



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

March Garden Tips 2021 (February 27, 2021)

by Peyton Ellas, UC Master Gardener

March was the first month of the year in the original Roman calendar. That feels right to me: March is a month of flowers and growth, the first full month in which almost everything in the garden is bursting with energy. Even the weather gets in on this act: March may be hot, cold, dry, snowy, rainy, or windy. The vernal equinox is March 20; the sun is above the equator and begins its travels north, closer to us.



PLANTING: spring is the second season of major planting. You can plant all varieties of trees, shrubs, perennials, ground covers and vines in the spring. Time to plant heat-loving edibles like cucumber, tomato, melon, beans, eggplant and squash, especially towards the end of the month when the weather and soil are warmer. You can also plant potato, radish, chives, greens, beets, and herbs of all types. Citrus, avocado and other frost-sensitives should also be planted later in the month.

When buying citrus, please be sure to buy from a reputable Tulare or Kings county nursery so we don't spread the Asian citrus psyllid. That means saying "no" to the neighbor or family member who has an extra citrus tree for you, and that means not bringing citrus trees into the county from elsewhere in the State. There are regulations about movement of bulk quantities of citrus fruit in order to save the California citrus industry, much of which is in our counties. Help out as a homeowner by following good citrus practices. You can find out more from the CDFA website or read the University of California Pest Note at:

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74155.html>

We think of March as a big color month. Lots of plants, native and non, bloom profusely in March. If you need quick color, plant ageratum, alyssum, bachelor buttons, begonias, celosia, cleome, coleus, cosmos, duster miller, gomphrena, impatiens, lobelia, marigolds, nasturtiums, nicotiana, petunias, portulacas, salvias and verbena. It is also the month to start planting summer blooming bulbs such as cannas, calla lily, crocosmia, dahlia, gladiolus, liatris, lilies, ranunculus, tuberose and zephyranthes.

MAINTAINING: Along with bursts of flowers and foliage, March also begins the major insect season. Hand picking large insects is easier on the garden and the ecology, if you can stand it. Using traps like rolled up newspaper or boards is another way to catch and remove insect pests like snails, slugs and earwigs.



If you must use chemicals for slugs and snails, use baits containing iron phosphate, which is not toxic to children, wildlife or pets. Baits containing metaldehyde are extremely toxic. Tolerate some damage, especially from caterpillars. Think of them as the pretty butterflies and moths they will become. Bugs are also a major food source for nesting and hatching birds.

Start setting baits out now for Argentine and other non-native ants and rotate the chemical every three months. Eliminating ants will help natural controls for a whole host of soft-bodied insects.

Spittle bugs are occasionally an unsightly nuisance but do little damage and don't stay long. They look like little blobs of wet foam with a small bug in the middle. They seem to prefer rosemary and many sage varieties. The foam protects babies from birds, but populations rarely grow large and the "spittle" doesn't stay long.

If rain is not plentiful, water your new transplants well and keep them from completely drying out. This attention to irrigation is one reason planting in the spring is more difficult than in the fall, although some springs are wetter than the previous fall, and maybe that will happen this season.

March is also a good month to fertilize roses. Use a specialty fertilizer meant for roses and do two smaller feedings instead of one. You can also fertilize non-native perennials and established citrus trees that are emerging from dormancy. Your California native plants don't need fertilizer, although you could give your acid-loving manzanita a weak dose of fertilizer labeled for camelias, azaleas and magnolias.

Weed control is in high gear. Cool season grasses have seeds; warm season weeds are blooming. Whether you use mechanical, chemical or a mix of control methods, remember weeds are trying to protect the earth's crust by reducing erosion. If you clear an area of weeds, what will replace these plants? Use rock, bark or living mulch (a.k.a plants!) to keep your soil on your property. When spraying herbicide, remember that many of your plants including roses and California native species are highly susceptible to damage from small amounts of drift, and you may not see that damage immediately. Follow label directions and protect desirable plants.



CONSERVING: While planting for spring, include at least one plant that increases the garden's diversity and usefulness for pollinators and/or other wildlife. Matching a plant with your soil and climate (including water availability) ensures fewer pests and less maintenance. If you want to try milkweed for the Monarchs, search out the native varieties, such as "narrow leaf."

If you haven't already done so, check your drip and sprinkler systems, cleaning filters, checking for leaks and make needed improvements. Get ready for summer before you need the irrigation system. Make sure your system is as efficient as possible. You may consider upgrading to a "smart" controller that can better adjust to the weather and water needs of the garden. I've tried several of them now, and most of them are reliable, affordable, and easy to use with a smart phone app. You still should check your system periodically to make sure there are no leaks or other problems.

Happy Spring!

Good News! The Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions at a few select locations in the next few months!

March 6, 11 am - 2 pm, Ace Hardware, Visalia

March 13, 10 am - 2 pm, Luis Nursery, Visalia

At this time, we are not in the office to answer phone calls, 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

Visit our website to search past articles, find links to UC gardening information, or to email us with your questions:

http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/