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## Begin chipping away at January garden checklist

By SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS  
FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT



If you have collected seeds for your garden, this is a good time to pull out your stash and get it organized in time for National Seed Swap Day on January 25. Crissy Pascual/Petaluma Argus-Courier

With few sunny days ahead in January, predicted temperatures in the low to mid-50s and potential rain on the horizon throughout the month, gardeners are well-served to have plans ready to go when circumstances are optimal to work in the yard this month.

A new year inspires us to set goals. Here are some simple resolutions for achievable goals to make your garden greener and more sustainable in 2025:

- Plant wisely by choosing plants that thrive in our local soils and microclimates.
- Feed the soil with compost to create a thriving ecosystem for plants.
- Save water by using efficient irrigation such as drip systems and embrace drought-tolerant plants.

- Be pest smart by welcoming beneficial insects and using eco-friendly pest control methods.
- Support local wildlife by adding native plants to attract pollinators and by creating habitats for local critters.
- Reuse, recycle, and repurpose materials for pathways, structures, and garden décor.
- Save energy by replacing gas-powered tools with manual or electric ones.

Don't put your holiday lights away yet! A strand of holiday lights in a citrus tree is often enough to protect the plant from frost which could occur through mid-January.

If leaves on your citrus have turned yellow, the chlorosis could be caused by a variety of factors including nitrogen deficiency, over-watering, or both.

With the arrival of warmer temperatures in the spring, nitrogen deficiencies in the plant subside as the soil drains and nitrogen becomes available and the leaves green up again.

Protect the root zone of citrus from seasonal temperature fluctuations by mulching with a thick layer of aged compost. The nutrients in this surface layer of compost gradually find their way into the root zone and provide a balanced nutrient supply.

Citrus need a regular supply of nutrients, so plan to apply an organic fertilizer formulated for citrus according to manufacturer's instructions in early February, and then two more times, 4-6 weeks apart.

For more information on growing citrus, see the UC California Backyard Orchard website: <https://bit.ly/3pNvQDg>.

Anytime between New Year's Day and Valentine's Day is good for pruning.

Prune roses hard, down to three to four young vigorous canes per plant. Be careful not to compact the soil around the plants with your feet as you prune.

Prune pines and other dormant conifers by thinning where necessary and cutting out entire branches to the base. Don't trim individual branches back part way or top them, topping causes irregular growth. You can control the size of most pines by pinching out new shoots, called candles, at the tip of each new growth cluster.

Begin to cut back deciduous ornamental grasses, pruning to within several inches from the ground. If you like the existing structure, wait until February or March to cut back.

January is a good time to start seeds indoors for cool-season leafy vegetables like lettuce, collard greens, kale, Swiss chard and spinach, and for Brassica family crops like broccoli, spring cabbage and cauliflower.

For information on when to plant your starts, see the useful guide to year-round food gardening in Sonoma County on our website: <https://bit.ly/3ilxJll>.

## **National Seed Swap Day**

If you have collected seeds, this is a good time to pull out your seed stash and get it organized in time for National Seed Swap Day on Jan. 25.

It is celebrated on the last Saturday of January every year and is a reminder that spring will soon be on its way.

The first official seed swap day was held on January 26, 2006, in Washington, D.C. when gardeners, farmers, and plant enthusiasts came together to swap seeds from their best plants.

It is a great opportunity for people to share their favorite varieties of seeds, as well as to try out new varieties that they may not have had access to before.

Collecting and exchanging seeds has many benefits ranging from preserving rare, heirloom varieties to saving money on seeds. It's a bonus that the exchange of seeds perpetuates and improves biodiversity and promotes the ultimate form of recycling within our local area.

All gardeners ranging from novices to horticulture experts can benefit from the long-honored practice and tradition of seed swapping.

There are a variety of ways to swap seeds:

- Check to see if your local library has a seed library.
- Find local seed swap groups on social media.
- Have a seed swap party with friends and neighbors. Everyone can bring their excess seeds to swap.
- Support your local seed library with seed or financial donations.
- Spread awareness about seed swapping by posting on social media.

Seeds don't last forever. Before you swap or use the seeds you have on hand, take the time to sort through to make sure they are still viable.

One of our favorite seed viability charts can be found on the Iowa State University website. <https://bit.ly/40bbsOz>

You can also find extensive information on all things related to seeds, including a seed bank, at Community Seed Exchange in Sebastopol.

For more information go to: <https://communityseedexchange.org/> or <https://seedsavers.org/>

*Contributors to this week's column were Diane Judd and Debbie Westrick. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County [sonomamg.ucanr.edu/](http://sonomamg.ucanr.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 this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or [mgsonoma@ucanr.edu](mailto:mgsonoma@ucanr.edu).*