

Issue #34

Amador/El Dorado County Master Gardener E-News

October 2012

## Fuzzy Sunflowers & Compost

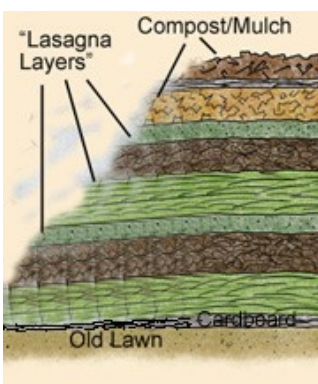
*Sarah Preiss-Farzanegan, El Dorado County Master Gardener*

El Dorado County Master Gardener Cindy Young's "fuzzy sunflowers" are a beautiful example of the benefits of using compost! There are several reasons in particular that compost is a helpful adjunct for growing just about anything. These are easier to appreciate once you understand exactly what compost is.



Simply put, compost is organic matter that has decomposed into nutrient-rich humus. The modern process of making compost entails the management of the proper ratio of carbon-to-nitrogen ingredients in a moist, aerated environment, to allow aerobic bacteria (bacteria that need oxygen to do their thing) to break down the organic matter into material that can then be recycled.

If you need "Compost in a Hurry," then you can find everything you need to know in Pam Geisel's UC publication #8037. The advantages of this method, which relies on the production of very high temperatures by bacteria, include the production of a valuable soil amendment that is ready to use in 2-3 weeks and many organisms that can cause disease in plants, insect eggs and weeds and weed seeds are killed by this process. For more information: (see link below<sup>1</sup>).



Cindy used a method in her sunflower bed called sheet mulching. In contrast to the method previously mentioned, sheet mulching, or lasagna composting, is a cold composting method that can be used to convert grass to vegetable beds, create or enlarge perennial borders, improve soil and soil structure and recycle materials at home. The technique literally sounds like you are making a compost lasagna: arranging alternate layers of carbon and nitrogen materials directly onto the soil you wish to amend. This method is a very easy way

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### Contact Your Local Master Gardener

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## Fuzzy Sunflowers & Compost, *Continued from page 1*

to compost using whatever materials that are handy and on whatever scale you need, large or small, to enlarge a current garden space or improve soil in an existing bed. The Master Gardeners of Oregon State University compiled a superb and concise description of sheet mulch composting (see link below<sup>2</sup>).

Still wondering what makes compost so great? Let me count the ways:

1. Saves water, holds moisture and reduces water runoff; recycles organic resources and conserves landfill space; reduces the need for other fertilizers.
2. Adds slow-release nutrients and beneficial microbes, improves plant growth.
3. Increases soil organic matter, encourages healthy root structure, helps balance pH and protect plants from drought and freezes.
4. Moderates soil temperature and decreases the use of petrochemical fertilizers.



What are some cool uses for compost?

- Mix compost into flower and vegetable beds to improve soil properties.
- Use as a mulch to deter weeds or top-dress your lawn.
- Use in or on potting mixtures for indoor and outdoor plants.



Many things are great to toss in a compost pile, including dried grass, shredded paper or newspaper, tea bags, fruit waste, citrus rinds and old potting mix. There are some things that should not be composted: dirt/soil, ashes, animal or dairy products, sawdust (from plywood or treated wood), diseased plants or seed-bearing weeds (to keep from propagating these in your garden) and manure or human waste (due to the disease-causing bacteria that could be present).

Check out these resources for more information about the composting methods mentioned above, and contact our MG office via email or telephone to speak with a Master Gardener if you have further questions about producing or using compost. We would love to hear from you your own success stories making or applying compost, especially photos of particularly interesting results!

<sup>1</sup> Geisel P, Unruh CL. Compost in a hurry. [UC ANR Publication #8037](#)

<sup>2</sup> Oregon State University Extension Service Lane County. [Sheet Mulch - Lasagna Composting](#)

<sup>3</sup> Geisel P, Seaver DC. Composting is good for your garden and the environment. [UC ANR Publication #8367](#)

**Do you  
want to be  
a  
Master  
Gardener?**

Amador County Master Gardeners will host new volunteer training in 2013. Any resident of Amador, Calaveras or El Dorado County may apply. Master Gardeners commit to donating at least 25 hours of volunteer and 12 hours of continuing education hours to their home county after completing their training and first year.

