



Merced County Master Gardener's Public Newsletter

Aug 2024

Upcoming Events

- Sat, Aug 17 – Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardening 10-12 noon – [Details here](#)
- Sat, Aug 17, Sep 7 and Sep 21 – [Visit our booth at Merced Certified Farmers Market, 16th Street parking lot between M & K street.](#)
- Sat, Sep 14 -Lose the Lawn – Go Native Workshop 10-12 noon – with Jim Bruger -Save the date
- Sat, Oct 12- Backyard Mini-Farm Workshop, 10-12 noon



2024 Master Gardener Training Class Graduates



Congratulations to Jacquie, Dennis, Kristen, Hunter, Bri, Corina, Dino, Michael P, Michael S, Karen, Sandino, and Justen for completing the 15 weeks of comprehensive training in the Master Gardener Program!

Their educational booth on lesser known ag products in Merced County was awarded 3rd Place at the Merced Co Fair.

FIRST PLACE GARDEN

The Elegant Courtyard Demonstration Garden designed and built in 1 week by Merced County Master Gardener volunteers was awarded 1st place at this year's Merced County Fair. The design featured fleur de lies elements, elegant wrought ironwork, and plants on loan from Stepping Stone Nursery and several Master Gardeners.

Advice to Grow By... Ask Us

Do you have questions about plants, trees or pests in your home garden or in your containers? Here's how to get answers:

- Bring your questions, photos, and/or samples to talk with us in person, at our booth at the Merced Certified Farmers Market on the first and third Saturdays of each month (April – Oct). We will either help you get answers on the spot or fill out a questionnaire to submit to our Gardening Helpline for more research.
- Send an email to anrmgmerced@ucanr.edu giving a description of the issue, attach photos of impacted plant(s) and pest, and provide your name and phone number to contact you.

Garden To-Do's – Summer

By Pat Shay, Merced County Master Gardener

[Note from Editor Delores: Pat was unable to write her usual column of garden chores and asked me to recycle one from the past. This was July 2023. It still seems relevant (wet winters, hot summers). Join me in wishing Pat a speedy recovery.]

In a normal year we would be considering ways to maintain moisture levels and guarding against searing temps. We can expect the heat to hit. Mulching is the order of the day. This practice helps plants maintain uniform

moisture levels, supports plant health and leads to good harvests. As always, maintain a couple of inches of clear ground around the base of your plants – avoid letting the mulch touch plant material.

When the heat hits, it is important to stay current with the weather forecast and adjust automatic watering systems accordingly. As has been mentioned many, many times, IF you still have a lawn, it is much more efficient to set sprinklers for two rotations in the morning – one at around 5 a.m. for ten to fifteen minutes and again around 6 a.m. for the same amount of time. The lawn can absorb the water it receives and utilize it properly, as opposed to one 20 – 30-minute cycle which leads to waste, or the dreaded 'urban drool' when water goes down the drain rather than onto your lawn.

Again, on the lawn – adjust your mower (or tell your gardener to adjust his) to a somewhat higher level – lawn will use less water than if it is 'skinned'.

- Put some color in your yard – add salvias (reds, blues, purples) and other perennials and/or self-seeders such as coreopsis, gaillardia, rudbeckia or add annuals such as rock rose (portulaca) and zinnias. Both of the latter bloom like crazy for weeks and weeks and thrive in the heat.
- Give your houseplants a vacation – put them outside! More delicate ones can go on a shaded patio or under an overhang on an east or north facing wall. Use the mist setting on a sprinkler to get rid of dust.

- Give mature trees long, slow waterings with a bubbler once a month. The drought was VERY unkind to mature trees and this winter's wonderful rains have helped them considerably, but monthly deep watering will keep them healthy.

Summer is probably the most difficult and demoralizing time of year to garden. Veggie garden and fruit bushes/trees are ready to provide a bumper harvest for which we can be grateful, but ornamentals take a particular beating in this weather and it is up to us to adjust our approach to maximize meager water and combat sizzling temps. What we do in August is equally relevant in September for us.

