



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Mother Earth, Rosie and Spireas (October 6, 2018)

by Susan Franciskovich, UCCE Master Gardener

Before sharing information about ever-faithful and easy to grow spireas, I ask for your indulgence and invite you to contemplate the approaching season's change, considering all the while the homage which Mother Earth deserves in our gardening psyches. I especially invite new and non-gardeners to read along, even if you don't know a peony from a marigold. Gardening is not an "exclusive" adventure, meant only for seasoned green thumbs. This might be the time to consider giving gardening a try. Just remember starting a garden takes time; the best gardens emerge over several seasons. "Adopt the pace of Nature. Her secret is patience." (R.W.Emerson)



Fall is a welcome time to think about what to plant next season. It's a time to consider the fullness of summer in your garden and how things did or didn't survive, maintain or flourish. For me, a summer highlight was our bumper crop from two backyard peach trees, an Elberta and a Nectar. The not-so-fun part of that particular highlight was doing battle with our 12-year-old Golden Retriever, Rosie, who is very passionate about most things in her life, especially playing and digging up new plantings. She is definitely passionate about peaches. Even though we worry that she can barely move her aging hips, Rosie is still very stealthy and skilled at jumping up high enough to snag the choicest lower hanging fruit, especially the plump and sweet white Nectar peaches. Our doggie barricade efforts are no match for Rosie's perseverance.

With Rosie's peach passion leading my thinking and also remembering the lessons from the best gardeners I know, I was reminded, once again, to not take my gardening too seriously. Of course, I am a diligent steward of my garden, watering, weeding, feeding, nurturing through drought, researching, and yes, often fretting. But, when I fully accept Mother Earth's dominant role in my garden (as well as the role of one of her beloved four-legged peach-loving creatures), I begin to relax into the joy of gardening

In refreshing or developing your own personal gardening approach, remember that plants thrive and spread when they are happy and nurtured. Also, remember that perfection is no fun. Don't worry if the neighbor's grass is greener. It always will be. Gardening is not a competitive sport. And, by the way, those mysterious botanical names will come naturally later. For now, your plants will grow just fine if you call them Pete and Gracie.

Armed with a positive attitude, it's time for some practical information about spireas. There are nearly 100 varieties of the genus *Spiraea*. (simply pronounced spy-ree-ah). If spireas have always made you yawn in the past, it might be time to give them another chance.



Photo by Ray Maleike

They have made a much-deserved comeback in these challenging times of drought punished soil and hungry pests. No matter how you treat spireas, they seem to survive and even thrive. From our broiling hot valley day time temperatures to our sometimes freezing cold winter nights, spireas can survive as sturdy garden workhorses. They are mostly free of insects or disease, grow robustly in full sun to partial shade and don't need feeding. Spirea foliage most always look good. These shrubs are versatile and great companions in any flower bed.

The well-known classic Vanhoutte spirea (*Spiraea x vanhoutei*), a bridal wreath variety, can reach heights of 6 feet tall by 8 feet wide. Its clusters of white flowers grow cascade-like in spring and early summer and are quite showy. If spent flowers are removed, spireas will produce a second but less dramatic bloom. The dark green diamond shaped leaves may turn purplish in the fall. Once the season is over, the flower producing wood can be cut to the ground ready to reappear, and, voila, in spring the bridal wreath extravaganza reappears. If gardeners like bluish-green leafed shrubs, a good choice from the bridal wreath spirea variety is Thunberg spirea (*Spiraea thunbergii*).

Unlike bridal wreath varieties, shrubby spirea plants (usually grow to 4 to ft. tall) bloom summer through fall in a variety of colors: white, pink or red. No matter what color the flowers are, bees and butterflies will be drawn to them. An attractive California native, Douglas spirea (*Spiraea douglasii*) is a nonstop summer blooming showstopper with long clusters of purplish-pink flowers. Japanese spirea (*Spiraea japonica*) bursts with flat clusters of pink spring flowers from summer to fall. For vibrant golden foliage in spring (cooling to a yellowish-green in summer) with pink flowers, try Goldmound spirea (*Spiraea japonica* 'Goldmound'), or Limemound Spirea

(*Spiraea x bumalda* 'Monhub'.) There is a wide range of popular cultivars: 'Waterer', 'Goldflame', 'Little Princess', 'Magic Carpet' and more. Check local nurseries for available spirea varieties to plant in fall or spring.

For long-lasting flowers, clean foliage and good fall color, give spireas a try. Also, go easy if you are taking your gardening too seriously and not enjoying it. The seriousness belongs to the full acceptance of the reign of Mother Earth over all growing things we gardeners being the able stewards. And, if you beginners need a reason to try gardening, Mother Earth could use many more stewards.

Where can the UCCE Master Gardeners be found this month?

- Visit us at the Visalia Farmers Market at the Sear's Parking lot on Mooney on the 2nd Saturday of the month, we will be presenting ongoing talks.
 - Lowe's, 1955 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, Plant Clinic, October 6th, 10-1pm.
 - Luis's Nursery, 139 S. Mariposa Ave @ Caldwell, Visalia, Plant Clinic, October 20th, 10-1pm.
 - Greenfield Garden Workshops – Hanford, October 20th, 2:00pm – Growing and Using Herbs. Greenfield Avenue, just east of the Kerr Outpatient Center, north of Lacey Blvd.
 - You can find us each Saturday at Visalia's Farmer's Market in Sears Parking lot, 8am until 11am.
 - Food Day @ Foodlink, 611 2nd Str., Exeter, October 27th, 10 am – 1pm.

We love to talk plants. Come ask us your gardening questions!

For answers to all your home gardening questions, call the Master Gardeners in Tulare County at (559) 684-3325, Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:30 and 11:30 am; or Kings County at (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m.; or 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/