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August is time to tidy up, sow fall seed in gardens

By SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS
FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT



A gardener weeds a community vegetable garden on Mendocino Avenue in Sants Rosa
Photo by Kent Porter/The Press Democrat 2015

As summer winds down, and with continued irrigation, your ornamental garden largely takes care of itself. In the veggie garden you may still be enjoying the fruits and veggies planted in spring, but it's time to look ahead and start planning your fall and winter garden.

Sow seed or plant starts in and around existing summer vegetables. Use a row cover or an umbrella for a couple of weeks to provide shade and protect tender seedlings from the sun. Transplants should be planted in the late afternoon to avoid withering sun.

From seed, plant beets, bunch onions, calendula, carrots, chives, dill, greens (Bok choy, Swiss chard, kale, mustard, radicchio), leeks, nasturtium, parsley, parsnip and peas.

You can plant artichokes, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and fennel bulb from purchased starts. These can also be sown indoors in midsummer and transplanted to the garden in August and September.

Add compost, mulch

Mulch will help with water retention and weed suppression now and protect against cooler weather in October and November. Mulch should not touch the plant stems. Stagger plantings of leafy greens and other favorite cool weather crops that can be harvested before mid-November (average first frost date for Sonoma County) and root crops that will survive the winter for a continued harvest

Remove finished summer crops by cutting plants just below the soil line to leave the roots to decompose in place. Before planting fall/winter crops, prep your garden soil by adding 1 to 2 inches of properly composted organic matter. No need to dig it in. Just add it to the top of the soil and plant into it. Other options include using dried chicken manure pellets with a formulation of 3-4-3 or a complete organic fertilizer, always following the fertilizer manufacturer's instructions.

For more information, see Cool Season Vegetable Gardening: bit.ly/3AMYnP5



Melissa Keyser harvests beets from the raised vegetable garden beds at her Santa Rosa home. Photo by Christopher Chung/The Press Democrat 2015e

Citrus

If you split your citrus fertilization into three applications this year, make your last application this month.

For mature citrus trees, use 1 pound of urea or 6-10 pounds of steer manure, less for smaller trees. If spider mites are present, use insecticidal soap or a stream of water to

wash them off. New mite generations develop rapidly and may require repeated treatments. Read more about spider mites at: bit.ly/3WBvMXG

Tidy up

Clean and tidy up your garden to keep it healthy by removing dead and decaying plant material that can attract pests, which may damage healthy plants. Also remove older leaves on some plants like squash vines, that may naturally have turned yellow and died. Remove them early to allow the plant's energy to go into the actively growing parts.

Pick up fallen fruit that can create an environment for disease-causing pathogens and attract rodents.

Pull weeds that compete with your plants for water, nutrients and sunlight and can attract pests.

Clean your garden tools after each use to avoid spreading pathogens from infected plants. Sterilize your tools with one part household bleach diluted with nine parts water. Dry and store them in a moisture-free area to prevent rust.

Be alert about water

Stay alert to signs of water stress, especially for plants in containers and hanging baskets. An occasional deep soaking during periods of high heat benefits most plants, even those that do not require regular water. Make sure your garden has thick layers of mulch around the plants to conserve moisture. Pay close attention when mulching plants with woody stems, especially trees. Leave 3 to 6 inches of bare earth around trunks. Too much moisture at the base of woody stems causes rot.

Contributors to this week's column were Diane Judd and Debbie Westrick. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County 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.