



## Over the Garden Fence

### December in the Garden

By Tery Susman, UC Master Gardener of Mariposa County

It's winter and if you are a novice gardener like I am, you might think this is the season when both you and your garden can rest until spring. However, December is the ideal time to nurture your soil, to prune and to generally tidy up in preparation for the new growing season.

#### Enhancing your soil

Helen Willoughby-Peck, an accomplished Mariposa Master Gardener, recommends the following easy tip for enhancing the fertility and structure of your soil - MULCH!

This is the time to top exposed soil with organic material. Right now, our trees are losing their leaves and this leaf litter makes great mulch. You can also use straw, newspaper, wood chips, pine needles, grass clippings and even spent plant material that. By mulching, you are protecting the soil from temperature extremes, adding nutrients, improving moisture retention, suppressing weeds, and encouraging soil organism activity.

#### Prune

December is a good time to prune. To determine when and how to prune specific native plants, refer to: [Calscape.org](http://Calscape.org) - The California Native Plant Society website. This website offers extensive information about the native plants that grow in Mariposa County. There is a description of the plant, sun, moisture and soil requirements, common uses, maintenance guidelines and how to propagate. An invaluable tool!

A few examples of what to prune in December:

*Toyon (Heteromeles arbutifolia)* – Pruning in mid to late December allows the berries to ripen for the birds and for us to enjoy. Toyon flowers set on new growth in early spring so pruning before the buds set will yield the most flowers and berries next fall.

*Western Redbud (Cercis occidentalis)* – Being deciduous, Western Redbud shows its structure in the winter which guides our pruning. Generally, prune to enhance shape and keeping it the correct size for its garden location. Western Redbud does respond well to occasional hard pruning.

*California Fuchsia (Epilobium canum)* After a few years in the ground, cut California Fuchsia nearly to the ground. This will encourage fresh spring growth and vitality.

### **Tidying up your winter garden**

In addition to mulching, this is the time to weed, tend to your tools and make repairs. Pull up nonnative grasses. Inspect your garden's hardscape. Retaining walls can give way with heavy, wet soil behind them; winter weather can place a strain on fences and other garden structures. Repairing them now can prevent further damage. Assess the tools you use regularly. Make sure they are clean, sharpened and lightly oiled before storing them inside for the winter.

As you can see, there is much to tend to in your garden in the winter. However, don't forget to take time to relax and enjoy the winter beauty, and envision the abundance of spring.

*California Native Gardening A Month-By-Month Guide* by Helen Popper was also used as a reference for this article.

*UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County are located in Mariposa at 5009 Fairgrounds Rd. Visit our website at <http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/MasterGardener/> and Facebook page (UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County) for more gardening information and events. UC Master Gardeners staff a Helpline serving Mariposa County, including Greely Hill, Coulterville, and Lake Don Pedro (209)-966-7078 or [mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu)). Listen to us on the radio at KRYZ 98.5 Mariposa on Wednesdays at 2:00 and Saturdays at 5:00.*