

# The Curious gardener

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## Orchid-Mania: How to Buy and Care for an Orchid

by Bonnie Bradt, UC Master Gardener of Nevada County

**WARNING:** Collecting orchids can be addictive. Of course since I'm already far down that path, I guess I'm contributing to encouraging future addicts. **GO FOR IT!**

To begin with, there are two main reasons to buy an orchid:

**ONE:** you want a pretty plant with flowers to put on your coffee table or give as a gift. It will last for a few weeks looking great. And then you will toss it. No guilt and not much money. So pick any pretty orchid from anywhere including a grocery store or big box store. You don't need to know what kind it is or how the roots look. Pick one where the flowers have not all opened up and it will last longer. The End.

**TWO:** you are interested in orchids and want to have pretty ones that will grow well and re-bloom, maybe for years. You are willing to put in some time and patience to learn how to care for them. They can still sit on your coffee table when they're blooming but you won't be tossing them. If you have chosen TWO, then let's deal with what you need to know to give you a good start.

We will begin with the purchase of a new orchid. You DO need to know what type it is. Look for a label of some sort that gives the whole name. Often grocery store or big box store orchids won't have this. But if you know the name, then you will be able to look up special instructions that will be helpful for growing that particular orchid. Each orchid has different requirements. If you know them, you will have much more chance at a successful future for your plant.



*Cymbidium orchids.  
Photo by Bonnie Bradt.*

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Hint... purchase at an orchid show and I guarantee each orchid will be properly labeled. Don't lose the label.

If you want your orchid to last, you DO want to know what the roots look like. Most orchids are potted in see-through plastic pots. That is perfect as you can see the roots' appearance. They should be plump and white or green (depending on whether they are dry or wet). If they are brown or black then they are rotted and will not take up water. Try smelling the root area if you can. Rotted roots will smell rotted... a "dead" giveaway.

Look at the color and condition of the leaves of the plant, not just the flowers. Evenly green, and no misshapen leaves or leaf spots, which could be fungus, virus or insects. If you really want to invest in the future of your collection, and you are patient, buy orchids that are not blooming. You can buy orchids as "juveniles" inexpensively, and have a nice collection to grow and care for. Again, purchasing at an orchid show allows you to buy many types of baby or "not yet flowering" orchids.

In general, most orchids have a growth phase during the warm months and they bloom in the winter months. So you feed them and water them more during the months when they are growing. Makes sense, right? You do not need to feed them when they are flowering. Just water them.

Most people who are first time orchid buyers, will choose one of the three most popular varieties. The "moth" orchid (*Phalenopsis*), the *Cymbidium* orchid, or the lady slipper orchid (*Paphiopedilum*). Mostly they are easy to grow and have a good chance of reblooming if treated right. But they have very different preferences for growth conditions.

The graceful, arching moth orchid, the grocery store favorite, is easy to grow and can bloom for months at a time unless it's already been blooming for a month before you get it. This orchid prefers medium light, medium temperature, and at least 50% humidity during its growth phase.



Moth orchids. *Phalenopsis*. Photo by Bonnie Bradt.



Lady slipper orchid. *Paphiopedilum*.

Photo by Bonnie Bradt.

A day/night temperature difference of 15 degrees in the fall is good for flowering. It is a house plant.

Cymbidiums can also be found in grocery stores. They are tall hardy orchids that can be happy growing outdoors. Usually they should be in tall containers, in bark for drainage and so their roots can stretch. In fact, they actually need a cold chill phase in the fall/early winter, to grow the best flowers. Although I would not advocate this, they will tolerate being snowed on. During their growth phase, they need lots of light (even periods of direct sun although dappled sun is best), lots of water, drainage, fertilizer and that cold chill that I mentioned. Ideally they can be grown outside all year, until they start to bloom. Then you can put them wherever you want to show off the flowers.

The last "beginner friendly" orchid I want to mention is the lady slipper. They are a bit harder to find but are reasonably easy to grow. They do not need a lot of light, but they like humidity. Maybe they'd be a good bathroom orchid.

Of course there are many types of orchids you can try. If you go to an orchid show, you will be literally blinded by the choices. But I suggest that you start with either *Phalenopsis*, *Cymbidium*, or *Paphiopedilum* (or all of them) to experiment with what will tolerate your home's conditions best. You will probably find, as I did, that it is easier to find orchids that like your home, instead of trying to alter your home to please an orchid. Of course if you have a greenhouse, that is the best of all situations.

