

The Press Democrat
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**ADVICE TO GROW BY » SONOMA COUNTY MASTER
GARDENERS**

**Dividing plants can help them thrive and multiply and
November in the garden**

Question: I have several plants in my yard that are outgrowing their space. I'd like to move them to another part of my garden or give some away. I've heard that dividing plants is a good way to do this. Can you describe how it's done?

Answer: Yes. Dividing plants can provide many benefits. Beside saving money on new plants, it's a great way to make more of your garden favorites. It also can help reduce crowding by managing the size of larger species. Over time, some plants can grow quite large by clumping or producing structures called rhizomes or tubers. When a plant is divided, the new growth is separated from the original and replanted. With care, it will establish itself as a separate plant.

You may already have plants growing in your garden that can be divided. For example, herbs such as chive, yarrow or thyme and large ornamental plants such as the Shasta daisy can be successfully propagated by division. So can the woody, shrublike California native Douglas Spirea (*Spiraea douglasii*). Do some research to learn whether your plant is a good candidate.

When it comes to dividing a plant, timing is important. In fall, wait until blooms have faded but there are still several weeks of mild weather before the average frost date in mid-November. Take advantage of any fall rain to reduce water use and help new roots get established. Avoid digging up plants in hot weather, as it can make it difficult for them to recover once they've been moved.

Once you've selected your plants, assemble the tools you need for the task. For large plants, such as Shasta daisies and agapanthus, a shovel or garden fork might be necessary. Smaller plants may only require a hand trowel. Pre-select locations for the new plants and dig holes to save time and reduce stress on the new divisions. For dry areas, water the night before planting and pull up any weeds.

To divide the plant, first remove any spent flowers and dead leaves. Then dig around the base, keeping as much of the root ball and soil intact as possible. While some plants have soft roots or tubers that can be easily divided, others may have woody centers that need to be cut. Stringy, tangled roots can be gently separated with a garden fork.

Trim away excess or dead roots and select only the healthiest portions to save. Then transplant your new division into a pot or hole, backfill the hole with soil and water it thoroughly.

If you end up with too many plants, consider trading with other gardeners. Pot them up and keep the soil moist until you're ready to move them.

For more information on dividing plants, go to <https://bit.ly/3EUH151>.

For information on California native plants, go to <https://www.calflora.org>.



**Pomegranates don't ripen after picking,
so only harvest them when they are fully ripe.**

Can you still harvest fruit in November? Yes!

When most other fruits have come and gone, persimmons and most pomegranates are ready to harvest. Use pruning shears to cut the persimmons off just above the green calyx that is attached to the top of the fruit. Pick while the fruit is still firm, and let it ripen at room temperature.

To get the most flavor, harvest pomegranates when they're fully ripe because they do not continue to ripen after picking. Cut the stem with pruning shears where it enters the fruit. Do not pull the fruit from the stem. You can store pomegranates in the refrigerator up to several months until they're ready to use.

Turn off all drip irrigation systems. Continue to be mindful of water conservation. We are still in a drought.

Be prepared for frost. Nov. 15 is the average first frost date in Sonoma County. Protect frost-tender plants such as citrus, hibiscus and bougainvillea. Cover plants with sheets or lightweight blankets or burlap. A strand of holiday lights in a citrus tree is often enough to protect the plant from frost.

Leave the fall leaves for insects and other invertebrates as winter habitat protection. Invertebrates rely on fallen leaves and other organic debris to cover and insulate themselves from the elements. Leaves don't need to be left exactly where they fall. Rake them into garden beds or around tree bases. Too many leaves can kill grass, but in soil they can suppress weeds, retain moisture and boost nutrition.

Keep in mind that during fire season you should not let leaf litter accumulate more than 2 to 4 inches within 5 to 30 feet of the home, and remove it completely within 5 feet of the home. For more information on types of winter habitats, visit <https://xerces.org/leave-the-leaves>.

Contributors to this week's column were Rob Williams, Joy Lanzendorfer, Patricia Rosales, Diane Judd and Debbie Westrick. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County (sonomamg.ucanr.edu) provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to scmgpd@gmail.com. You will receive answers to your questions either in this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or mgsonoma@ucanr.edu.