

March Around The Garden

I hoed and trenched and weeded.... A.E Housman

By George Frisch Master Gardener

Now that spring is here, I'm ready to get back to the garden. What jobs need doing now?

Jeanne Miranda, Arroyo Grande

Spring is upon us. Trees are in blossom; shoots and bulbs peek through the soil; birds and butterflies flit about. With these idyllic thoughts to carry us garden-ward, we gird ourselves with tools and go forth to our chores of inspecting and repairing, cleaning and clearing, pruning, thinning and feeding; weeding, planting, and mulching.

If you have not spent much time in the garden during the winter, take a walk around and inspect the structures, fences and irrigation systems to make sure they have not been damaged and are in good repair. Clean up any fallen branches, leaf litter and desiccated fruit lying about to neaten up and get rid of pests and disease organisms that may have over-wintered there. Prune dead and broken branches, but wait to prune frost damaged plants until they have produced new growth so you can clearly see the damaged areas.

A good weeding knife may provide therapeutic satisfaction as you pluck the entire weed, roots and all. A sharpened hoe can make the job easier. Whichever method you choose, follow it with a good thick layer of mulch to suppress new weed seeds from germinating. For information on controlling aggressive weeds, such as Yellow Starthistle, visit www.ipm.ucdavis.edu.

As you raise your eyes from the task of weeding to appraise your newly bearing pomes and stone fruit trees, you confront the gardener's perennial dilemma. You ask yourself, "Do I want a lot of little, pretty good fruit that might weigh down and even break a bough, or do I want a smaller crop of big, sweet, delicious fruit?" Painful as it may be, annual fruit thinning is better for the fruit and for the tree. Thin when the fruit is about the diameter of a quarter leaving the larger fruit on the branch about hand span apart .. Feed the trees with a complete fertilizer per manufacturer's recommendation.