MONTHLY GARDEN CHORES—DECEMBER

*By Linda Lewis Griffith, UCCE Master Gardener*

The days are short and the weather is cooler.  Still, there’s work to be done in the garden to keep it looking its best and producing throughout the year.

**Chores**

Compost:  Add disease-free garden waste, grass clippings, pruning material and leaves.  Turn and keep as moist as a wrung-out sponge.  Cover during rainy weather to prevent the pile from becoming waterlogged.

Drainage: Install downspout diverters to direct rain runoff to landscape trees and plants.  Watch for standing water near tree trunks and the root zone of trees.

Frost: [Frost](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Flawr.ucdavis.edu%2Fcooperative-extension%2Ffrost-protection&data=02%7C01%7Cmmurrietta%40co.slo.ca.us%7Cd133fb936648461e2eba08d63ddb844b%7C84c3c7747fdf40e2a59027b2e70f8126%7C0%7C0%7C636764410372667509&sdata=fOhSNApZRa3Z48F6b%2B3nwv%2Fs%2FmaeY6xOn7Katjr4%2FhA%3D&reserved=0) is common in North County this month and likely to occur in other areas of the county.  Protect sensitive plants by moving them indoors, keeping them well watered or covering them at night.

Irrigation:  Reduce irrigation or consider turning it off completely if rainfall is adequate.  Keep in mind that new plants need to be watered until they become established.

Maintenance.  Inventory all sprays and pesticides.  Take outdated or unneeded chemicals to a [hazardous waste center](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.iwma.com%2Fwhat-to-do%2Fhhw%2F&data=02%7C01%7Cmmurrietta%40co.slo.ca.us%7Cd133fb936648461e2eba08d63ddb844b%7C84c3c7747fdf40e2a59027b2e70f8126%7C0%7C0%7C636764410372667509&sdata=jBqaicYhjKDloUV8i%2F7FvaRqxYvrPI0DxsS2anBX8XU%3D&reserved=0).

Mulch:  Add mulch to garden beds where bulbs are planted and to areas where weeds have been removed.

Tools:  Clean and sharpen dull blades.  Lubricate garden tools and repair damaged grips.  Clean with soapy water and a wire brush or steel wool.  Air dry and apply a light coat of oil to prevent corrosion.

Weeds: Inspect lawn and manage rainy season weeds before they flower, using nonchemical methods such as cultivations, hand weeding or mowing.  Use chemicals as a last resort.

**Landscape**

Clean-up: Do a general clean-up of the landscape on a dry day. Avoid walking on wet soil.

Plant:  Plant container ornamental trees, plants and shrubs except [subtropical plants](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fucanr.edu%2Fblogs%2FTopics%2F&data=02%7C01%7Cmmurrietta%40co.slo.ca.us%7Cd133fb936648461e2eba08d63ddb844b%7C84c3c7747fdf40e2a59027b2e70f8126%7C0%7C0%7C636764410372667509&sdata=fp8vxgjm1QRUvpbaQ4pX8f8EGDQV9IlXK3DPkO%2FQPac%3D&reserved=0).  This includes frost tolerant perennials, hardy spring blooming annuals, summer blooming bulbs and seedlings of cedar, fir, pine and spruce.  Plant azaleas, camellias and rhododendrons.

Prune: [Prune](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fcagardenweb.ucanr.edu%2FLandscape_Trees%2F%3Fuid%3D12%26ds%3D411&data=02%7C01%7Cmmurrietta%40co.slo.ca.us%7Cd133fb936648461e2eba08d63ddb844b%7C84c3c7747fdf40e2a59027b2e70f8126%7C0%7C0%7C636764410372667509&sdata=PF1y2CybExJcbg8ixmwhO8acRhmi%2F5E89VHS8Ihr7JQ%3D&reserved=0) winter flowering shrubs after blooming, woody shrubs and evergreen trees, and hardy deciduous trees.  Wait to prune spring flowering trees and shrubs until after they bloom

**Fruits and Vegetables**

Clean-up:  Control overwintering pests by removing fruit mummies, fallen leaves and diseased limbs, especially if codling moth has been a problem.  Dispose of debris in green recycling bin to prevent the spread of pathogens.

Dormant spray: [Spray](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fanrcatalog.ucanr.edu%2Fpdf%2F8368.pdf&data=02%7C01%7Cmmurrietta%40co.slo.ca.us%7Cd133fb936648461e2eba08d63ddb844b%7C84c3c7747fdf40e2a59027b2e70f8126%7C0%7C0%7C636764410372667509&sdata=14AmrzWC8u4Na92NUPo6ZxBIOGoG3cyMav2JXHPLLvI%3D&reserved=0) deciduous fruit trees for over-wintering insects, especially on apples, pears, stone fruits and nut trees.

Propagate:  Cool season winter and spring vegetables can be started indoors 6-8 weeks before planting.  Some can be direct sown.

**Pests**

[Snails and slugs](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fipm.ucanr.edu%2FPMG%2FPESTNOTES%2Fpn7427.html&data=02%7C01%7Cmmurrietta%40co.slo.ca.us%7Cd133fb936648461e2eba08d63ddb844b%7C84c3c7747fdf40e2a59027b2e70f8126%7C0%7C0%7C636764410372667509&sdata=Zv%2Bp5w8FOi1qy%2BMnuo5pXsfbcOMXfa3bJ8%2BmpElrFQE%3D&reserved=0):  Watch for snails in citrus trees. Collect by hand and dispose of them in soapy water.

**Abiotic Disorders**

[Phytophthora root rot.](file:///C:\Users\Linda%20Lewis%20Griffith\Documents\ipm.ucanr.edu\PMG\PESTNOTES\pn74133.html) Almost all fruit and nut trees, as well as most ornamental trees and shrubs can develop Phytophthora rot if soil around the base of the plant remains wet for prolonged periods or when planted too deeply. Avoid excessive irrigation and wetting the trunk and lower branches.

[Leaf curl](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fipm.ucanr.edu%2FPMG%2FPESTNOTES%2Fpn7426.html&data=02%7C01%7Cmmurrietta%40co.slo.ca.us%7Cd133fb936648461e2eba08d63ddb844b%7C84c3c7747fdf40e2a59027b2e70f8126%7C0%7C0%7C636764410372667509&sdata=c9D09FWFpRTiENK58aV3ks%2BtZNGI2AkxP2P46gJHdd0%3D&reserved=0). This fungal disease affects the blossoms, fruit, leaves and shoots of peaches and nectarines.  Select disease resistant varieties.  Apply dormant spray containing copper or copper sulfate.

[Shot hole](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fipm.ucanr.edu%2FPMG%2Fr602100711.html&data=02%7C01%7Cmmurrietta%40co.slo.ca.us%7Cd133fb936648461e2eba08d63ddb844b%7C84c3c7747fdf40e2a59027b2e70f8126%7C0%7C0%7C636764410372667509&sdata=PmbnvOug6FUWLCISh%2FP2e38IDe8HpM5HgsHk%2FFPMGs0%3D&reserved=0). A fungus whose hosts include almonds, nectarines, peaches and apricots.  Prevent infestation by using low-volume sprinklers to avoid wetting foliage.  Prune and dispose of infected plant tissue as soon as it appears.