**Interested?** Sign our MG Training interest list at [http://ucanr.edu/be\\_mg](http://ucanr.edu/be_mg). We will contact you with details about our upcoming Orientation session where you will learn more details about the Master Gardener program.

## Experience an Olive Harvest to Learn about Olive Trees

*Have you considered planting an olive tree in your garden so you can cure and process your own olives?*

*Would you like to see examples of seven varieties of olive trees to help you decide what variety to plant?*

*Do you want to experience first hand how to harvest olives?*

*Are you curious about curing fresh olives?*

If you answered yes to any of these questions, we have the perfect event for you!

### Hundred Acre Olive Harvest Weekend



**What:** Participate in harvesting an olive orchard. You are welcome to come for an hour, or stay all day. Talk with the orchard owners as you pick and learn about growing olive trees.

**When:** Saturday, November 3, from 8 am until sunset and again on Sunday, November 4, until all the harvest has been picked. On Sunday, there will be a Master Food Preserver presentation on curing olives.

**Event Host:** [Hundred Acre Olive Oil](#), Plymouth

Please dress accordingly; we recommend layers. Bring gloves if you like, but it is not necessary. The fields are not level and gopher/mole holes are a given, so be sure to wear good, sturdy shoes. Kids are welcome but please be sure to keep an eye on them.

In exchange for your help and companionship, we will provide lunch, snacks, dinner and beverages of all sorts. Every tree is an opportunity to meet someone new as you pick.

Our trees were planted in 2006 and they spent two years in the pots. We have the following varieties: Arbequina, Frantoio, Mission, Pendolino, Manzanilla, and Leccino. There are also a few Kalamata trees, which produce HUGE olives and are perfect for curing and stuffing with all sorts of goodness.

If you intend to be a part of the harvest party, we kindly ask that you let us know so we will be sure to have enough food.

RSVP by email to [HundredAcreOliveOil@gmail.com](mailto:HundredAcreOliveOil@gmail.com) if you would like to participate in the olive harvest. Please let us know how many people plan to attend. We will forward the address information and directions at that time.

Visit the [California Backyard Orchard website](#) for great information about [growing olive trees](#).

[Download the free ANR Publication #8267, Olives: Safe Methods for Home Pickling.](#)

## Things I Learned From My Garden, Part 2

Sarah Preiss-Farzanegan, El Dorado County Master Gardener

In order to have any semblance of order and peace in the life of a family with small children, for that's all I can speak of well, things must be organized. Meals planned, work and school schedules aligned, parties and play dates arranged, work days efficient and timely. I can safely say that I am used to being in control. I am learning to lose control now and then, to leave dirty dishes in the sink or laundry hampers overflowing, so I don't completely lose myself in minutia. This past spring and summer, this lesson extended to my garden.

I love tomatoes! In salads, on salads, with balsamic vinegar (especially a really good Italian one), on sandwiches, in sauces; the list goes on and on. Despite my every effort this year, all I could produce was a basketful of decent tomatoes. Of all that I can control, I did. What I cannot control is the weather or the microclimate in my foothills yard. I was forced to submit to whims of nature that, this season, decided that I was not to have many tomatoes. Here is how it went:

I tilled and planned, selected my plants and seeds with care.  
I dug and planted, erected stakes and supports to guide.  
I watered and waited and waited.

The first leaves produced celebratory excitement. And aphids.  
Forced evacuation and organic spray banished them.  
And still I waited.

I fed them with nutrients, N, K and P.  
I encouraged them and then scolded them.  
Where are my tomatoes?

One warm day, the growth took off!  
Leafy green, towering plants brought cheers and anticipation.  
And scrutiny for even the smallest blossom of fruit.

Squash, herbs, flowers and strawberries flourished.  
Green, green cucumbers everywhere, yet not a tomato to eat.  
I trimmed and trained, guarded and defended.

Finally resigned and enjoyed the rest.  
A tomato year this was not meant to be.  
Nature is in charge.

[Sigh]. Once I got over my disappointment, I realized that there was no mutiny on behalf of my beloved tomatoes. Everything I did for them was done with love and had nature been more cooperative, they would have willingly prospered. Hence, here is another lesson I have learned from my garden: I cannot control everything. Nature does indeed take its course and instead of wasting energy fighting or mourning this fact, I need to sit back in my Adirondack chair and enjoy the view of what nature has bestowed upon me and celebrate that gift. I hope you will do the same and enjoy the view!



