



Advice to Grow by...Ask Us! Master Gardener Program

University of California Cooperative Extension 



UCCE Master Gardeners of Lake Tahoe October Newsletter 2024

This month we have an information packed newsletter. Contributors Jen Cressy and Lisa Strand provide some detailed directions about how to make the most of your autumn garden days. We are grateful to their time producing a detailed fall gardening guide, and a step by step guide to dividing your perennial plants. Get out and enjoy these shorter, cooler days and you will be rewarded come spring!

As always, your feedback, questions and suggestions for this newsletter are welcome. Please [email me!](#)

Sandy Gainza
UCCE Master Gardener Volunteer, Newsletter Editor

UPCOMING EVENTS

- [Click here for a list of UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County events.](#)
- [This link will take you to the complete list of UCCE Central Sierra events.](#)
- [Click here to learn about UCCE Master Gardeners of Placer County events.](#)
- [UCCE Master Food Preservers of Central Sierra events are listed here.](#)
- [University of Nevada Extension events are found here.](#)

Fall is the time to prep your garden for healthy and vigorous spring growth.

Download [this guide](#) to help protect your garden over the winter and get it ready to flourish next spring!

Jen Cressy, Master Gardener of Lake Tahoe offers a **complete guide** to preparing your Tahoe garden for the winter to come! She also provides tips on getting a head start on next year's garden.



Want Free Plants?

Now is the time to divide your favorite perennial plants!

by Lisa Strand, Master Gardener of Lake Tahoe

Early fall is a great time for planting here in the Tahoe Basin - soil temperatures are warm enough for roots to get established, and days are shorter which lets plants retain more water due to less evapotranspiration.

It's also a great time to evaluate which plants are doing well, and in doing so you might notice your more tender leafy perennials are looking extra vigorous. For example, your plants are sending up more

stems, often in clumps visible above the soil line and sometimes looking a little dead or tired in the middle. These are signs that it's time to divide them: by giving roots more space to grow, you'll foster healthier plants, and get MORE plants for the rest of your garden! In the photo shown, an overgrown clump of *Coreopsis* is in need of division.

Common perennials that benefit from being divided in the fall every few years include but are not limited to: *Ajuga* (Bugleweed), *Alchemilla mollis* (Lady's Mantle), *Coreopsis* (Tickseed), *Hemerocallis* (Daylily), *Echinacea* (Coneflower), *Gaillardia* (Blanket Flower), *Heuchera* (Coral Bell), *Hosta*, *Leucanthemum* (Shasta Daisy), *Phlox*, *Rudbeckia*, and *Veronica* (Speedwell).

Here's a step-by-step on dividing and re-planting those perennials:

Step One: Decide which plants to divide. Choose plants after they have finished blooming for the year. Some perennials do better if divided earlier in the season such as *Agastache*, Mountain Aster (*Symphotrichum spathulatum*), and Yarrow (*Alchillea millefolium*).

Here's a great **resource** which details when to divide which perennials, courtesy of the University of Minnesota.

Step Two: Prepare the site where the newly divided clumps will be planted. Choose garden soil similar to where the host plant was growing. If moving to a new section of your garden, incorporating 10-20% compost into the planting area can ensure the plant has enough organic matter for successful root establishment now, and growth come springtime. Fertilizer is generally not recommended, as

you don't want to encourage new growth at this time. If you're going to gift your divided plants, you can also put them in pots with fresh potting soil - just be sure the recipient gets them in the ground or a temperature-appropriate location ASAP.



Step Three: Dig up the perennial to be divided. Aim for an overcast day or late afternoon after any chance of hot, direct sun. Carefully dig around the edges of the plant, gently lifting soil around the roots. You'll often see individual root balls you can simply separate with your hands. Other times, you might need a sharp knife or hori-hori to help slice the roots into clumps healthy enough to replant.



Step Four: re-plant your newly divided plants into the soil ASAP, and water in so their roots are in the ground as deep as they were in their original site. For most perennials, it's also a good idea to trim up to half the leaves off the plants to reduce leaf transpiration - at this time the roots need that moisture.

Step Five: Continue watering regularly, so that the root zone remains moist, for at least 4-6 weeks. A good layer of mulch is helpful in two ways: it will help keep moisture in, and once snow falls, it will help to provide a cushion of protection from an early-season freeze. Come springtime, look for your divided perennials to come back healthier than before!

What's in a Name?

Don't Get Confused by Common Plant Names

by Jen Cressy, UCCE Master Gardener

Most gardeners can enjoy a perfectly enjoyable existence without the knowledge of a plant's Latin names. And why would we want to twist our tongues and mispronounce confusing scientific names if we don't need to? Or do we?

By utilizing botanical names, as challenging as they are to pronounce, let alone spell, the problem of misidentifying plants is solved. Common names can be misleading on many fronts. Take the common name Poison Oak. When your hiking partner warns you to be wary of the poison oak, a person unfamiliar with the plant might think twice before taking a rest on a low hanging oak branch and ignore the offending three leaved shiny green branches brushing against their boots.

