reason to not hate our Tule fog: it's good for the plants. I'm not sure I will ever hope for more foggy days, but I have learned to not wish them away entirely.

CONSERVING: It's wood chipping month around my place! It always feels like a gloomy foggy day is perfect for putting in the earplugs, putting on the cap and gloves and firing up the chipper. We use these non-diseased trimmings and leaves as a natural mulch in many of our flower beds, and we add a little of the smaller trimmings to the compost bins. If we don't get to every pile, we call it a bird shelter and don't fret. This year, I hope to continue my 2020 trend of spending more time in the vegetable garden, which is always satisfying.

As we are making plans and goals for the year, we consider how we are creating and managing our patch of the earth. If we farm, can we plant a hedgerow? In all types and sizes of gardens, can we use "least toxic first" pest control methods, tolerate a little wildness in parts of the garden, grow some plants just for the birds, pollinators, lizards, toads, or even small mammals, tolerate some damage to keep the chain of life healthy? Your garden, even in January, should be busy with natural activity. If no one visits except the weekly gardener, you are missing out: the garden can be and do so much more!

In accordance to the Stay-at-Home guidelines, the Master Gardeners have cancelled all public events at this time, but if you send us an email or leave a message on our phone lines, someone will call you back!

Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325; Kings County at (559) 852-2736

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