

The Press Democrat
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GARDEN ADVICE

Celebrate farmers markets, plan your fall garden
By SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS
FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT



Amy Kram works at the Tuesday farmer's market at Lucchesi Park in Petaluma, providing a service where customers can place orders online, she shops for them, then they drive by to pick up their purchase. Crissy Pascual — Petaluma Argus-Courier Image

National Farmers Market Week is celebrated this coming week Aug. 3-9.

Farmers markets play a vital role in our nation's food system by supporting local economies, enhancing food access and nutrition, and fostering social connections. They provide economic opportunities for farmers and small businesses, boost community engagement, and promote healthier lifestyles by offering fresh, local produce.

Sonoma County Master Gardeners are present at several different farmers markets each week, generally spring through fall.

Seek us out at information tables where we can answer your questions and provide area-specific gardening leaflets and reference books.

For a complete listing of locations, dates and hours of our 2025 farmers market participation, go to: tinyurl.com/2b6y43nb

Cool-season veggies

It's time to start planning our fall gardens.

Sow seed or plant starts in and around existing summer vegetables. Use a row cover or an umbrella for a couple of weeks to provide shade and protect tender seedlings from the sun.

Transplants should be planted in the late afternoon to avoid withering sun.

From seed: beets, bunch onions, calendula, carrot, chives, dill, greens (bok choy, Swiss chard, kale, mustard, radicchio), leeks, nasturtium, parsley, parsnip, peas.

Usually purchased as starts: artichoke, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, fennel bulb. These can also be sown indoors mid-summer and transplanted to the garden in August and September.

Mulch will help with water retention and weed suppression now and protect against cooler weather in October and November. Mulch should not touch the plant stems. For a continued harvest, stagger planting leafy greens and other favorite cool weather crops that can be harvested before mid-November (average first frost date for Sonoma County) and root crops that will survive the winter.

Remove finished summer crops by cutting plants just below the soil line to leave the roots to decompose in place. Before planting fall/winter crops, prep your garden soil by adding 1 to 2 inches of compost.

No need to dig it in, just add it to the top of the soil and plant into it. Other options include using dried chicken manure pellets with a formulation of 3-4-3 or a complete organic fertilizer, always following the fertilizer manufacturer's instructions.

For more information see, go to: bit.ly/3AMYnP5

Prune

August is the best month to prune apricot trees. Apricots are susceptible to a number of diseases, including eutypa, a water-borne fungal disease. As a result, apricots should be pruned only when rains are unlikely over the ensuing six weeks.

Clean, tidy up

- Remove dead and decaying plant material that can attract pests, which may damage healthy plants.
- Remove older leaves on some plants, like squash vines, that may naturally turn yellow and die. Remove them early to allow the plant's energy to go into the actively growing parts.
- Pick up fallen fruit that can create an environment for disease causing pathogens and attract rodents.
- Pull weeds that compete with your plants for water, nutrients and sunlight.
- Clean your garden tools after each use to avoid spreading pathogens from infected plants. Sterilize your tools with one part household bleach diluted with nine parts water. Dry and store them in a moisture-free area to prevent rust.

Stay alert to signs of water stress, especially for plants in containers and hanging baskets.

An occasional deep soaking during periods of high heat benefits most plants, even those that do not require regular water.

Make sure your garden has thick layers of mulch around the plants to conserve moisture. Pay close attention when mulching plants with woody stems, especially trees. Leave 3 to 6 inches of bare earth around trunks.

Too much moisture at the base of woody stems causes rot.

Native Plants

In California, the "Fifth Season" for native plants refers to the hot, dry period from mid-summer to mid-fall, characterized by a lack of rain and plants entering a state of dormancy or reduced activity.

This period follows the spring and early summer blooms and precedes the fall and winter rains.

More Information:

- **Impact on plants:** Many native plants become dormant or semi-dormant during this period, conserving energy and resources until the return of the rains.
- **Appearance:** The landscape can appear dry and brown, with many plants showing faded or dried foliage and spent flowers.
- **What to expect:** This is a time for appreciating the resilience of California natives, as they endure the heat and drought. Some plants like tarweed may still be in bloom, attracting wildlife.

- Best planting time: While some plants can be planted during the Fifth Season with extra care, the best time to plant California natives is in the fall, winter, or early spring.

Contributors to this week's column were Diane Judd and Debbie Westrick. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County <https://sonomamg.ucanr.edu/> provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to scmqpd@gmail.com. You will receive answers to your questions either in this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or mgsonoma@ucanr.edu.