

JANUARY HORT BY MARILYN GUIDROZ This is not only the New Year but the beginning of our garden year. This is the month that you must perform certain garden tasks. Our Southern California gardens are year round and this is very much the beginning of our spring. It's a very busy time.

Pruning Deciduous Fruit Trees All deciduous fruit trees need to be pruned and shaped from the beginning. To bear fruit well these trees need to be pruned once a year. Major pruning is best when the leaves have fallen off the tree and the new buds have not swelled yet. During this brief dormant state the tree shape is easier to map. January is the month to prune!

Each type of fruit tree and each individual tree vary in the type of pruning it will need. Some of the things to note are the placement of the main framework of branches, the age and vigor of the tree, and if the tree bears its fruit on spurs. It can get a bit complicated so call on an expert or consult a pruning manual.

Dormant Sprays After pruning the fruit trees, clean up the ground underneath and apply the dormant sprays. Many of our organic gardeners use the dormant sprays. These help to safely control over-wintering mites and insects, such as scale and certain caterpillars.

Peach and Nectarine trees suffer from a fungal disease called Peach Leaf Curl. Dormant sprays can control this disease in winter without damaging fruit or harming the beneficial insects in the garden. Beneficial insects are less active in the cooler weather. As with all chemical products be careful to read the directions and use protective clothing, boots, rubber gloves and a mask.

Pruning Roses Southern California rose growers do not hard prune the rose bush to 12-18" high like in the cold-winter climates. Here we keep the healthy, productive cane with as much good wood as possible. Don't cut your plants lower than your knee and keep some canes as high as 4' tall if they are thick and vigorous. This method will produce flowers earlier and the plant will live longer. When you make a cut use clean, sharp pruning shears that slice like scissors in a straight, not angled manner. Cut out all dead or unproductive wood. Remove all twiggy growth and old, spent canes. Remove all suckers that spring up from below the graft union. Leave four or five of the good strong canes in place.

Clean up the ground under and around the plants. Remove all leaves and debris. Clip off all leaves that are still hanging on. Apply a fresh layer of mulch and don't feed until new red growth begins to turn green.

Bare Root Planting This is the time to visit the nursery for bare root stock. Bare root is when a plant is dormant and all the soil has been taken off of its roots for shipping. Sometimes they are packed in moist sawdust.

Roses, cane berry bushes, deciduous fruit trees, ornamental deciduous trees and vines, strawberries, artichokes, asparagus and short-day onions are all available this month. Keep the roots moist until you are ready to plant. Many gardeners will soak the roots in water before planting to give them that extra boost.

Do your homework first before heading out to the nursery. Make sure you know if you want a dwarf, semi-dwarf or standard size tree. Choose low-chill varieties and check if you will need a pollinator.

Garden Chores If frost is predicted make sure that the plants are irrigated unless we have had some good rain recently. Cover tender plants at night and be sure to remove the cover before the sun shines on the covered areas. Heat builds up and can damage the foliage as much as the frost can.

If frost damage has burned the foliage wait to prune until you see signs of new growth. Some branches may take until summer to recover, so be patient.

Start a garden notebook to keep track of what you are doing and when you are doing it. Note the results and ideas that you come up with so you can change methods if you need to. We are always learning and the garden is always going to be better this year.

FEBRUARY HORT BY MARILYN GUIDROZ This is usually our coldest month and still considered winter even though there are many beautiful blooms to enjoy in the garden. It is best to wait until March for spring planting when the weather safely warms up a bit. A good gardener is a patient gardener!

Pruning woody perennials – Around the middle of this month the basal growth, which is fresh new growth near the roots of the plants, should be making a dramatic comeback in the garden. This is the time to cut back all of the old woody and overgrown stems on your perennials. The fall and late summer bloomers, such as Gaura, Penstemon and Verbena can all be cut back now. This will freshen up the garden, keep the plants compact and promote more blooms later.

Spring bloomers, such as *Lavandula* (Lavender), should not be cut back now or you will miss out on the lovely flowers. These types of shrubs and perennials should only be cut back after the bloom cycle is finished. They can then be cut back by up to one-half or even two-thirds.

