



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Helpful Garden Tips for January 2024 (January 6, 2024)

by Peyton Ellas, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener



January is the month of rain, snow, ice, freezing temperatures, fog, and wind. Sound good? Although plant and soil organism growth slow down in the cold soils of winter, some growth continues, often only underground. Our winter and early spring blooming shrubs, bulbs, and perennials love all this frosty, damp weather. And what moisture is not used can be stored deep in the soil for later use.

PLANTING: It's possible to plant in winter, but we delay most planting until the (relatively) warmer days of mid to late February. The exception is bare-root planting. Here are some tips:

- Bare-root fruit trees are now available. Check their pollination requirements; not all fruit trees are self-fertile, and some will require a cross-pollinator. Notice the number of chill hours required. Our winters average 700-800 chilling hours.
- Bare root roses-- Hybrid teas, floribundas, climbers, miniatures, and shrubs are available. All do very well in the San Joaquin Valley.
- Bare root berries and grapes-- Plant grape vines, cane boysenberries, blackberries, raspberries, blueberries, and strawberries.



You can also plant beets, carrots, leek, lettuce, onion, parsley, radish, seed potatoes, onions, peas, radish, spinach, artichokes, and asparagus directly in the garden this month. Begin sowing seeds for summer annuals and vegetables like tomatoes and peppers in a protected location where you can keep the seedlings warm and where they will receive enough light. Sow more wildflower seeds, especially in gravel or rock, where they will receive a little warmth and can germinate without rotting in wet soils.

MAINTAINING: We have less to do in January, but there are a couple of chores that are perfect to do this month. One of them is spraying roses, deciduous flowering trees, and deciduous fruit trees with winter horticultural oil to smother overwintering insects like spider mites, scales, mealy bugs, and peach twig borers. You don't have to apply horticultural oil if you are lucky enough not to have these specific pests, but if you've had a problem every spring, summer, or fall, be proactive now and keep your trees and roses healthier year-round.

Spray the branches, crotches, trunk, and the ground beneath the tree's drip line. Hold off spraying if rain is forecasted or if the temperature is below 45 degrees. Never spray oil on walnut trees. If you didn't spray your peach or nectarine tree for peach leaf curl in November or December, spray now with a copper-based or synthetic fungicide.

The other main chore of January is pruning deciduous trees and deciduous shrubs, including roses. For all pruning chores, keep pruners & loppers sharp. Sterilize the pruners or loppers in between plants. Use a 10% bleach solution or white vinegar and rinse or wipe the blades off after sterilizing to remove the chemicals. Remove all broken, diseased, or crossing branches first. Two basic cutting techniques are used in general pruning: thinning and heading. Thinning cuts remove entire branches back to a larger branch or the trunk, resulting in a more natural look. Thinning cuts are also used to allow more air circulation and light into the interior of the tree. Thinning cuts are made first before heading cuts. You might want to take a break midway through and step back to examine the tree from a short distance. A well-pruned tree looks balanced and strong.

Heading cuts shorten branches and should only be used on small branches. Use heading cuts judiciously to shorten over-long branches. You can take off about a quarter of the previous season's growth on these newer, smaller branches if you want to keep the tree smaller. Make sure to cut back to an outward-facing bud to direct new growth away from the interior of the tree. Prune from the bottom up and from the inside of the plant to the outside. Don't be too nervous about it. Healthy trees will recover and re-grow. For more info, visit: https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/Local_Gardening_Articles_-_Info/Landscape_Trees/

Another January task is to apply pre-emergent herbicide for warm-season weeds. Read and follow the package directions carefully. If you don't use chemical weed control, shallow-till seedling weeds frequently.

Monitor or turn off your irrigation controller if you haven't already. You will want to deep water if we have an extended dry period, but don't waste water and all the resources it takes for the water to get to the sprinkler or drip emitter if we don't need it.

Prepare your garden and property for torrential rains. Can you fit a swale or rain basin on your property to collect overflow? Where will extra water run to? Are there spots that need erosion control berms or fabrics? Last year, my sheep pen flooded, so I had some thinking and remodeling to do; hopefully, this year and in years to come, the extra water will safely be moved where it can percolate below ground without displacing the sheep!

CONSERVING: I love a good foggy day for chipping some of the brush we've been collecting all year on our rural property. Although we leave brush piles for wildlife, some branches, including the Christmas tree, are great replenishment mulch for our planting beds. Instead of sending leaves off your property, shred them and use them as mulch as much as you can. Nature does not like bare soil, and good gardeners understand the importance of caring for the soil by covering it and protecting it from wind, rain, and extreme temperature assaults.

Check-in on your bee nesting boxes. Often, the older ones have filled tubes, meaning they are "in use." Check to make sure spiders or earwigs aren't hanging out nearby, waiting to eat the bee larvae inside the tubes. To learn more about this great way to support solitary nesting native bees, visit the xerxes.org website.

Happy New Year!

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse North parking lot

January 13 - Rose Pruning Demo, Grangeville Roses, Hanford 1 - 3 pm

January 20 - Rose Pruning Demo, Tulare Co. Courthouse, Visalia 9 am - 1 pm

January 20 - Visalia Farmers Market, Tulare Co. Courthouse North parking lot, 8 - 11 am