



University of California

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Master Gardener Program

October 2024 Public Newsletter from the UC Master Gardeners of Merced County

Upcoming UC Master Gardeners of Merced County Events:

MG Calendar:

October:

5: Farmers Market

Grange Plant Exchange (9-10 St Patrick's Parking Lot on Yosemite) Come and get free plants.

19: Farmers Market

26: Seed Saving Workshop For info go to <https://ucanr.edu/sites/mgmerced/>

Save the Date for November 9: Back Yard Mini Farm Workshop

Garden To-Do's:

By Pat Shay

Fall has officially arrived, even if daytime temps make it seem as though summer is here to stay. This is the time of year to focus on three things: Cleaning up, preparing for next spring and planting those things that you want to become established when temperatures are cooler and they will get a good start with the season's rain.

Harvest the last of the summer garden produce. Remove plants as the last tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers, watermelons, cantaloupe, etc. have been picked. Particularly if they have any insect or disease infestation at all, put the vegetation on the waste bin – do not add to a compost heap.

Prune off broken branches on perennials. (If there are pieces that look somewhat lively, clip off excess leaves, trim the stem at an angle, dip in root starter and pot into a vermiculite/soil mix – a good source of new plants! Keep the soil moist. Mark sure they have good light, but not direct sun.) Trim back perennials that have become leggy and overgrown, leaving at least some blossoms/buds for pollinators. Prepare beds for winter vegetables. Add two to four inches of compost to improve soil. Monitor watering systems. As temps cool, less water is needed. Check for leaks or broken emitters that may need replacement. On the fringes of the garden where weeds will soon begin to appear, spray with pre-emergent to reduce the need to weed as rain starts.

Fall is THE time to plant California natives. They need to be in the ground so that they can benefit from the (hopefully) soon arriving rains and can get a head start on the coming spring growth period. Some things to keep in mind about natives: They take less water than most other garden plants, so best to have an area devoted to natives so that they are not drowned by being watered with everything else. Natives prefer well-draining soil. If you have clay, you may want to add amendments to break up the soil before planting your natives. They prefer a sparse diet...don't use fertilizer— they are not used to it and do not want it! Most of them prefer full sun. Good sources for California natives and other drought tolerant plants include California Native Plant Society (chapters of which, including Stanislaus County, often have sales this time of year) www.cnps.org. Los Pilitas Nursery in Santa Margarita, CA which offers on-line shopping and mail delivery, UC Berkeley Botanical Garden www.botanicalgarden.berkeley.edu, UCD Arboretum, sales on October 5 (members only), October 26 and November 16 – visit their website for more info, and Sierra-Azul Nursery in Watsonville. The important thing, as with all plants, is to read the label

Garden To-Do's: Continued

and plant/care for accordingly. The happy thing about natives is that they prosper with mild neglect. Pampering tends to have a negative effect on them.

Begin planting spring bulbs so that come February/March you have a lovely patch of crocus, daffodils, narcissus, iris, etc. to enjoy in the garden and as cut flowers in the house. Maybe try some bulbs that you haven't grown before for a change of pace...anemones, ranunculus or freesias. Garden catalogs have wonderful suggestions (undoubtedly TOO many suggestions!). Space out planting so that you have blooms over a period of time in spring. Do not forget to add bone meal or a bulb fertilizer in the planting hole before the bulb. Follow instructions on bulb package or other source for depth to plant.

