



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Garden Tips for February 2019 (February 2, 2019)

by Peyton Ellas, UCCE Master Gardener

Historically February is much like January, with cold nights and cool days, two-to-three inches of rain and the possibility of frost and fog throughout the month. If it's a dry month, we will need to provide some water to our trees and newly-planted shrubs and perennials to keep fine roots from drying out. But don't over water; if fog or mist keeps the ground moist, even without actual rain, we probably won't need to water. Cold soils don't encourage much growth and we don't want roots to rot. If you're curious, put on your scientist hat and dig down to root depth of a few inches to a foot or more (away from plants to not damage roots) and observe directly what's going on.

Even with the cold air and soil, there are a few things we can do to stay active in the garden. I love working out in the garden in February. The hills are green, and bundled up, I'm ready to spend several hours pruning, planting, mulching and planning spring improvements.

PLANTING: Finish purchasing and planting bare-root fruit trees, berries, grapes, kiwis, roses, clematis, forsythia, lilac and flowering quince. Most of these are high-water-use plants, so create a zone just for these types, preferably a small zone compared to the larger zones of moderate, low and very low water-use.

Dig your hole twice as wide, but just as deep, as the root ball. Plant high, even with the crown an inch or more above the soil level. Water to settle the soil, and then add a thick layer of mulch to retain moisture and protect the crown and roots from frost. Even dormant plants can be damaged by frost, so mulch of some kind is quite important for winter planting.



If you plant a tree that came with a nursery stake, remove this stake when planting. If you must stake, do it loosely with bamboo or lodge poles and tree wraps so the tree trunk can bend with the breeze. Try not to leave the tree staked for longer than a year so the trunk can gain its own strength.

Continue or begin to plant seeds for heat lovers like tomatoes, basil, eggplant, peppers, and tomatillos. These seeds need both heat and abundant light to germinate and grow into strong seedlings, so a greenhouse, even a temporary one, and a heat mat are helpful. Chard, lettuce, peas, radishes and Asian greens can be seeded directly into the garden, and seed potatoes can be planted too. You can continue to plant onions and garlic and, if it warms up a little towards the end of the month, get a start on edible and non-edible "sweat" peas. Plant bulbs, corms and tubers like Gladiolus, Zephyranthes (fairy lily), Dahlia, Dianthus, Heuchera (coral bells).

MAINTAINING: Continue or begin pruning deciduous shrubs and trees, including fruit trees and roses, but don't fertilize them until March. Towards the end of the month, you can also cut back by about a third or more geraniums, hydrangeas and ornamental grasses. Don't prune spring-blooming shrubs such as Eastern lilac and many California native plants; instead, wait until after they bloom before pruning them. Leave frost-damaged growth on tender plants as protection until danger of frost is past, at least until the end of the month. A good rule of thumb is to begin pruning as new growth appears. It's better to wait than to prune too early and damage your plant. Frost damage often doesn't have consequences until summer. Don't prune frost-sensitive plants like citrus at all until after frost-danger, mid-March.

Weeds can be placed in your compost pile if there are no seed heads. Cover your ornamental garden with at least three inches of mulch to help reduce weeds. Harvest and top dress with compost from your bin. If you don't have a compost bin, February is a good month to build one or purchase and start one. If you don't even have room for a small bin, try a worm-composting system, which can even fit on a balcony or small patio. Compost is a balanced, healthy amendment for all plants, indoors and out, and compost "tea" is a gentle balanced fertilizer for seedlings and mature plants alike.

Apply a dormant spray to fruit trees before the buds swell. Products containing copper are used to control some diseases, like peach leaf curl. Products containing oil kill insects and their eggs that over-winter in the cracks and crevices of the tree. Choose a calm day with no imminent rain in the forecast and exactly follow the directions on the container.

Pick up fallen Camellia blossoms and discard to prevent flower bud infection, which leaves ugly brown blotches on the blossoms.

Snails, slugs, aphids, white fly and earwigs may all be a problem this month, depending on the weather. Be ready to hand pick or use no-chemical traps when you can; spray leaves with water for chewing insects and use the least toxic pesticide that solves the problem. Non-selective pesticides also harm beneficial insects, so only use them as a last resort. This includes many powders and sprays, so read the label and choose your insecticide with intention.



CONSERVING: Using the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) system above is a good step to helping our beleaguered wildlife. As your planning your spring garden, choose plants that support pollinating insects like native bees. Construct or purchase a bee-nesting box to encourage solitary-cavity-nesting bees. It's fine to use hummingbird feeders, but don't forget to also provide them with natural, plant-based nectar. And don't forget the water source!

Many things that help create a wildlife habitat in your urban, suburban or rural garden is to allow a little nature to occur. If you can do it, allow a small (or large!) space that is managed, maintained, but not overly pruned, sprayed, blown clean, and sterile. The more we, as gardeners, can show others how to have an under-control but natural garden that improves our planet, the more we will help everyone on our block and in our town have great California gardens. Let us know how we can help!

Groundhog Day Winter Festival at the Master Gardeners Demo Garden at Hurley Elementary School, Feb. 2nd from 11-1. Learn about growing winter vegetables, hands-on irrigation for your yard, fruit tree pruning demos, children's groundhog activity, and your gardening questions answered. Bring the entire family and your neighbors!

Children's Storybook Garden & Museum: Bill Hofmans from Hofmans' Nursery will be providing a hands-on fruit tree pruning demonstration. Master Gardeners will provide an info booth with general gardening information and will also help educate the public and garden/museum volunteers on proper pruning techniques. 175 E. 10th St., Hanford, CA, 93230 10:00 - 2:00

See you at the Visalia Home & Garden Springfest 2-8/9/10, 11-6pm. Once again, we'll be in the Garden Center at the Marriott attached to the Convention Center. We will be talking growing edibles! Yum.

We'll also be at the World Ag Expo with our handy information booth! Feb 12-14th.
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 11:30am; 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_Gardeners/

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.