Soil preparation – This is a great time to dig in the garden! Adding manure, compost and other organic amendment material to the soil will eventually break down and become humus. Humus is the organic portion of the soil made up of aged or decomposed animal and vegetable matter. It improves the structure of the soil and creates an environment that provides slow release nutrients and beneficial organisms to the plants. Healthy soil promotes healthy plants which can resist pests and diseases better. Mulch is material placed on top of the soil to help conserve moisture, reduce soil erosion, control weeds and keep maintenance to a minimum. Composted mulches not only look good in the garden but will also break down to feed the plants, add organic material, beneficial nutrients and micro-organisms.

Encourage beneficial insects – Ants are the worst! They move the little sucking insects like aphids, mealy bugs, woolly whitefly, and scale. The ants protect these pests from their natural predators, carry them from plant to plant and milk the honeydew from them. If you get rid of ants you get rid of pest problems as well. Sprinkle cornmeal around the base of your house, along ant trails and nests and anywhere ants are a problem. This method is a safe and effective way to curb the ants without using poisons. Release ladybugs to control aphids especially on your citrus trees when the fresh new tips are just beginning to grow. Release other beneficial insects, including lacewings in the garden.

A well-kept garden, free from poisonous sprays will encourage the beneficial insects and arachnids (spiders) to control the destructive insect garden pests naturally. Broad spectrum chemical sprays kill the pests but also kill the beneficial insects and bees. Bees are especially important in the pollination process of flowers. No bees means no fruit.

Irrigation notes – This is the time to check all of your irrigation system components. Our rainy season has not brought the long soaking rains that are expected at this time

of the year. Run your irrigation system on all stations now to saturate the soil deeply if the rain doesn't do it for you. The plants need these deep water soaks to withstand the long hot, dry summer months ahead.

Earthworm castings – I am in love with this product. It is just too easy and works so well. I would enjoy setting up my own worm farm (Vermicomposting) but for now I just purchase already bagged worm castings. Add a handful or two into the holes for new plants and spread a layer over the roots of existing plants, water it in and cover with a layer of mulch.

Worm castings act as a good organic soil amendment and mild fertilizer. They help sandy soils retain moisture, and add readily available nutrients, humus and bioorganisms to all soil types. The most amazing benefit of worm castings, however, is the ability to repel garden pests while protecting the beneficial insects and bees.

It is a good idea to wash your plants and trees with soapy water (1-2 tablespoons of liquid dishwashing soap in a gallon of water) to remove aphids, woolly whiteflies, and mealy bugs. Spread a 1-inch thick layer of worm castings under plants and renew the layer every year about this time before the pests begin their destructive activities in April. This will control ants and many other garden pests all year without using poisons that harm the beneficial insects and bees.

MARCH HORT BY MARILYN GUIDROZ This is it! Our second best season of the year to plant new trees, shrubs and perennials. The nurseries are loaded so make a list before you go shopping or you know what will happen. I have put myself on strict restriction from impulse buying. Somehow it always sneaks up on me anyway. Be strong!

Saving time in the garden – This is a well known truth about gardening. If you time your work for Spring and Fall, the summer and winter chores are light and the garden flourishes. Low maintenance gardens are actually just gardens that are timed right. March and April are the months to fertilize with a good organic fertilizer, replenish mulch 3-4" thick over all the bare ground (remember to keep mulch 12" away from stems and trunks), and water in well. Cacti, succulents and native plants don't need fertilizer for the most part. Acid loving plants require specialized fertilizers as do roses, fruit trees and the vegetable garden.

Pruning Time – It is time to get out your pruning equipment and "go to town". That means all the winter bloomers can be cut back by 1/3 with selective shaping. Please do not use electric trimmers to make balls and squares out of your beautiful shrubs. This is not a very nice way to treat a plant that wants to grow to its own individual shape. It is best to study the natural shapes of the plant itself (low mounds, upright, wide spreading, or open growing shrubs). From the main branching structure select a few leaders and cut them back into the foliage judiciously. This will keep the plant compact while maintaining the characteristic shapes. If you want more height on a shrub or tree, taking off the lower branches to the main trunks will generally send it up. If you want less height, taking down the top branches, if appropriate, will generally send it out. It is best to cut the stems and branches, not the leaves themselves. Most shrubs look better with the leaves in their full shape and not cut through the middle. This really doesn't take much extra time and the plant looks good right away. Not like a bad haircut that will need to grow in before it looks good.