As passing thoughts for your beginning efforts, here are the **10 "Rules of Thumb" for basic orchid care.**

1. When in doubt, go drought. More orchids have been killed by overwatering than underwatering.
2. Whatever you do, do it before noon. This gives the orchid time to dry before cool night temperature encourages fungus.
3. Air movement and light are as important as water and fertilizer.

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4. Misting can result in more problems than benefits. Humidity is best found by a kitchen sink or in a bathroom (or greenhouse) for the orchids that need it.
5. Water once a week on the average—more in summer, less in winter.
6. Fertilize WEEKLY, WEAKLY. Very dilute fertilizer each time you water. During the flowering phase, it's water only.
7. Use temperate to warm water. Do not water with sodium softened water, but potassium soft water is fine. And remember, orchids are not cocktails, do NOT use ice.
8. If the leaf is warm to the touch, it is in too much light.
9. Sun moves seasonally, so move your plants accordingly.
10. Become an inspector. Observe your plants for the appearance of problems.

One of the new orchid lover's best friends is the website for the American Orchid Society, [www.aos.org](http://www.aos.org) There are "Culture Sheets" for most types of orchid with specific information about that variety. There are suggestions about everything from repotting orchids to pest control.

Lastly, be patient. A true orchid expert is one who has killed many orchids and learned from the mistakes.

## References

- *All About Orchids*. American Orchid Society. 2019. [www.aos.org/orchids.aspx](http://www.aos.org/orchids.aspx)
- Vasiljev, Alex. *Success with Orchids Indoors*. Fine Gardening. 2020. [www.finegardening.com/article/success-with-orchids-indoors](http://www.finegardening.com/article/success-with-orchids-indoors)



# Hotline FAQs

Have gardening questions?  
Contact a Master Gardener!

Placer Co. 530-889-7388

Nevada Co. 530-273-0919

Nevada County office closed due to COVID-19 testing site. Contact us through our [website](#) or [Facebook](#).

## Do you have suggestions for spring flowering bulbs that do well in our area?

by Pauline Kuklis, UC Master Gardener of Placer County

Spring flowering bulbs are a wonderful way to add a splash of early color to your yard. Plant a variety of bulbs in mulched areas or under trees for a showy spring display. Most bulbs require little water and are nearly maintenance free.

Select plump, healthy bulbs or corms and plant them in the fall (late September to December). They will do best in full sun or partial shade where the soil drains well. Most bulbs should be planted about twice as deep as they are tall. Ideally, you should deadhead the flowers as they die back, and allow the leaves to turn brown and dry before removing the debris. Bulbs and corms will divide and become overcrowded, so they will need to be dug up and divided every few years. Replant what you can and donate any extras to your friends!

Below is a short list of bulbs that do very well in our area:

1. **Peruvian Scilla** (pictured below) This purple beauty is one of the earliest flowering bulbs and makes a fantastic border around the edge of a berm or beneath a tree.
2. **Daffodils and Narcissus** Plant in clusters for maximum effect. You have many types to choose from, and their blooming time can vary. You can extend the blooming period and add interest by planting several different varieties.
3. **Grape Hyacinth** This tiny bulb can provide a sea of deep blue and look fantastic when surrounding clusters of daffodils or narcissus.
4. **Gladiolus** These beauties come in a huge variety of stunning colors. Cut and arrange the flowers in a large vase to add instant drama to your home. They are also a favorite of hummingbirds.
5. **Allium** The large purple globes are a delight to the eye. As an added benefit, these bulbs (which are in the onion family) are deer resistant.

For additional information about selecting and planting bulbs in our area, check out the following online resources:

[http://sacmg.ucanr.edu/Sacramento\\_Bulb\\_Planting\\_Schedule/](http://sacmg.ucanr.edu/Sacramento_Bulb_Planting_Schedule/)

<http://www.ucanr.org/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=22522>



# Saving Seeds

by Peggy Beltramo, UC Master Gardener of Placer County

Historically, humans saved seeds to provide food for the following year. Today, the practice of saving your own seeds has diminished. Racks of seeds are available at nurseries, big box stores, and online. So why collect and save your own seed? There are a number of reasons why and a few reasons why not.

Why should you save seeds? You choose which plant varieties you want to grow, you save money by collecting your own seeds, you have the security of knowing where your seeds came from, you can depend on consistent seed quality, and over time your seeds will become regionally adapted to your growing conditions. You are the selector and choose what and how to save your seeds.