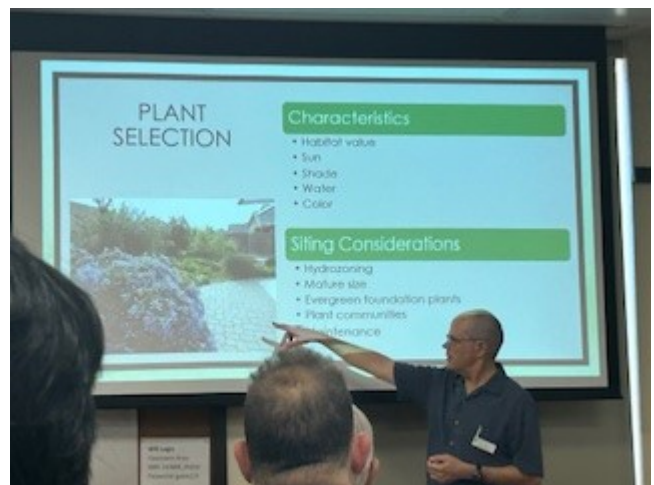
If gophers are a problem eating bulbs, line planting holes with chicken wire, or similar, when planting. Fertilize azaleas, japonica camellias, and rhododendrons. Sasanqua camellias are blooming now! As the daylight fades earlier moving toward winter, plant a couple of large pots with cyclamen and chrysanthemums to brighten things up. Chrysanthemums in the garden need to be staked as they grow tall...or consider a secondary use for tomato cages! Remember the later into October we go, the cooler the temps and fragile plants...fuchsias, begonias, etc. will need to be moved to more sheltered locations. Succulents which have been enjoying hot, sunny days need to be under eaves to be out of the coming rain.

Don't forget to carve/Sharpie a pumpkin or two for outside enjoyment! (As they begin to deteriorate, the birds will thank you for the seeds and you can compost the rest!)

Happy Gardening

To find where the best view of California's Fall Foliage, go to [California Fall Color Map – California Fall Color](#). The map is updated weekly.

Jim Brugger's Workshop *Lose the Lawn* was very thorough. He began with the reasons for removing lawns and then went through the steps for using the space, beginning with developing a landscape design, hydrozoning, plant selection, etc. A member of the California Native Plant society, he recommended the following resources for additional information: [Cnps.org](#), [calscape.org](#), [lasplitas.com](#), as well as numerous books on the subject. To watch one of his presentations, search his name on YouTube.



Mosquitos 101



Jason Bakken discussed Mosquito Abatement with the group.

Website Mission Statement: Merced County Mosquito Abatement District is dedicated to improving the quality of life for our local community by providing best management practices of mosquito control and disease prevention. We are a special district that is publicly funded with the goal of preventing mosquito-borne diseases throughout Merced County. The commitment to our work is shown through our detailed surveillance, proven treatment programs and our constant efforts to control the mosquito population. It is our responsibility and honor to provide such preventative services in the most cost effective, environmentally responsible manner possible. We find it extremely important to educate the public on what we do and how residents can help make a difference. Public outreach and our education campaign are other services we offer in addition to

mosquito control. We thoroughly enjoy engaging with the public and are grateful to have been serving Merced County since 1946.

Prevent Mosquito Bites

We encourage people to follow the 5 D's for Preventing Mosquito Bites

Dusk and Dawn - Stay Indoors when mosquitoes are biting

Dress - Wear clothing that protects the skin from bites

DEET - Use mosquito repellent containing DEET

Drain - Empty containers holding water around your home

To request service, go the website and fill out the form. Spraying is free and so are mosquito fish if you have standing water.

To submit a request for service please use following:

Call us at (209) 722-1527 or visit the webpage at <https://www.mcmosquito.org/>

The address is 3478 Beachwood Drive, Merced, CA 95348



The **western mosquitofish** (*Gambusia affinis*) is a North American freshwater poeciliid fish, also known commonly, if ambiguously, as simply **mosquitofish** or by its generic name, *Gambusia*, or by the common name **gambezi**. Its sister species, the eastern mosquitofish (*Gambusia holbrooki*) is also referred to by these names. Mosquitofish eat the larva of the mosquito.

[Mosquitofish - Wikipedia](#)

Countertop Composters: Is One Right For you?

