



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

December Garden Tips 2018 (December 1, 2018)

by Peyton Ellas, UCCE Master Gardener

December is a busy Holiday month, so gardening may not be on top of our minds. The cool weather means everything is slowing down, so many chores can be put off until January. There *are* a few opportunities, however, to get out and work in the garden at least a few times this month.

PLANTING: It's possible to plant in December, but you may not see any new growth until the weather warms. That's a good thing, since new growth is more susceptible to frost damage. Be sure and mulch to protect roots and crowns from frost, and be ready to do frost protection on new plants in addition to any established plants that are frost-tender. We can also begin bare-root planting this month of fruit trees and roses. Finally, it is the season to finish planting spring-blooming bulbs.

For some instant color to brighten a dull winter day, try snapdragon, calendula, flowering kale, sweet pea, stock, and viola. I generally shop at nurseries in December for chrysanthemums on clearance sale.

In the edible garden, plant artichoke, garlic, lettuce, parsley, radish, spinach and rhubarb roots. Be sure and protect these winter vegetables from rabbits, sparrows, and chewing insects that may be periodically active. You can still plant Asian greens and green onions and many other cool-season vegetables, especially if we have a few weeks of warm weather to get the seeds germinated.



Although we don't plant them in December, we purchase a lot of poinsettias this month. Try not to leave them in your car while shopping. Bring them into your house soon after purchasing and place near a sunny window. To keep your plant blooming, maintain a temperature above 65 degrees, keep them away from cold drafts and don't allow the leaves to touch a cold window. Water when the soil is dry. Heaters can lead to dry air, so our poinsettias might dry out quickly. Plan on checking daily. While many people believe that the poinsettia plant is poisonous, this is not true, although it is not recommended to eat them.

MAINTAINING: Spray stone fruit, apple, pear, nut trees, flowering trees and roses with dormant oil spray to smother over-wintering aphids, whitefly and scale. Add copper fungicide if you had peach leaf curl in the warm months. Only use pesticides if you need them. Don't fertilize dormant or deciduous trees and shrubs. Unused chemicals often get washed into the water supply, which is an increasing problem throughout California.

Keep up with removing cool season weeds, either using a selective or non-selective pre-emergent herbicide. Read the directions carefully because there are plants that you don't want to use herbicides around. Or cultivate lightly but frequently to remove germinating seedlings. It's too late in the year to cover with clear plastic (solarization), but you can pile on more mulch, which helps reduce weeds, reduces evaporation, and insulates the soil.

You can prune deciduous shrubs and trees. Don't prune any plants that bloom in the spring; wait until after they bloom next year. Finish up removing dead branches from perennials, and you can deadhead and remove the leaves from roses to force them into dormancy and help get them ready for pruning next month.

CONSERVING: Time to hang and keep filled the bird feeders! And don't forget the water. Small creeks as part of a water garden design, mister-style sprinklers, or a bird bath with fresh water are all popular with our wild bird friends. Examine the high branches of large trees for bird nests and avoid pruning that tree if hawks or other birds are nesting, unless safety is an issue. We can also hang bird houses and bee nesting boxes in anticipation of spring, if they are in a location that is protected from wind and severe storms. It's also okay to wait until next month.

If you haven't already done so, cut the flowers off tropical and other non-native milkweed varieties. These are the ones with orange flowers. The Monarchs that stick around because of a ready food source will not survive the cold winter; they need to migrate south.

On the other hand, we have so many hummingbirds that do not migrate, it is okay to continue to provide them with hummingbird-feeder food through the winter.

As leaves continue to fall, consider using disease-and-weed-free leaves for compost or even mulch. Plants love mulch made from their own material; it helps create the proper mix of microorganisms, PH and texture. Especially in back yard beds and on large rural properties, try to leave a few things up to nature; this is good for the garden and is easier too!



Happy holidays!

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) 852-3325. Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:30 and 11:30am; or in Kings County at (559) 852-2736, Thursdays only, 9:30-11:30am; 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_Gardeneers/

The UCCE Master Gardeners will be available to answer your gardening questions at the following venues in:

You can find us each Saturday at Visalia's Farmer's Market in Sears Parking lot, 8am until 11am.

Please mark your calendar!! We will be sharing our annual Rose Pruning Demonstrations at Tulare County Courthouse Rose Garden and the Ralph Moore Public Rose Garden from 11-2pm., January 19th, Visalia.

Grangeville Rose Gardens January 21st, from 11-2pm. Hanford.