The reasons why not to save seeds are equally, if not more, important. Not every vegetable or flower will produce the same plant from seed. Hybrid plants are produced from crosses between two distinct, inbred parent lines. The seed does not produce plants that are true to the original hybrid variety you planted. Next year's plants will be a surprise! Check the plant label or seed packet for the word 'hybrid' or 'F1.'

Open pollinated plants will normally produce the same plant in succeeding generations. You can depend on their seed producing the same plant next year, but you need to keep the plant you want to collect seed from separate from other plants which could cross pollinate it and give you a "cucamelon" or a "watercumber." (Cucumbers and watermelons are in the same family and can cross pollinate each other.) Also, popcorn and sweet corn will cross pollinate and next year's crop may be neither popcorn nor sweet corn. So, it is tricky to collect pure seed. There are crop distance charts that tell you how far apart plants need to be to prevent cross pollination—sometimes as much as 1/2 mile! There are tricks to prevent cross pollination, even in small gardens, but it takes a bit of work.

Once you have determined which seeds you want to save and have figured out how to protect them from cross-pollination, you need to know when to harvest your seeds, how to clean them, and how to store them safely. To learn more about successfully saving seeds, see the resources below. Also learn about getting free seeds in the Seed Library article at right.

## Resources

- *What Types of Seeds Should I Save.* Richmond Grows Seed Lending Library. n.d. <http://www.richmondgrowsseeds.org/new-to-seed-saving.html>
- Whealy, Diane Ott. *How to Save Seeds.* Seed Savers Exchange. <https://www.seedsavers.org/how-to-save-seeds>
- Ashworth, Suzanne. *Seed to Seed.* Seed Savers Exchange. 2002.



*A card catalog repurposed to hold seeds for loan. Photo courtesy of Richmond Grows Seed Lending Library.*

## Seed Libraries

"Just as one seed can produce many seeds, one idea can change many lives. Free public libraries were revolutionary in their time because they provided access to books and knowledge that had not previously been available to a large segment of the population. A free seed lending library can also provide people with a chance to transform their lives and communities by providing access to fresh, healthy food that may not otherwise be available."

*Quoted, with permission, from*

<http://www.richmondgrowsseeds.org/about-us.html>

Many libraries throughout the Sacramento region have joined the seed library movement. Madelyn Helling Library in Nevada County has hosted seed swaps the past two years in January. The Loomis Library and Community Learning Center provides a seed library in Placer County. Library patrons are able to choose seeds from those available, both commercial seeds and some grown and returned by patrons of the library. Library cards are available, and seeds can be delivered curbside. Check their website for Covid-19 updates. For more information go to <https://loomislibrary.org/seed-library/>



# Master Gardeners of Nevada County Now Live on Zoom!

By Ann Wright, UC Master Gardener of Nevada County

With in-person public workshops on hold for now, the decision was made by the Master Gardener of Nevada County Board to move forward and plunge into the virtual workshop world. Zoom is a cloud-based video communications computer application, which allows us to take part in meetings, and now, public workshops! This promotes safety and consideration of our Master Gardeners and the community we serve by keeping a distance, and still being able to participate in some gardening classes.

The first workshop, **Garden Makeover: From Lawn to Landscape** was expertly presented by Alison Chop and Chrissy Freeman on June 13, 2020. The second workshop to go live on June 27, **Weeds: The Good-The Bad-The Ugly**, was presented by Theresa Thomas, Susan Van Steenkiste and Ann Wright. The Zoom format allows Master Gardeners to do their part of the workshop from their own homes. Online links and PowerPoint slides are also easily adapted to the Zoom programs.

In August we really stepped up the pace and presented:  
**Seed Saving Basics** on August 1  
**Flowers 101 - From Seed to Vase** on August 15  
**Compost is the Gardeners Best Friend** on August 22  
**Broccoli, Lettuce and Kale, Oh My! - Cool Season Vegetables, Part 1** is planned for August 29.

Afraid you missed out? No worries! In order for viewers to watch a session again, or for people who couldn't attend the live workshop, the presentations have been recorded. The NCMG [website](#) now features an "Online Workshops and Videos" [link](#) on the menu at the left on the home screen. The recorded programs are edited, and depending on video length, are divided into 30-minute segments. After the programs are edited, they are downloaded to the website. For workshops that include participant handouts, links to the handouts are also included on the website.

Look for these upcoming Live ZOOM Workshops:  
**Broccoli, Lettuce and Kale, Oh My! - Cool Season Vegetables, Part 2** September 5  
**Managing Deer** October 17  
**No Sun? No Problem: Plants for Shade** October 24  
**Soil-Building Workshop** October 31

It's very exciting to be able to help fulfill our mission for public education while keeping social distance! And, Master Gardeners may view the workshops for continuing education hours!