By Cathy Dunn

I read an article from the September 1, 2024, edition of the *Merced Sun-Star* discussing whether countertop composters really work. I live alone and I rarely cook, but I seem to generate kitchen waste and I was hoping a countertop composter would be a better way to deal with the waste I have. The City urges us to put table scraps and other kitchen waste in our green waste can for regular pickup. That works better in the summer months when I have debris from my yard. I don't have any lawn so there are no lawn clippings. When the green waste can is empty, it doesn't feel right to put the can out with only a small bag of kitchen waste. Since I don't generate enough kitchen waste and debris from my yard to justify having a compost pile, I was hoping a countertop composter would be a feasible replacement. I was surprised at the results of my search.

The article was a real eye opener. It turns out that not only are the composters expensive (generally \$300 to \$1,000), most turn the contents into something that resembles dirt but isn't dirt. They really just grind up and dry the contents, turning it into something that resembles dirt but is definitely not compost. If it is put out into the garden, once it gets wet either from watering or rain, it starts to rot. That was not the finished product I was looking for. Some of the suggestions from the manufacturers include mixing the finished product into your existing compost heap (I don't have one) or adding it as an amendment to your soil.

The most intriguing composter I found was from Mill. At 3 feet tall, it may be a stretch to call it a countertop composter. It is not only big, it's expensive. It can be purchased for \$999 or rented for \$9.99 per month. It claims to turn your food waste into "food grounds" which can be mixed into the soil or compost, or you can put the food grounds in your green waste can. I really don't think I need a \$999 appliance to do what I'm already doing—putting my kitchen waste into my existing green waste can. The company also offered another way to dispose of the food grounds. The grounds can be shipped back to Mill which then sells it for use in chicken feed. They charge the customer \$9.99 for this service. Sounds like a great deal for Mill.

In an article from Good Housekeeping dated April 11, 2024, I found what appears to be the appliance which produces the closest product to actual compost. This is the Reencle Home Composter. It can be purchased for \$499 or rented for \$35 per month. This is the only composter I found which uses microorganisms to produce actual compost.

The Reencle has three filter systems and a microbe compost starter. It also comes with a 24 page instruction manual which includes two pages of precautions including cautioning the user not eat the contents of the food waste composter. The optimal amount of food waste to add daily is between 1.5 and 2.2 pounds. The instructions are very detailed and if you like that sort of thing, you might want to give it a try. It's definitely not for me.

After researching the various appliances available, I came to the same conclusion as the author of the Sun-Star article. If a traditional compost heap is not feasible and the available appliances don't appeal to you, a worm bin might be just the solution you're looking for. Worm bins are cheap, quiet, odorless, use no electricity and have no mechanical problems. 250 red wigglers can be purchased from Uncle Jim's Worm Farm for \$27.95, or you can ask fellow Master Gardeners if they have any worms you can get for free.

I didn't expect the results I found. I really hoped there was something available that worked as advertised but I didn't find one that would work for me. Not only are the appliances expensive to purchase and often complicated to use, with one possible exception, they don't produce actual compost. I particularly liked the "offer" from Mill where the customer can mail the food product back to Mill, for \$9.99 per month, so that Mill can sell it to chicken feed producers. Great salesmanship.



It's Olive Time

By Delores Cabezut-Ortiz

Do you have one or more lovely olive trees in your yard that fill each fall with green olives which soon turn to black and fall on the ground to make a mess? You can easily cure the olives with a few basic steps. Although there are several ways to cure olives, curing with lye is quick and easy and well worth the effort. If you've never tried it, then this is the time of the year to try.

REMEMBER: Do not use metal pots, spoons, or strainers with lye!

First, pick olives that are green, not bruised and without any marks. Check to see that they are not infected with worms. These are shown by a small speck on the skin. Next clean the olives in fresh water, removing all the debris. I cure the olives in an ice chest since it's plastic, with a lid and a drain spout. Buy Red Devil Lye at either at a hardware store or a grocery store. Don't use Drano which has additives. Wear rubber gloves, long sleeves, closed shoes, and eye protection to mix the lye in a well-ventilated area, using only glass or wooden utensils. **AGAIN, DO NOT USE METAL.**

Mix the lye one quart to one tablespoon of lye. Don't breathe the fumes; stir to dissolve. Let the mixture cool before pouring it over the olives to cover. Lay a towel on top to push the floaters into the lye. Keep out a couple of olives to use as a comparison. After 8 hours, pull out several to slice open. The inside should be brown to the pit. If not, let them stay in the lye a little longer, checking them every hour. The comparison olives are light green inside. Once the brown color is to the pit, drain off the lye. This mixture is no stronger than stomach acid but still take care when you drain it off.