## Winterize Your Garden

Sue McDavid, El Dorado County Master Gardener

Now that cooler weather is starting to arrive, it's the perfect time to start getting your garden ready for winter.

Pulling out all the spent annuals that are no longer blooming should be the first order of business. Then, start grooming those shabby-looking herbaceous perennials that are no longer blooming by pruning them to within 4 inches or so of the ground. This includes such things as Shasta Daisy, Coreopsis, Salvia, Lamb's Ears, Geranium (the true Geranium whose common name is Cranesbill), Hosta, Coral Bells, Santa Barbara Daisy and the like; they will start their re-growth come spring-time. Place all plant prunings in your compost pile, unless you had problems with any plant diseases.



Shrubby perennials such as Lavender and Santolina should only be lightly pruned by about 50%; never cut back into bare wood on these. Hydrangeas bloom on the last season's growth, so these should have been pruned and shaped after the flowers in summer faded. Just trim off the dried blooms now, but don't do any drastic cutting of stems on your Hydrangeas now - you will sacrifice next season's flowers if you do.



For large, deciduous trees, delay any pruning of live limbs until after they go completely dormant. (You can remove dead or broken limbs any time of the year.) You'll be busy enough raking up all their fallen leaves or, better yet, leave them as a natural mulch. Evergreen trees, if planted in the right location, should need little, if any, pruning except for a minimal amount of shaping.

After raking and cleaning up all the plant debris, it's time to amend the soil. Remember, good plants come from good soil, so spend the time

now to put down a 3-4 inch layer of organic material such as compost. Adding organic amendments every year will increase your soil's ability to hold air, water and nutrients, which will lead to stronger, healthier plants that resist disease and insect attacks. The rains throughout winter will leach this material slowly into the soil, increasing earthworm and beneficial microbe activity. Do not apply any fertilizers around plants this time of year; wait until spring when re-growth begins.

While you're in the garden cleaning things up, take the time to note which plants thrived in which location and those that didn't do so well and update your garden journal. This will help you next spring when you are planting new perennials or rearranging old ones.

Once your garden is ready for winter, come inside, sit by the fire and start dreaming of all the new things you'll want to order when those plant and seed catalogs start arriving in the mail this winter.



## More Fall Chores to do before it freezes



Wrap young trees. Bark warms up during daylight hours and freezes at night causing sun scald. Start at the bottom of the tree and wrap to the lowest branches.

Take care of pets, livestock, and chickens. Cats seek warmth on car engines during coldest days and nights of fall. Bang on the hood before starting your car. Clean up antifreeze puddles as dogs and cats love the taste of this poison. Provide shelter, feed and thawed water for all pets and livestock. Don't seal your chicken coop airtight but add a heat lamp to keep chickens and water from freezing. Check your pets and livestock every morning and night.



Wrap and secure insulation to wells and water lines.

Save perennial seeds. Tie small parachute of cheesecloth beneath flowers. Spread the seeds on a screen and dry them in the sun for a week. Store in cold, dry place, such as a freezer or garage.

## Pruning Fruit Trees

Late summer/early fall is a great time to prune your fruit trees. Prune immediately after you harvest the fruit. On overgrown or derelict trees which haven't been pruned for a number of years, reduce up to three large limbs per year, to your wanted height.

Don't prune apricot or cherry trees at this time. Summer is the best time to prune apricot and cherry trees. They are susceptible to Eutypa dieback which kills branches. Infection occurs on wounds made during wet weather. Allow six weeks of dry weather after pruning apricot or cherry trees. (Not now.)

Winter pruning takes place after most of the leaves have fallen, which gives you a clear view of the framework of the tree. Winter is a great time to remove crowded and unwanted branches. Winter pruning stimulates tree growth in spring.

When pruning fruit trees it is not a good idea to apply emulsions or paint to the pruning cuts as they trap moisture in which can lead to disease. Leave them to dry out and callus naturally.



## What's Happening at the Master Gardener Office Gardens?

*During the past year the Master Gardeners in both the Amador and El Dorado County offices practiced what they preached and brought new life to the small gardens outside of their offices. Stop by to see what they've done to their gardens. You may get some ideas of your own. The gardens may cause you to ask questions about your own garden. And you may just enjoy looking at the plants!*

### In Amador County

Jackie Tarchala, Amador County Master Gardener

Two years ago the large planter in front of the General Services building that houses the Master Gardener office was a bare plot of soil with a tree at the far end. Last year the Master Gardeners installed a drip system, spread a load of compost, and planted small plants. Those plants thrived, providing color and beauty.