## 2021 Gardening Guide and Calendar

Presented by the UC Master Gardeners of Placer County



## 2021 Gardening Guide and Calendar! Smart Choices for Gardening Success

UC Master Gardeners of Placer County are pleased to announce that the 2021 Gardening Guide and Calendar will be available in September 2020. The theme for 2021 is "Smart Choices for Gardening Success." The calendar presents an abundance of information essential for both novice gardeners and veteran gardeners. It includes thirteen articles with beautiful and informative photos.

Articles include topics such as soil testing, planting bare root plants, gardening tools, and shade gardening. Each month also includes tips on what to plant and what is available at the market. In addition, tips on gardening tasks to be performed are readily displayed by month. Information on climate zones and gardening at varying altitudes is also provided. Reliable sources for more information on many related topics are provided throughout the calendar.

Starting September 8, the Gardening Guide and Calendar can be purchased for \$10 on the Placer County Master Gardener (PCMG) website [pcmg.ucanr.org](http://pcmg.ucanr.org), as well as at several local nurseries throughout Placer, Nevada and El Dorado counties. For questions on where the calendars can be purchased call the PCMG office at (530) 889-7388. Purchasing the calendar will help ensure successful gardening. Enjoy!



agri-cola, ae *m* tiller of the field, farmer, husbandman  
 caulis, is *m* stalk, stem of a plant; cabbage  
 colo, colui, cultum 3 to care for; a) to till, cultivate  
 farm; b) to tend; *adj.* cultus 3 cultivated, tilled  
 ta, orum *n/pl* tilled land, gardens, plantations  
 cresco, crevi, (cretum) 3 to grow  
 cultus *m* cultivation, labor, tilling; a) to till, cultivate  
 b) care, training, education; c) to grow  
 florens, tis blooming, flowering  
 floreo, ui 2 to bloom, blossom  
 flos, oris *m* flower, blossom  
 fodio, fossom 3 to dig, dig  
 folium, i *n* leaf; foliage  
 herba, ae *f* grass, herb  
 hortus, i *m* garden  
 radix, icis *f* root  
 viridis, e *f* green  
 vita, ae *f* life  
 xylen

Corner

## BotLat

### Find Out What Those Weird Plant Names Mean

by Peggy Beltramo,  
 UC Master Gardener of Placer County



Photo by Jack Kelly Clark

### Wicked, Poisonous Plants

Fall is the season for magic and spirits. You probably know that there are common plants that are dangerous. They cause rashes, intestinal distress, and even death. In the spirit of Halloween, let's examine the names of a couple of these "wicked" plants.

The foothills are festooned with poison oak, *Toxicodendron diversilobum*. Raise your hand if you are allergic to it. I am! If you have been reading this column, you may be able to untangle at least parts of that BotLat name. *Toxicodendron* means 'poison tree' and *diversilobum* tells us that the lobes on the leaves are diverse, every leaf having its own pattern. You may have learned the warning, "Leaves of three, let them be!" That is loosely true, but records show that it is not always just three leaflets in a bunch. See the UC IPM Pest Note [ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7431.html](http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7431.html) for more information about poison oak and how to manage it.

Another wicked plant, commonly found in gardens, is oleander, *Nerium oleander*. It is considered toxic to humans and is a skin irritant as well. This plant's BotLat genus name, *Nerium*, references the Greek word for water, *neros*, since the natural habitat for oleander is streamside, yet it is recognized as a low water plant in our gardens. The specific epithet, *oleander*, refers to the leaves resembling leaves of an olive tree.

UC ANR publication 8560, [anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8560.pdf](http://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8560.pdf), contains details on poison oak, oleander, and many other potentially dangerous garden plants. It also discusses various plant toxins, their modes of action, and how to prevent poisoning.

For a quick reference, check out the [UC Toxic Plants list](#) where dangerous plants are listed with their toxicity ratings. It is important to know whether you have any "wicked" plants in your garden.

## Nevada County Demo Garden News

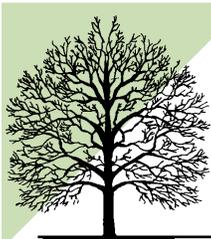
by Ann Wright, UC Master Gardener of Nevada County

As summer moves along, and the limitations to work in the garden have lessened, the Master Gardeners' Demonstration Garden in Grass Valley has been the scene of some much-needed weeding and maintenance. Using a scheduling system developed by Don Asay, our "safety officer", Master Gardeners have had access to the garden—using social distancing, and in groups of fewer than 10. And some good work has been done! Taking advantage of Nevada County's free green waste disposal between May 17 and June 27, several trailers-full of waste from the garden was hauled to the disposal site. Many thanks to Kate Brennen for the use of her trailer, and to all the Master Gardeners who helped weed and prune.

