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## It's not too late to plant many veggies and flowers SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS



A large variety of zinnias grow in the backyard of David Galpin, founder of Sonoma Healing Flowers, in Santa Rosa, Calif. On Wednesday, July 27, 2022. (Beth Schlanker/The Press Democrat)

The gloriously long days of early July are upon us and gardens are filling in with green growth, blossoms and some early harvesting.

No two seasons are alike, and each brings fresh questions about how to proceed. Read on for some of the recent questions Sonoma County Master Gardeners are receiving at area farmers' market tables and at our Information Desk.

**Question:** I'm a fairly new gardener. I planted tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, lettuce, dill and radishes the first week of May. I also planted flower seeds of zinnia, sunflowers, and marigolds. I was happy that the flower seeds all sprouted. The other plants are doing well except the lettuce. For several weeks now I've been enjoying delicious and tender lettuce, but, after the temperatures got into the 90s, the lettuce plants started to bolt. I'm not sure what to do now. Can I still eat the lettuce? Should I pull out the plants and replace with new transplants, sow some new lettuce seeds or perhaps try something else?

**Answer:** It sounds like your garden is responding well to your efforts. Congratulations!

Lettuce usually starts to bolt when temperatures get hot. The plant switches from leaf production to seed production, which is nature's way to propagate more lettuce plants for the next season.

Once the lettuce bolts, it's time to finish harvesting all the leaves, otherwise they become less tender and start to taste bitter. They are still edible; you may just need to add some sweet fruit or dressing to the salads that you prepare using the lettuce leaves from the bolted lettuce plant.

It's then time to remove the plant using a garden knife to cut the stem off at soil level. Don't disturb the roots; they will add nutrients and tilth to the garden soil as they decompose.

Although lettuce plants are easily stressed by high summer temperatures, there are transplants or seeds available that are heat tolerant and bolt resistant. A transplant will grow into harvestable lettuce within two or three weeks of planting, while lettuce seeds sown directly in the soil won't be ready for at least 8 weeks.

If you have enough garden space, you could place the transplants near where your first lettuce plants were and also tuck some lettuce seeds in empty spots in other places around your garden. We always suggest topping the soil with 2-3 inches of compost after planting.

**Q:** Is it too late to plant new things? I still have some empty spaces in my garden.  
**Answer:** There is still plenty of time to plant other things in July, but anything you plant will require consistent watering and some shade cloth protection from strong sun when first planted.

Vegetables that you could plant now are beans, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, collards, bunching onions or scallions, peppers, summer squash and Swiss chard.

Perhaps you'd like to add flowers that would bloom in late summer and into the fall. Flowers add color, as well as attract pollinators and beneficial insects. Good options include alyssum, cosmos, marigolds, nasturtiums, salvia, sunflowers and zinnias.

If you haven't already planted culinary herbs, there's still time to put those in now; consider basil, chives, cilantro, lemon balm, marjoram, oregano, parsley, tarragon, sage and thyme.

**Q:** Recently I was away from my garden for a week. Now the weeds are sprouting up again. I had just weeded everything a few weeks ago.

**Answer:** Weeds are a source of exasperation for gardeners. No matter how diligent we are, the nature of weeds is to just keep coming back.

Thankfully, you did a thorough weeding earlier in the season because now you'll probably be able to pull these new weeds easily before they form seed heads.

Don't put any weeds with seeds in the compost pile. If the weeds you've pulled are young and without seeds, it's fine to compost them. After you've finished weeding, add 3 to 6 inches of mulch, such as rice straw or bark chips, to the areas where the weeds keep coming back to block sunlight and retard the growth of more weeds.

One last thing to keep in mind is that, although gardens need the steady presence of a knowledgeable gardener, most plants are forgiving, have inherent vitality and show us that they often thrive despite the shortcomings in our care.

Along with all the necessary garden tasks, remember to take some time to draw in the benefits that our ongoing garden relationship with natural rhythms and the present moment give us.

Simply taking a few minutes in the morning or in the cool of evening to enjoy the garden atmosphere, to notice the changes that happen from day to day and overnight, to listen to the songs of birds, insects and perhaps frogs, and to admire the beauty of blossoms, fruit and foliage, is a gift not to be overlooked.

*By Sally Singingtree and reviewed by Diane Judd. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County <https://sonomamgucanr.edu> provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to [scmgpd@gmail.com](mailto:scmgpd@gmail.com). You will receive answers to your questions either in The Press Democrat or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or [mgsonoma@ucanr.edu](mailto:mgsonoma@ucanr.edu)*