What you will find there:

Buddleja 'Buzz Violet' (Butterfly Bush)	Sedum 'Angelina'
Sedum 'Cape Blanco'	Sempervivum
Sedum 'Blue Spruce'	Delosperma nubigenum
Jovibarba 'Snow Ball'	Ceanothus
Bulbine frutescens	Helitotrichon sempervirens (Blue Oat Grass)
Cercis (Redbud)	Chrysanthemum hosmariense (Evergreen Chrysanthemum)

Gardens always have weeds but in our garden, it's not too bad, one here and there. Mulch really keeps them down. I did see what looked like Burmuda grass starting up front by the chrysanthemum. By getting it out now, we can keep it down.

Normally buddleia go dormant in the winter and that's when you cut them back. Last year our long blooming buddies never took a rest. This year we cut them to the ground as they are really out of control. (They were supposed to stay small!) There are four of them. Last spring I cut back the one that's closest to the office doors and it will remain unpruned until the others recover. They will recover in no time.

The way to refresh the Blue Oat Grass is to "comb" out the dead leaves. I do this with my hands but you could use a very large comb if you have one. Ours seem to have a watering issue. They might be getting too much water but my guess is they're not getting enough. (It's time to check out the irrigation system.) I will cut them as close to the ground as possible and with the proper water they should recover. If not, we will have to replace them.

We'll remove any of the old blossoms or dried stems on the Chrysanthemum, Sedum 'Cape Blanco' and the Sedum 'Angelina', removing all the dried parts. The Sempervivum are finishing flowering now so we'll leave them until they are dried. Next month we'll consider dividing them. When the Cercis goes dormant we will prune it and thin the branches.

Doing just these few things will keep our garden looking good.

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## What's Happening at the Master Gardener Office Gardens, *Continued from page 7* In El Dorado County

Joan Jenkins, El Dorado County Master Gardener

Just as it may happen at your home, the small garden in front of the El Dorado MG office “all of a sudden” was overgrown and a tangled mess. You can walk by something every day and think to yourself that you need to take a couple of minutes and clean out that garden. Before you know it, it’s time to rip out most of the stuff out and start fresh. That’s what a team of volunteers did to the small garden at the entrance to the Master Gardener Office last spring. The hardworking Master Gardeners pruned the overgrown bushes and tree, pulled and cut back most of the plants, amended the soil, tested the irrigation system, then added mulch to help keep the weeds out and the water in. The garden is now in a maintenance stage. Volunteers perform monthly upkeep to keep it from getting out of control.

Recently the following tasks were completed:

- Cleaned-up litter and leaf debris
- Pulled weeds
- Dead-headed old blooms from the viola, buddleia and clematis
- Cut back the buddleja (butterfly bush) to encourage more blooms into fall
- Planted additional violas (yellow and blue) for added color this fall and winter

Next month will probably see many of the tasks repeated to keep the garden in good condition. Stop by to see what’s been done and enjoy the refreshed garden. Each of the plants has an ID tag so if you like what you see growing, jot down the name and pick up a plant at your local nursery or at the next MG plant sale.



*El Dorado MG Office Garden: Before*



*El Dorado MG Office Garden: After!*



## Start Now to Force Bulbs for Holiday Bloom

Kathy Ruiz, El Dorado County Master Gardener



*Paperwhite narcissus*

If you want bulbs blooming for an indoor arrangement for the holidays or want to give one as a holiday gift, now's the time to plan and start the "forcing" process. In their dormant state bulbs hold the promise of developing into blooming plants. The process gets its name by manipulating or "forcing" the bulb into flowering before it normally would in the outdoor garden. The process is easy and it's amazing how beautiful flowers sprout from a small dormant mass.

You can force many types of bulbs, but most of these need to be chilled for a period of between 12 and 20 weeks at about 40°F before they will be forced into bloom.

Two of the best bulbs for forcing are paperwhite narcissus and amaryllis. These bulbs do not require a pre-chilling period. Amaryllis will bloom 6 to 8 weeks after planting in a container and paperwhite narcissus will bloom even earlier, usually in 3 to 5 weeks after planting.

