



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Garden Tips for February 2020 (February 8, 2020)

by Peyton Ellas, UCCE Master Gardener



In the middle of winter, a blooming plant for the home, office or garden makes a festive Valentine's or "just because" gift. How about a gift on Groundhog Day, February 2? Remember, for a short winter, we actually want clouds and gloomy weather on Groundhog Day! Wait out rainy days by planning the garden year ahead and shopping online or in print catalogs for seeds. On dry days, we are harvesting oranges, pomelo, limes, kale and Asian greens, radish, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, avocado, beet, lettuce and spinach.

PLANTING: Bare root fruit trees, berries, grapes, kiwis, and roses can still be purchased and planted this month. You can plant most rooted (container) plants if a hard freeze is not expected in the week ahead. When planting in winter, it's especially helpful to have the mulch ready to tuck up around the plant wherever the soil has been disturbed. This helps to protect the roots from freezing temperatures. If you don't have wood mulch, use pest-free leaves or even straw as a mulch. Straw or old hay is especially good in the edible garden since it will decompose over time and become a useful soil conditioner. Edibles to plant in February directly into the ground include asparagus, chives, cilantro, leek, green onion, parsley, Irish potatoes, English peas, radish, cabbage plants, spinach, kale, strawberry, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussel sprouts and beet plants. Start from seed the following: onions (for setting out in April), tomato, peppers, basil, eggplant, tomatillo. For food safety, only use farm animal manure that has been aged for at least a year. If you use manure in the garden, leave that bed fallow for a year. In the flower garden, February is the month to plant canna, dahlia, gladiolus, Liliium, Zephyranthes (fairy lily), Heuchera, Plumbago, Campanula (bellflower), poppies, Limonium (statice) and Lobularia (alyssum.) You can also sneak in a last sowing of California native wildflowers but be prepared to hand-water if rains don't keep the soil moist enough, and to be vigilant in weeding to keep the weeds from shading your flower seedlings. Annual weeds generally grow faster than desirable wildflowers!

As always, when planting trees, shrubs and perennials, plant in a hole that is twice as wide as the container, but only as deep as the container soil level, or even plant a little higher. The worst thing you can do with many of today's modern low-water-use plants is to plant them in what will become an inverted pyramid once the soil settles.



MAINTAINING: Be on the lookout for snails and slugs. Use an iron-phosphate-based snail bait or just hand pick and toss somewhere the birds can have a feed. I've noticed that unfortunately even the earwigs are coming out on warmer winter days. Diatomaceous earth (DT) or traps can control earwigs before they become a huge problem. Opaque bottles placed sideways in the garden bed, small tins with oil or stale beer, or rolled newspapers or cardboard tubes can all be traps for earwigs, slugs and snails.

Weeds give us an ever-ready opportunity for a little garden therapy. Pull or hoe when they are small. It's already weed-eating time for many areas. Try to get to weeds before they set seeds and if you have a limited time, go for the worst invasives like non-native thistle and mallow. As spurge emerges, try to rid your garden of as much of this weed as possible to help reduce ant populations as the weather warms.

Pruning can be done on berries, grapes, deciduous fruit trees and roses if they are still looking dormant, which means no bud break and no sap flowing. In my pruning this winter, some of the fruit trees have never gone fully dormant so I've just pruned lightly and when frost was not expected. Do not prune camellias, forsythia, Eastern lilac, California lilac, California native sage, coyote mint, penstemon, quince and other spring-flowering shrubs or trees until they finish blooming. Do not prune frost-damaged plants until new growth begins in the spring. I know the brown foliage is not attractive but pruning away that cover exposes new growth and the crown to late season frosts. After pruning fruit trees, apply a dormant spray before the buds swell but when the air temperatures are at least 45 degrees Fahrenheit. 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 follow the directions on the container exactly.

Camellias are blooming now. Pick up fallen blossoms and discard to prevent flower bud infection which leaves ugly brown blotches on the blossoms. If you still have cool season lawn such as fescue, late in the month is the time to fertilize. Late in the month can also be the right time to fertilize deciduous fruit trees. Do not fertilize citrus or avocados yet.



CONSERVING: This is the month your pollinator nesting boxes should see action. Make sure earwigs and spiders are not lurking to predate those baby bees and larva. In the modern California garden, we use synthetic chemicals only as needed. Sometimes they are, but we use Integrated Pest Management to work with a least toxic first ladder. The UC IPM website has pest notes for just about everything and gives the latest expert recommendations on effective and safe methods, so make use of this free service, as well as asking us, whenever you are not sure about a pest management practice. Gardening should be enjoyable and rewarding and not a constant battle. If your garden is not your happy place, consider modifying your maintenance practices -- or perhaps it's time for a new garden plan for the new decade?

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

Visalia Farmers' Market – Every Saturday morning (8-11 am), Sears parking lot, Mooney Blvd.
Feb 7-9, Visalia Home & Patio Springfest, Visalia Convention Center
Feb 11-13, World Ag Expo, Tulare

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/

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