

May To Do List

By Teresa Spence, University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Calaveras County

Prune spring flowering shrubs such as lilacs, azaleas and spirea.

Dig in a 5" to 6" layer of compost a couple of weeks prior to planting summer vegetables.

If the evenings are warm, above 50 degrees, it is a good time to plant summer vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplants. It is also time to direct seed melons and squash. Consider planting basil among tomatoes, they enjoy the shade and will stay tender longer.

Continue weeding if the soils are still moist.

Place mulch, at least 3" in depth, in flowerbeds and around trees and shrubs. The mulch will keep the plants moist and cool and help prevent weeds from growing. Make sure to keep the mulch several inches away from the trunks of the plants.

Fruit trees often set an abundance of fruit, often at the expense of the tree or the quality and size of the fruit. It is important to thin fruit from your trees at the appropriate time so that the remaining fruit will reach its maximum size and best flavor. Thinning fruit also lessens the chance of limb breakage.

Most stone fruit such as plums, peaches, nectarine and apricots, and pome fruit, such as apples, pears and Asian pears require thinning. The optimal time to thin the fruit is when it is fairly small. (3/4" to 1" in diameter for stone fruit and 1/2" to 1" in diameter for pome fruit.) The amount of fruit to be thinned depends on the species and the fruit load. For example small stone fruits such as apricot and plums should be thinned to about 2" to 4" apart on the branch, peaches and nectarines to about 3" to 5" apart on the branch.

If fruit load is light use the smaller number; if the tree has set a lot of fruit use the larger number. Pome fruit trees produce clusters of fruit; thin to no more than 1 or 2 fruit per cluster keeping the largest fruit in the cluster. With a heavy crop there should be at least 6" to 8" between clusters.

The best way to thin fruit is by hand. Firstly thin out small, disfigured or damaged fruit. If a long branch has fruit its entire length, thin more heavily and thin out fruit on the ends of the long terminal branch. Make sure the fruit on the tree is sufficiently thinned so that at maturity the fruit does not touch.