Paperwhite narcissus can be planted in glass containers with just pebbles and water. The container needs to be about three to four inches deep. Nestle the bulbs deep enough in the pebbles so that they will be able to support the growing leaves and flower stems, then water just enough so that the bases of the bulbs are wet. Keep them in a cool, dark place until roots and shoots develop. Then, move them to a sunny location.

Amaryllis should be planted in light potting mix in a shallow container that is no more than two inches deeper than the bulb's diameter. Plant amaryllis so that only the bottom half of the bulb is in the potting mix, leaving the top half exposed. Water thoroughly but then allow the bulb to dry out.



*Amaryllis bulb*

Once the flower stalk appears, water lightly and regularly, but never let the planting mix get soggy. Keep this bulb in a sunny location until it starts to flower, then move it to an area where it will receive bright light but not direct sunlight. After it has bloomed and has been enjoyed indoors, cut off the spent flower stalk. As the weather warms, transplant the bulb and foliage to a sunny spot in your garden. Amaryllis can be made to bloom again indoors by bringing it inside again before the first frost. When you bring the amaryllis bulb inside, allow it to go dormant by keeping it in a dark place, withholding water and letting the foliage die back. After about 8 weeks the bulb should start to repeat its cycle by growing new shoots. Begin watering the container again and move it to a sunny location. Amaryllis bulbs will bloom annually for years. As the bulb increases in size repot it in a slightly larger container.



*Amaryllis in bloom*

Paperwhites can also be planted in potting soil. Choose a container that has drain holes and is at least as deep as twice the diameter of the bulbs. Fill the container about three quarters full with regular potting soil. Position the bulbs, pointed ends up, on the soil and cover with more soil. Contrary to instructions for planting bulbs in the garden, bulbs that are being forced do not need to be widely spaced, in fact, plant

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**Start Now to Force Bulbs for Holiday Bloom, Continued from page 9**

them closely in the container for a massing effect. Water the container well and store it in a dark, cool place. Watch for signs of rooting (roots emerging from the container’s drain holes) and small yellow shoots. When this occurs move the container to a warmer location with indirect light. Once the shoots turn green, move the plants to a bright location. Water the containers only when the top of the soil is dry to the touch. Enjoy the beautiful and fragrant blossoms.



The blooms of forced bulbs generally do not last as long as ones maturing outdoors in your garden. Higher indoor temperatures may be responsible for causing the plants to mature faster. You may want to move the plants to a cooler location in your home at night. To ensure you have a succession of blooming bulbs, start containers with bulbs at two week intervals. Forcing is hard on bulbs and most forced bulbs are discarded after blooming.

Check nurseries and big box stores now for the best selection of bulbs. Ones that are most suitable for forcing will be labeled as such. Pick bulbs that are firm and undamaged. Forcing bulbs is a great way to keep flowering plants in your home all winter long.

**Artichokes**

*Dennis Miller, Amador County Master Gardener*

Now is the time to divide or transplant artichokes. Plants need to be well rooted and of reasonable size before cold winter temperatures arrive.

Artichoke plant selection for the inland valleys and foothills include:



**Imperial Star** (annual or perennial)



**Emerald** (annual or perennial)

*Note: Green Globe is not recommended for this area.*



**Early Globe Violetto** (perennial)

Plant in full sun, 4-6 feet apart. Loose, well drained soil in a raised bed lined with hardware cloth on the bottom is ideal. Fertilize in early spring and deep root water once a week.

A mature plant will produce 10 or more stems. Each stem will produce 4-5 buds. Harvest when buds are plump and tight. I prefer to pick them when they are about the size of your fist. At 2600 feet, my Violetto’s produced about 40 artichokes per plant in late May.

**Note: Hot temperatures make artichokes tough.** For our hot, dry summers, plant artichokes in partial shade.





## Public Education Classes & Events for Amador and El Dorado Counties – Free!!



Most classes are from 9 a.m. – Noon. Please call ahead to confirm locations.

### Amador County

Unless otherwise noted, location for all Amador classes: GSA Building, 12200-B Airport Road, Jackson.

#### October

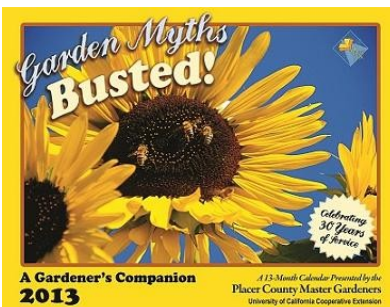
##### 13: Fall in the Garden

Fall is a wonderful time to work in your yard at a more relaxed pace than the hectic summer season that just ended. At this class the Master Gardeners will suggest what to plant now, giving recommendations for plants with beautiful fall color. Now is the time to clean up your vegetable garden and prepare it for spring or winter plants so you can grow strong, healthy plants next year. See how to dig and divide spring bulbs and hardy perennials to either expand your garden or to share with others. You'll also learn how to properly clean and store your yard equipment and tools so they'll be ready to use next spring.