A new set of steps is being constructed for the Cottage. The old wooden steps were no longer safe, so new concrete steps are in process—thanks again to Don Asay for leading this project.

The hoop house is housing some propagated plants for next spring, and the raised bed area has been going under some rehabilitation. The demonstration garden is one of the faces of Master Gardeners of Nevada County and it's been gratifying to see people back out to work. There is a lot to offer the community in the various parts of our garden!





# Great Trees

for Our Area

## Valley Oak *Quercus lobata*

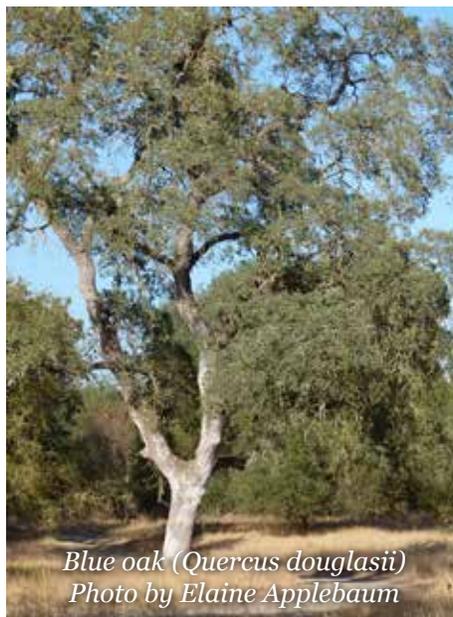
USDA Hardiness Zones: 7-9

Height: 100', Width: 50'

## Blue Oak *Quercus douglasii*

USDA Hardiness Zones: 6-9

Height: 40-60' Width: 40-50'



Blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*)  
Photo by Elaine Applebaum

by Marianne Calhoun, UC Master Gardener of Placer County

As the best time to plant a tree occurs during fall's cooler weather with anticipated winter rains, have you considered adding a large shade tree this fall? Nicole Harrison, certified arborist and UC Master Gardener, recommended matching a tree's potential size with "the conditions on your site—the ones you don't control!" in *The Curious Gardener's* [spring 2020 issue](#).

The best deciduous shade trees are tall and broad with an open branch structure. A large one will offer protection from our hot summer sun, as well as allow filtered sunlight during the winter, when planted strategically on the south side of your home. If you have a large garden, consider planting a deciduous oak that is native to Nevada and Placer counties as well as commonly available in nurseries. Oak trees, in the *Fagaceae* plant family, are renowned for their longevity plus habitat for birds, butterflies and insects.

Valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) is an Arboretum All-star, plus recommended by [Roseville Urban Forest](#) and [Sacramento Tree](#) Foundations. As its deep roots reach ground water, this tree adapts to many soil conditions in Sunset zones 3b-9, 11-24. Valley oak prefers full sun and often grows 20' tall within five years. After 20 years, this oak can reach 60-70' tall and 50' wide and ultimately 100' tall. Its massive trunk, thick bark and outer limbs drooping to the ground are distinguishing features. Native Americans relied on its acorns for food.

If you're young and patient, consider blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*) that only grows a few inches each year. It ultimately grows 40-60' tall with branches beginning at 10-20' and a rounded canopy. This oak tree thrives when planted in a hot dry area (Sunset zones 3-11, 14-24), plus receives little to no summer water once established. Also recommended by Roseville Urban Forest and Sacramento Tree Foundations, its foliage evolves to a distinctive bluish-green color.



So please consider planting one of these deciduous oak trees this fall! Click on the following links to CalScape and SelecTree and type in the tree names for more information and photos of both oak trees.

<https://calscape.org/about.php>

<https://selectree.calpoly.edu/search/>

Leaves of valley oak (*Quercus lobata*)

## Master Gardeners of Placer County in Partnership

Good gardening practices do more than create healthy plants and beautiful gardens. They can also have positive effects on air and water quality, water conservation, and waste reduction. So our mission as Master Gardeners, to extend research-based gardening and composting information to the public, is often a good fit with city and county agencies tasked with protecting our environment.