Water Considerations: Look at your yard/garden from a structural perspective.

There are the permanent, foundational plantings like trees and large shrubs which are the lynchpins for your overall landscape. Make sure that trees get the water they need first, followed by large shrubs/bushes. These are the elements that took the longest to grow and would be the most difficult to replace. Give them their due by making sure they get the water they need.

This also includes your fruit trees. They are doing double duty at the moment...growing AND producing the fruit you're going to enjoy.

Perennials are next and probably the easiest, because if you selected natives/low water varieties, they will use less water, still look good and provide nourishment and habitat for the creatures that make your garden come

alive... birds and pollinators and the occasional wildlife visitor.

Right along with perennials are your veggie garden plants. Their season is relatively short and they require a certain amount of water to produce the tomatoes, peppers, squash, etc. that you are planning to eat or preserve for eating in winter. By using water on them early in the day, they get the most of the application and you are rewarded with good production.

Blossom end rot is a result of inconsistent watering and/or continued calcium deficiency. Lessen by establishing/maintaining a watering routine and applying small doses of lime/gypsum.

If you have chrysanthemums, be sure to cut them back early in July so that they are ready to bloom in mid-Fall. As buds begin to form, thin them for larger blooms.

Don't wait for someone to bring you flowers. Plant your own garden and decorate your own soul. Luther Burbank.

Annuals are last. Yes, they are lovely, but they are also expendable. Some take more water than they return in value in this difficult water time. Some look rather straggly at the end of the day but revive quite well with the next day's watering. You will do yourself a favor if you choose flowers that give you the most bang for the buck water-wise.... like cosmos, portulaca (moss rose) and zinnias.

If it is too tough to forego some dahlias, grow them in one place where they can all benefit from the least water.

For everything: MULCH, MULCH, and MULCH. A good, thick layer of mulch helps limit evaporation – the plants get the benefits, not the atmosphere. Be careful to keep the mulch away from the base of each plant. Try to leave areas near the edges of your garden bare for the benefit of ground dwelling bees!

Make sure to keep birdbaths full – and clean periodically. If there is no edge that bees can land on, float a wine bottle cork or two so that they have somewhere to land to get their drink, or put a good-sized rock or two in the middle for a landing spot.

Another word on fruit trees. Hopefully they were thinned well in late spring, but if not, or not enough, be sure to provide staking to avoid breaking branches. As fruit ripens, be sure to keep any fruit that drops cleared from under the trees – that will avoid ant infestations and disease. If ants are climbing up to the fruit, use salad oil applied to the trunk/branches to foil their incursions.

As berries come to the end of production, cut back old canes and tie up new ones as they begin to grow.

As we go later into summer and the leaves of iris/daffodils, etc. die off, it's time to dig up the bulbs to overwinter and/or share with friends. Deadhead roses as blossoms fade and give them a dose of fertilizer for the next round of bloom.

Begin to think about planting seed for winter veggies at the tail end of summer. Plan for winter/early spring flower seed as well...in hopes that we will again get the rain they need to do well.

As your veggie garden fades, prepare to renew the beds by cultivating at least a foot deep and applying a good dressing of compost and fertilizer for those winter veggies you're contemplating.

- Fertilize camellias, azaleas, and rhododendrons as they begin to set buds in late summer/early fall. If they have a touch of yellow veining on leaves, apply a bit of iron.
- Provide first fertilization to citrus – you will do another application around November and again in January/ February.
- Trim back perennials as they fade so that they are ready to come back with cooler temps and hopefully rain. Divide the ones that have gotten very large or take cuttings and start new plants to put in other areas of your garden or to share.

Trim a woody piece about three inches long, dip planting end in rooting compound, place in potting soil with vermiculite and keep slightly damp. (You can do the same with the cuttings you took from your chrysanthemums!).

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