Even Master Gardeners can be fooled by common plant names. After attending a Tahoe Friendly Garden Tour I fell in love with the graceful bowing form of the *Sorbaria sorbifolia*, but that isn't the name I used when I asked my husband to purchase one for our shade garden, I used the common name, "False Spirea." When he opened the trunk of the car, he was puzzled by my disappointed expression. I was looking at three beautiful Astilbe plants in full bloom and not my

new favorite “must have” plant. Clearly, common names are not the best way to identify plants.

There exists a system of classification provided by a great Swedish botanist, Carl Linnaeus, in the late 1700s that is still in use. This universal hierarchical system starts with the broadest classification on top, which is the Kingdom (plants), then tiers down into individual groupings of plants until the bottom tier which uniquely defines one specific plant.

Basic plant classification and naming structure looks like this:

Kingdom (plants)

Division

Class

Order

Family

Genus

Species Subspecies

Cultivar/Variety

Gardeners skip straight to the Genus and Species classifications. This is when the four lower classifications are useful for us.

Family is defined as plants sharing commonalities of general appearance or characteristics. The family name ending with “aceae,” for example Brassicaceae, is the Mustard family.

Genus is defined as clusters of plants within a family that have strongly associated and more visibly similar characteristics found in the leaves, buds, stems, branches, and roots. Genus describes a certain type of plant; for example *Rosa* is roses, *Pinus* is pines and *Spiraea* is *Spireas*. Genus is always capitalized and represented in italics.

Species is the most visually identifying classification. At this tier, you can answer the “what type of plant is this” question. Plants at this level are almost always reproduce sexually, i.e., by seed. Species is always noted in lower case and in italics. Subspecies are usually associated by a single common trait that distinguishes it from the rest of the species. It could be a local strain or mutation with desirable traits that is grown by seed. Subspecies are also italicized. Subspecies example: *Spiraea splendens subsp. rosea*.

Sometimes plants within a species are also arranged into groups called varieties based on slight variations of characteristics. Varieties are indicated by var. or v., for example, *Digitalis purpurea var. maculata*.

Cultivars, short for cultivated variety, are genetically identical to each other and are almost always cloned or propagated from a plant. Like a variety, cultivars differ from each other in one or more characteristics like the spots (*maculata*) in the above example. Cultivars can only exist in "cultivation." Therefore, they are only propagated by breeders and don't occur in nature.

So now you can wow the nursery staff when you go to shop with your plant list. Not only that, but you can also get exactly what you ask for.

October Tips for Tahoe Gardeners

(These tips coordinate with Jen's detailed list above)

Use tree wrap on young trees (less than three years old) or those with light-colored bark. This will help prevent sunscald as a result of intense winter sun.

Fertilize after the first hard freeze and leaf drop. Trees and shrubs go dormant in the fall and the fertilizer will be ready when the ground thaws next spring.

Put up holiday lights on trees before the snow and cold temperatures make the task more difficult.

If your lawn is still growing, continue mowing. Use a mulching mower and leave clippings to decompose and enrich the soil over the winter.

Drain hoses and sprinklers that aren't frost free. Disconnect hoses from outdoor faucets.

Put a fuel stabilizer in with the gas in your lawn/garden power tools. Run the engine to distribute the stabilizer then drain the rest of the fuel.

Drain and recycle the oil from mowers, blowers and trimmers. Clean air filters, replace spark plugs and oil necessary parts.

Clean and sharpen your digging and pruning tools before storing them. Apply a light coat of oil to prevent rust.

Store pesticides, fertilizers and other chemicals in a cool, dry place where they won't freeze.

Sow wildflower seed before winter sets in.

Keep pulling weeds by hand until snow covers the garden.

Mulch perennials and roses after the first hard frost. Especially important if they are a less hardy species or don't receive much snow-cover.

Before putting your garden to bed for the winter, till or spade the soil, leaving chunky clods. The freeze and thaw cycle will heave the clods so they will hold more snow and retain moisture better throughout the winter.

Fresh, hot, homemade compost can only be added in the fall. By the time spring comes, it will have lost its heat and won't harm new growth on plants.

For garden beds close to roads, cover with landscape fabric and secure with staples or sod pins. This prevents plant damage and soil toxicity from de-icing products and cinders. This should be the last thing you do before the snow. If plants are covered too early, they may dry out.

Clean your bird feeders and stock up on seed and suet. Providing a water source is just as important; using a birdbath heater makes this easy year-round.

Fertilize houseplants with slow-release fertilizer like through November, then stop feeding until February.

Start forcing paperwhite (narcissus) bulbs for Thanksgiving blooms. Plant amaryllis bulbs in pots for Thanksgiving blooms. Wait until the end of October for Christmas blooms.

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