In the past, we have partnered with The City of Roseville's Utility Exploration Center (RUEC) to provide public gardening workshops. Now that the pandemic has put those in-person workshops on hold, we have worked with RUEC to produce some short instructional gardening videos that are housed on their website. Topics covered so far are: **Stop and Smell the Roses**, **The Trouble with Aphids**, and **What's Eating My Plant?** These clips and others can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

We also worked with Placer Mosquito and Vector Control District to produce a beautiful poster on **How To Create A Native Landscape To Help Control Mosquitoes At Home**. It is so full of useful information that we can't begin to describe it in this small space, so click [here](#) to download a copy to explore.

Internally, we are converting some of our workshops into an online format and hope to have some ready starting in October. Keep an eye on our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) for details, but topics include **Native Plants**, **Raised Beds**, and **Composting and Your Soil**.

# Protecting Trees During Construction

by Brooke Moeller, Placer County Master Gardener

Planning to build a new home, garage, barn, tennis court, or pool? Will the project be around or close to mature trees? Big, healthy trees can easily be damaged or killed during construction projects.

Trees provide shelter for animals and birds, shade in summer, and soil stabilizing root systems. According to the Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers, a healthy, mature tree can add up to \$10,000 to your property's value.

Keeping your trees safe during construction requires a plan and coordination between your architect, contractor, and workers. It is not difficult or expensive, but it is critically important. It will save you heartache and provide benefits for years to come.

Before beginning construction, draft a Preservation Plan. First, check your local ordinances to determine if any of your trees are protected. Enlist an arborist to help you decide which trees to keep and which ones to remove. They can determine each tree's health and identify potential future problems.

Next identify the Critical Root Zone (CRZ) for the trees you need to protect. This is the area around a tree that contains all the roots necessary for the tree's survival. It includes large woody roots that transport nutrients and support the tree, as well as smaller roots that absorb water and nutrients. It is usually about 50% larger than the tree's drip line.

Download **Protecting Trees During Construction** from <https://www.placer.ca.gov/document-center/view/9584> for the CRZ formula.

Define a safe route that avoids disturbing the CRZ for trucks to deliver supplies, work space, staging areas for equipment, and space for storing materials. Determine where potentially toxic materials, such as paint, concrete, and chemicals should be cleaned from tools and equipment. Place it far away from all root zones. Do the same with septic systems, as roots may be damaged by the chemicals or grow into the tank and pipes.

Prepare each endangered tree by pounding steel fence posts into the ground at the CRZ. Then stretch fluorescent plastic fencing between the posts. Maintain this fence during construction. Post signs and make sure the site supervisor and all workers know you are serious about protecting your valuable trees.

Once construction begins, do not allow driving on or storing anything within the CRZs. To safely transport materials across a CRZ, use ¾" plywood or a 6-8" mat of bark mulch. Do not attach ropes, nails, or cables to trees. Use hand tools when possible for excavation work in the CRZ. When trenching for utilities, trench away from tree roots and combine utilities in a single trench, when possible.



Fencing prevents damage to tree roots and trunk, and avoids compacting soil at a construction site.

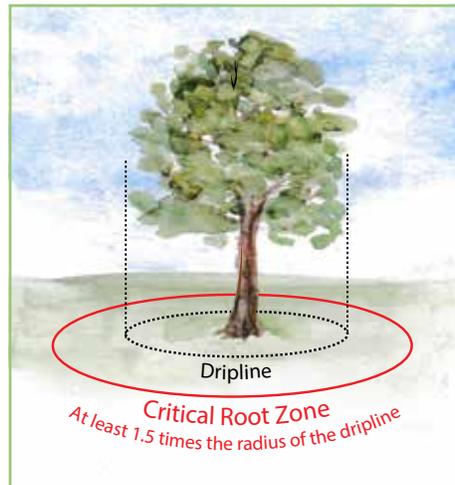
Photo by Jack Kelly Clark.

Tunnel under roots instead of cutting through them. Ideally, use hydro excavation or pneumatic excavation that remove soil but leave roots intact.

Removing unwanted trees and brush, and working around your trees' roots will shock them. Make sure your endangered trees have adequate water during and after your project. Maintain a 2-4" layer of mulch around your trees, and monitor them for signs of stress or pests. If problems arise, or pruning is needed, seek professional help from an arborist.