### 2013 Master Gardener Calendars

Perfect as a gift for a fellow gardener, Placer County Master Gardeners' 2013 Gardener's Companion calendars are for sale at the Amador and El Dorado County UC Cooperative Extension offices for \$10.

You can also purchase them at our classes while supplies last. You can also purchase calendars online with a credit card at [http://ucanr.org/sites/ucmgplacer/2013\\_Calendar](http://ucanr.org/sites/ucmgplacer/2013_Calendar).



This calendar is suitable for climate zones from the Central Valley to the foothills.

### El Dorado County

Unless otherwise noted, location for all El Dorado classes: Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville. Questions? Call 503-621-5512.

#### October

##### 6: Succulents

Learn what succulents are and why add them to your garden. Master Gardeners Joanne Geggatt and Bobbie Handen will cover those questions and give you ideas about how to design a succulent garden. Techniques for caring for succulents will also be covered. Enjoy these wonderful and weird plants in your garden.

##### 13: Propagation II

Different methods of plant propagation will be discussed by MG Gail Fulbeck. She will discuss how, when and under what conditions seeds should be germinated, perennials should be divided and cuttings should be taken and rooted.

##### 20: Composting

Learn to create a healthy natural environment in your garden. Master Gardener Thorne Barrager will teach you how to be productive at composting.

##### 27: African Violets

Now is the time most gardeners move indoors, but still want to continue growing things. Join Master Gardener Julianne Melchor for a presentation on how to plant and care for the many varieties of African Violets and other house plant selections.

[Check out the El Dorado Master Gardener Facebook page.](#)



*Note: all November and December MG classes in El Dorado County will be at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, in Placerville.*



## October Master Food Preserver Classes



### El Dorado County

The El Dorado County Master Food Preservers lead their final classes for the 2012 during October. All classes in during October are taught at the Marshall Grange in Garden Valley.

[Click here to download the full class schedule.](#) No rsvp needed.

#### October

Tuesdays, 10-Noon, Marshall Grange, Garden Valley



- 2: Apples, Pears & More
- 9: Cranberries, Winter Squash & Turkey
- 16: Olives
- 23: [Persimmons, Kiwi & Nuts](#)

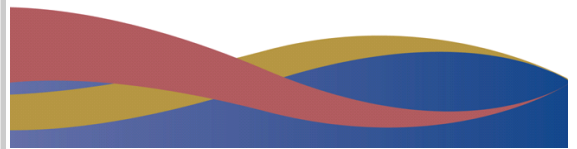
### Amador/Calaveras County

No reservations required.

October 20, 10-Noon

GSA Building, 12200-B Airport Rd, Jackson  
[Condiments, Vinegars & Pickled Peppers](#)

The holidays are on our doorstep and vinegars, condiments and pickled foods are wonderful on our holiday tables. They also make great gifts! Learn to make flavored vinegars, mustards and pickled peppers as well as many other fun recipes.



### Pest Notes

Free Pest Notes are available on a variety of topics. For more information, call or email your local Master Gardener office.



To explore the Pest Notes on the UC Integrated Pest Management (IPM) website, go to <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu>.

Amador & El Dorado Counties Master Gardener Newsletter  
Editor: Linda Hagye  
Layout Editor: Kim Cohen

Not on our e-newsletter distribution list yet? Know someone who would like to receive our newsletters and notifications on classes and events? Sign up online at <http://ucanr.org/mgenews>.

### Amador County Backyard Beekeepers

Wednesday, November 7, 6-8pm

The Amador County Backyard Beekeepers will host an open forum meeting to answer questions on summer losses and how to prepare hives for the winter in the Sierra Foothills.

The meeting will be in the large conf. room at 12200-B Airport Rd, Martel, CA.

For more information about this meeting, Contact Larry Jones at 209-267-5674 or [buckjones@suttercreek.com](mailto:buckjones@suttercreek.com).



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Should you need assistance or require special accommodations for any of our educational programs, please contact us at 530-621-5502.