Cover the olives with clean water and change 2 or 3 times a day until the water is clear. Taste the olives. If they taste a little soapy, then they need more water baths. Once they taste good to you, fill your container. Next mix a brine with kosher salt of 6 tablespoons to one gallon of water and flavor as desired. Do not use iodized salt.



I put fresh garlic cloves because we like the flavor. We can also eat the garlic too.

Olives are low in cholesterol and a good source of dietary fiber, which the body needs for good gut health. They are also high in minerals that the body requires to function, such as iron and copper. However, it is best to consume olives in moderation, as producers usually preserve them in brine that is high in salt.

Flavor olives according to your tastes. They are very porous and soak in the flavors. If they are too salty or too highly flavored, just change the water, wait a day, and you'll have a whole new taste.



Good to know gardening basics:

Merced/Atwater USDA Growing Zone 9a (low temperature range 20-25°F)
Average First Frost 11/11-20 Average Last Frost 3/11-20



Merced Master Gardeners

ucanr.edu

Pumpkins, Pumpkins, Pumpkins

Better Homes and Gardens has 5 tips for Making your Pumpkins last longer. 1. Don't touch your pumpkins unless you have to. The oils in your hands cause the pumpkins to rot faster. Also, don't carry it by the stem, only by the fruit. 2. If possible, keep them out of the sun and the rain. Dry, shaded spots are best. 3. Give your pumpkin a bath every now and then to keep its rind fresh in a mixture of one part bleach to ten parts water. Let your pumpkin dry completely before putting it back in place. Put the remainder of the liquid in a spray jar to use as a daily spray to keep pumpkins healthy. 4. When cleaning out your pumpkin, cut the hole in the bottom instead of the top. Also, when you are done, wipe the inside with some of the bleach mixture described above and wipe dry. 5. Once the pumpkin is cut open, it'll dry out faster. You can extend its life by rubbing petroleum jelly around the carved areas of the pumpkin. If you don't have petroleum jelly on hand, use olive oil or coconut oil.

Pumpkin Facts

1. The word "pumpkin" comes from the Greek word "pepon," which means "large melon."
2. More than 1 billion pounds of pumpkin are produced in the United States every year. That's 500,000 tons. That's *a lot*.
3. The average pumpkin weighs in at approximately 13 pounds.
4. Pumpkins are 90% water. And yes, they float.
5. A pumpkin is a fruit because it comes from a flower and has seeds.
6. The average pumpkin has approximately 500 seeds.
7. Most pumpkins are orange because they contain a pigment called "carotene." Carrots are another carotenoid-rich food.
8. Pumpkins come in many different colors, including orange, yellow, green, white and blue.
9. Pumpkins are grown on every continent except Antarctica.
10. Every part of the pumpkin is edible: root, stem, leaves, fruit, and seeds.

<https://thinkeryaustin.org/blog/pumped-pumpkins-10-fun>

Are you stumped about what to do with left-over pumpkins? A scan of the Internet came up with some new ideas. 1. If the pumpkin is still in good shape, cut it in half and make a bird feeder out of it. 2. Save the seeds, wash and dry them, roast them. You can also save them to grow for next year. 3. Have a pumpkin smashing or chunking party. Kids will love it. Gather the pieces and put in the compost, without the seeds. Pumpkins are mostly water so they compost easily and the worms will love them. 4. Donate them to the zoo or a farm to feed animals. 5. If you have chickens, chunk them up and feed them to the chickens. Of course, remove any rot first.