Speaking of haircuts, it is time to shear those ornamental grasses down to about 6” clumps. They will grow back quickly and fresh without all the dried up stalks.

Vegetable and Herb Gardens – Herbs are easy to grow and taste so much better fresh. Edible herbs to plant in the summer garden are sage, basil, dill, oregano, parsley, thyme and marjoram. They look nice mixed in with your vegetables and take the same care. Rosemary and mint should be grown separately in containers or out in the garden as part of the landscape. Keep in mind that mint is invasive and requires lots of water to do well.

Vegetables need full sun to be successful. If you are building a raised bed, orient it from north to south so the sun will cross over it from side to side. Taller crops should be on the north end and shorter crops on the south end. The garden should ideally be placed on the south side of the house for full sun exposure away from trees that might shade the garden area.

Summer vegetables to plant now are tomatoes, spinach, green beans and corn. It is best to wait until next month to plant cucumbers, squash, eggplant, melons, peppers, and pumpkins. Crops that you can plant year round are potatoes, beets, carrots, chard, turnips and radishes. Artichokes and asparagus tend to take over the world so it is best to plant these separately in containers or out in the garden as a part of the landscape.

Some winter vegetables are still going and the seasons overlap with the spring planting of the summer vegetables. This makes it a bit more difficult. You have the choice to pull everything out and start fresh or make room for the summer crops among the winter vegetables until they are finished producing.

Garden Pests – Spring rains bring out the snails and slugs. Sad but true. You can eat the European snail if you like or just get rid of them. This is something that just has to be done. Start early before you are buried in the little critters. They come out at night. You can go out with a flashlight and pick them off the plants, put them in tightly tied plastic bags and dispose them in the trash can. You can step on them but the eggs will survive. You can set out traps like upside down grapefruit rinds, loose lettuce or cabbage leaves, upside down flower pots or plastic nursery pots. Collect them in the early morning and dispose of them daily. You can set out beer traps so they drown or let the ducks and chickens out. A last resource would be to use Sluggo, a chemical bait harmless to humans and pets. Treat twice to make sure that you kill the parents and the offspring (usually 10 to 14 days apart).

Gophers start moving around in the garden again once the ground is soft. They go straight for your new plants and chew up the roots. Rabbits are also on the move and can take your new flowers down in one night. Poisons are not a good choice in any environment as it upsets Nature’s delicate balance. Trapping is the most reliable method to rid the garden of these pests. Natural predators such as coyotes, snakes, dogs, cats, owls and hawks are helpful, however not always thorough. The only foolproof method of protecting your plants, lawns, gardens and trees is with physical barriers. This means using wire mesh to lay under lawns and garden beds, around the newly planted shrubs and trees, fencing in areas of ground cover and flowers, and making baskets or plant pockets to protect the roots until they are mature enough to withstand these attacks. It might look like your plants are in jail for awhile but at least you can sleep better at night. after your evening snail gathering exercises.

APRIL HORT BY MARILYN GUIDROZ April is our second best planting month for the spring. If you have any new plants to get into the ground this is your chance before the

heat typically comes on. Although we enjoy flowers year round, the first part of April is the best show of wildflowers and the peak of flowers in the garden. A wonderful time of the year!

Vegetable Garden – It is not too late to get your summer vegetables planted. Plant seeds for beets, carrots, radishes, and turnips. It is also time to plant seeds for green beans, corn, leaf lettuce, squash, pumpkins and Swiss chard. It is always nice to plant sunflowers of all kinds to brighten up the garden beds. Small transplants of cucumbers and tomatoes are ready to go in as well. Keep seedlings moist as they grow quickly. Thin your plants to produce the best yield and prevent disease.

Garden Pests – Pests come along with the new garden growth. Beneficial insects will keep matters under control in a healthy garden, however, be on the look out for spider mites, gall mites, leafhoppers, caterpillars, slugs and snails. Sometimes you have to hand-pick these pests off of your plants if you do not want to spray garden crops.