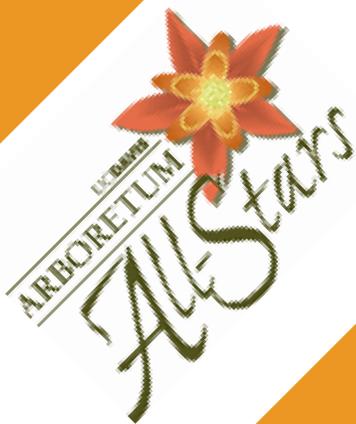
Drafting and implementing a Preservation Plan will help your trees survive your project and enjoy a long and healthy life. You, your trees, and many local species will all benefit from a little foresight and preparation.

The links in the references below provide additional information for protecting your trees during construction.



## References

- *Benefits of Trees*. Arbor Day Foundation. 2020. [www.arborday.org/trees/benefits.cfm](http://www.arborday.org/trees/benefits.cfm)
- Fazio, James R., Ed. *How to Save Trees During Construction*. Tree City USA Bulletin Number 7. The National Arbor Day Foundation. 2020. <https://shop.arborday.org/7-how-to-save-trees-during-construction>
- *Protecting Trees During Construction*. UCANR. <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/GARDEN/ENVIRON/protect-landscapes.html>



## Island Mountain Mahogany *Cercocarpus betuloides* var. *blancheae*

by Laurie McGonagill, UC Master Gardener of Placer County

Need a quick-growing evergreen hedge or screen? Consider the island mountain mahogany, *Cercocarpus betuloides* var. *blancheae*. This mountain mahogany is a California native found on the Channel Islands and in parts of Los Angeles and Ventura counties. It has a lot going for it--low water needs, a tolerance for shaping, and its attraction to pollinators and beneficial wildlife. Its common name refers to its red wood as it is not a true mahogany, being a member of the rose family. Island mountain mahogany has a vertical growth habit and can attain a height of 15 to 25 feet and a width of 6 to 12 feet, but it can be kept much smaller with shaping. It can also be pruned as a small tree. Its species name, *betuloides*, refers to its birch-like leaves which are larger than other mountain mahoganies. This plant likes full sun and dry soil. Once established it does not need supplemental water.

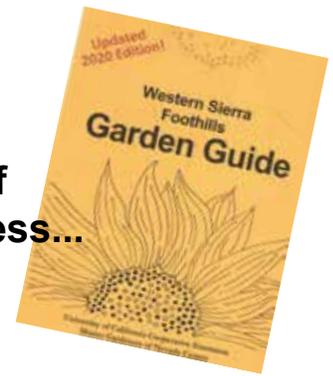
Island mountain mahogany blooms in late winter to early spring with small clustered white blossoms. The resulting seed pods are eye-catching; feathery tendrils spiral out from the pods, looking quite unusual.

Deer may browse this shrub so watch where you plant it. This under-utilized shrub is a draw for people and beneficial wildlife alike!



*The distinctive seed pods of mountain mahogany.*  
Photos by Laurie McGonagill

Hot Off  
the Press...



### The Western Sierra Foothills Garden Guide Goes to Print!

After a considerable amount of time planning, writing, re-writing, and editing, final proofs have been reviewed, and the 2020 edition of the Western Sierra Foothills Garden Guide is now complete and ready for sale. The book provides cultural tips and an abundance of gardening information relevant to the Sierra foothills.

The updated 2020 edition of the Garden Guide is the culmination of efforts of numerous Master Gardeners of Nevada County who helped review and update existing chapters, as well as write new content. Sections on growing native plants, ornamental and shade trees, composting, vermicomposting, and container gardening have been updated and added to the garden guide. The 2020 edition also provides lists of plants that grow well in our area, managing deer in the landscape, a month-by-month garden task section, as well as expanded information about integrated pest management.

Although the 2020 edition of the Western Sierra Foothills Garden Guide will not be launched with the great public fanfare as previously planned, a little quieter approach is being taken. We are grateful to several local vendors who are carrying the books in their stores. The Garden Guide may be purchased from the following Grass Valley locations: A to Z Nursery, Peaceful Valley Farm and Garden Supply, Weiss Brothers Nursery, and B & C Nursery. The book is also available at Easley's Nursery in Auburn.

## References

- *All-Stars Plant Details*. UC Davis Arboretum All-Stars. n.d. [arboretum.ucdavis.edu/plant/island-mountain-mahogany](http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/plant/island-mountain-mahogany)
- *Cercocarpus betuloides* var. *blancheae*, *Island Mountain-Mahogany*. Jepson Herbarium. University of California, Berkeley. 2020. [ucjeps.berkeley.edu/eflora/eflora\\_display.php?tid=56210](http://ucjeps.berkeley.edu/eflora/eflora_display.php?tid=56210)



# Events Calendar

**Due to COVID-19, Public Events Have Been Suspended  
Visit Our Websites for the Most Up to Date Information**

Nevada County Master Gardeners: [ncmg.ucanr.org](http://ncmg.ucanr.org)

Placer County Master Gardeners: [pcmg.ucanr.org](http://pcmg.ucanr.org)

## All Public Events Suspended

In the midst of the current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the top priority of UC Master Gardeners is the health and safety of our communities.

