



Winter Garden Chores

By Debbie Hager

UCCE El Dorado County Master Gardener

Winter garden chores are important for laying the groundwork of a successful spring growing season. It's time to pull spent garden annuals and vegetables and add them to the compost pile. Winter is the time to rake the remaining leaves and clean up plant debris. Another chore is to groom herbaceous perennials that are no longer blooming by pruning them to within four inches or so from the ground. All these plant materials may be composted unless there are any problems with plant diseases.

Winter is a good time to amend your soil after a thorough clean up; to prepare garden beds for spring add finished compost and other organic amendments. These additions will increase the soil's ability to hold air, water and nutrients, which will lead to healthier plants. The winter rains will leach this material slowly into the soil. Cover crops can also be planted to increase soil fertility and texture. Cover crops cut down on erosion and weeds and provide mulch material when you cut them down in the spring.

You've already turned off the irrigation systems or reset the timer on your sprinkler system. Another chore is to flush drip irrigation systems with water to clean out sediment and then drain lines to avoid or lessen the chance of breaking from winter freezing. It is important to remember to water plants in containers and pots that are under roof overhangs and may not get watered by rainfall. Have a plan in place to protect plants from freezing temperatures so you are prepared when temperatures drop. Cover cloth is useful for protecting tender plants from frost damage. It may also be wise to move tender plants indoors or under overhangs to over winter.

It's time to move all your tools to a covered spot and clean and sharpen them as necessary. Store seeds in a cool, dry place until the next planting season and label them accordingly. Apply horticultural oil to fruit trees to control scale, mites and aphids after final leaf drop. Apply copper based spray on peach and nectarine trees to control peach leaf curl.

Look forward to a new season knowing that winter garden chores are accomplished and you have invited a successful spring.

The free Master Gardener Saturday classes begin again on January 5th, 2013. Learn all about the art and science of shaping and training fruit trees when Master Gardeners present “Pruning Fruit Trees”. The class starts at 9:00 a.m. and is held in the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C at 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville. Also watch for an article in early January on classes and activities planned for you by the Master Gardeners.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.

Do you have plant containers to recycle? Master Gardeners will gladly take them at the Master Gardener Office. Call before dropping them off and thank you for the donation.