



WINTER GARDEN CHORES

Peggy Beltramo, Placer County Master Gardener

From *The Curious Gardener*, Winter 2009

Now that the weather has cooled off and plants are dormant until spring, it is a good time to take care of some gardening chores.

With our unusual weather patterns, *don't forget to check and water plants every four to eight weeks, if rains are insufficient*. Also, check the soil where roof overhangs prevent rains from watering for you. Remember that trees and shrubs need any watering basins left over from summer knocked down to prevent pooling of rains around the trunks, to avoid disease problems.

If you have fruit trees, clean up leaves and dropped fruit to control spreading any disease problems from last year. Dormant spraying of fruit trees should be proceeding according to schedule; reference the calendar available on the UC California Backyard Orchard website here: <http://homeorchard.ucdavis.edu/calendar.pdf>

In addition to spraying, fruit trees may need winter pruning. So, please come to the Placer County Master Gardener fruit tree pruning clinic on January 24, 2009 at Placer Nature Center to learn more or to the Nevada County Master Gardener pruning class on February 14, 2009 at the Demo Garden (see page 8 for details).

More Pruning...

Newer research suggests that dead stalks may provide some overwintering protection for perennials, so wait until early spring to cut back your flowering perennials. They also provide some winter interest and seed stalks for wildlife.

Summer blooming shrubs can be pruned now, but spring blooming shrubs should be pruned just after bloom. Their blossoms are produced on last year's wood, so if you prune them now, you cut off all of this year's blooms. You can cut branches of spring bloomers to bring in and force to get some early spring cheer.

Look for branches with swelling flower buds (flower buds are fatter than leaf buds.) Cut a few branches of almond, cherry, crabapple, deutzia, forsythia, honeysuckle, peach, pear, plum, pussywillow, quince, redbud, spiraea, weigela, or other spring-blooming deciduous shrubs or trees. Crush the ends of the stems and place them in warm water (70-80 degrees) in a cool, humid area with moderate light for a week before bringing them inside to bloom.

Roses should be pruned about six weeks before last frost. If you prune too early, you can stimulate new growth which can be damaged by an unexpected cold snap.

And, don't forget...

- Keep up with the sprouting weeds and adjust your mulch to keep them from taking hold.
- Check with your local nursery for bare root plants that are arriving now. They are much less expensive than potted ones and you can inspect the roots to check for a healthy root system. Planting them now gives them a head start on spring.

If the weather is just too awful to go outside and tend to these chores, put your feet up and shop the seed and plant catalogs or check the internet for more things to do in your garden. Sip a cup of tea and dream of spring. Soon we will be back in the garden again!

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PLACER COUNTY

11477 E Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603
(530) 889-7385

E-Mail: ceplacer@ucdavis.edu

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NEVADA COUNTY

255 So Auburn
Grass Valley, CA 95945
(530) 273-4563

E-Mail: cenevada@ucdavis.edu

Placer County Hotline: (530) 889-7388. Visit us online at <http://pcmg.ucanr.org>

References

Master Gardeners of Santa Clara, <http://www.mastergardeners.org/pdf/import/picks/treecalendar.pdf>

UCCE Los Angeles, <http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/Garden%5FTips%5Ffor%5FLos%5FAngeles%5FCounty/>

UCCE El Dorado, <http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/files/17561.htm>

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