At the time of publication, in compliance with CDC, state, and county guidance, Master Gardeners of Placer and Nevada Counties have suspended all in-person public workshops, events, and activities until further notice.

Until we can serve you again in person, please check out these “socially distant” resources to aid and inspire your gardening pursuits.

### Read Past Issues of *The Curious Gardener*

Ten years of past issues can be accessed at [http://pcmg.ucanr.org/Curious\\_Gardener\\_Newsletter/?newsList=3648](http://pcmg.ucanr.org/Curious_Gardener_Newsletter/?newsList=3648)



### Follow Us on Facebook

Ask home gardening questions, read gardening tips, and find out when our events resume.

**Placer County**

<https://www.facebook.com/PlacerCountyMasterGardeners>

**Nevada County**

<https://www.facebook.com/UCCEmastergardeners.nevadacounty/>

### Nevada County Master Gardeners and Friends Talk Radio:

**Listen live on Saturdays  
from 10:00 am until noon**

**at KNCO 830AM**

Or, live stream at  
<http://www.knco.com>

Call in to ask your home  
gardening questions:

**(530) 477-KNCO (477-5626)**

On dates Master Gardeners are not available for a live broadcast, past shows will be played from previously recorded podcasts (if this is the case, the call-in feature is not available).

### Miss the show? Download a podcast!

- Go to the KNCO website
- Click on the Podcast tab
- Scroll down to find the previous Saturday's date
- Look for “Master Gardeners—The First Hour” and “Master Gardeners—The Second Hour”

### Explore Our Websites

Both county's websites are chock full of gardening information, though they are each laid out a little differently.

On the Nevada County site, look at the menu bar on the left side of the homepage, [ncmg.ucanr.org](http://ncmg.ucanr.org). Here you will find links to [our new online workshops](#), information on Water-Wise Gardening, Home Vegetable Gardening, Backyard Orchards, Pest Management and Composting (including videos!).

On the Placer County homepage, [pcmg.ucanr.org](http://pcmg.ucanr.org), similar links are found across the yellow top menu bar where you will find headings like Placer Pests, Gardening Essentials (Basics, Composting, Drought Advice), Fruits & Nuts, Vegetables, and Landscape Plants.

These websites will be the best places to get current information about when our workshops and events will resume. We hope to be able to see you in person again soon, but until that time, we wish you happy and healthy times in your garden!

## About Master Gardeners

Our mission as University of California Master Gardener volunteers is to extend research-based gardening and composting information to the public through various educational outreach methods. We strive to present accurate, impartial information to local gardeners so they have the knowledge to make informed gardening decisions in regard to plant choices, soil fertility, pest management, irrigation practices, and more.

The Master Gardener volunteer program was started in the early 1970s at the Washington State University. Farm Advisors became overwhelmed by all the incoming calls from home gardeners and homesteaders so they trained volunteers to answer these questions and the "Master Gardener Program" was born. The first University of California Master Gardener programs began in 1980 in Sacramento and Riverside counties. The Nevada County and Placer County Master Gardener Associations began soon thereafter in 1983.

## Over 35 Years Serving Placer and Nevada Counties

### Production Information

*The Curious Gardener* is published quarterly by the University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners of Placer and Nevada Counties.

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Community Education Specialist: Home Horticulture and Composting Education, Master Gardener Coordinator

#### Liz Rees, Content Coordination

Master Gardener of Nevada County

#### Elaine Applebaum, Production

Master Gardener of Placer County

Have a Gardening  
Question?

Call our Hotline

Placer County Residents

**530.889.7388**

Nevada County Residents

*Nevada County office closed due to COVID-19 testing site. Contact us through our [website](#) or [Facebook](#).*

Master Composter Rotline

**530.889.7399**

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### How to Subscribe

Online subscriptions are free to residents of Placer and Nevada Counties.

Log on to [http://pcmg.ucanr.org/Curious\\_Gardener\\_Newsletter/](http://pcmg.ucanr.org/Curious_Gardener_Newsletter/) to sign up for your electronic delivery.

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