Thin Fruit – Deciduous fruit trees set more fruit than you need. If you thin the crop now you will decrease the natural process of dropping the fruit in the summer. You will also increase the size of each fruit that is left on the tree. It is a good idea to do this in two steps. First, thin lightly by removing one or two fruits from the clusters, then repeat this in four to six weeks.

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Weeds – The winter rains bring up the annual grasses and weeds. It is good to keep the grasses around at first for the beneficial insects to get going and to set roots to prevent future erosion. Controlling these grasses and weeds is an ongoing task that can easily get out of hand in a matter of days if you are not diligent. Weed eaters, mowers and tractors can take care of most of the weeds, however, hand-pull the ones around your flowers and vegetables to get the roots as well as the plant out. Mulch will help prevent weeds in the garden areas.

Garden Events – This is the best time of the year to see what everyone else's garden is doing. Sign up for the various garden tours, visit botanic gardens and flower shows and take a drive out to see the wildflowers. It is easy to pick up a photo hobby when the garden is looking its best! Invite your friends over for tea and a garden visit!

MAY HORT BY MARILYN GUIDROZ May is the month of results. If you have been following along with all of the garden chores, you should be able to observe the results of all your hard work. Landscape plants will typically put on the season of fast growth with the warmer weather.

Fertilizer If you find your soil is lacking and your plants are not showing healthy new growth, you may need to use additional fertilizer. Nitrogen is the most common addition to the soil. It is the first number on the NPK product description. Signs of nitrogen deficiency are stunted growth, small leaves, pale and yellow leaves that drop off. Use a good balanced product with a high first number. Be sure to water fertilizers in well after applications.

Irrigation The first things to check when your garden is not looking so good is the watering. Our rains will leach out salts that have built up from irrigation with imported water. Make sure that you are not over-watering or under-watering. I like to use a Moisture Meter to take the guess work out of the mix. Good drainage is a must

especially with clay soil. It is best to give plants less frequent deep watering through the summer and fall months. Established native plants are going into their dormancy and will not require supplemental irrigation, but will appreciate just spraying the foliage to cool them down in the early morning or evening once a week.

Water Conservation The price of water is going to rise. It is a precious resource that should not be wasted. Consider using a 'Smart Controller' to adjust your watering schedule as needed and install water saving irrigation systems like drip irrigation and Multi-Stream Rotators. If you find that your plants are too thirsty, consider replacing them with Dry Climate Plants that need less water. New plants will require more water to become established through the first 2 or 3 summers. Once they are established, they should be able to flourish with a deep soak once a week.

Garden Time Summer salads and veggies are the best this time of year. I have trained my family to only eat what is growing at that time of year. This means we can't wait to get our tomato diet back! Tomato sandwiches, tomato salad, tomato stir fry, tomato casserole, tomato everything! Summer vegetables grow fast this time of year and they need a lot of water. Drip irrigation and mulch will help prevent evaporation loss but do not let the garden dry out. Continue to plant and stagger your summer crops. Harvest daily, especially that zucchini, or you will find a giant in the garden overnight!

Herbs Using a diverse variety of plants helps to prevent garden pests from taking down the whole crop. I like to interplant herbs between plants to confuse the little buggers! It always looks interesting and smells so good. It is like aromatherapy in the garden! Enjoy!

SUMMER HORT BY MARILYN GUIDROZ As I finally inspected my own summer fruit crop and realized that I needed to spend some time in my garden, I decided that this article would be about garden reflections. Now just what does that mean? It does not mean that we list our regrets about what is doing poorly or what we could have done better in the garden this year. It means that we take the time to really look in on our garden and see what looks back at us.

It is about admiring the strength of our mature trees and delighting in the delicate show of our seasonal flowers and maybe even relaxing into the space a bit. It is looking at it just the way it is and appreciating the land that we live with. Accepting that this is where we are today.

I have been asked by other landscape design professionals for advice on how to keep "fresh". How to keep inspired in the business of design. I think the answer is simply to get outside and get dirty in one's own garden. If I feel the soil and the water and the sun that the plants feel, I connect on a deeper level. It is real - not just a creative theory.

It is always special to visit incredible gardens. We travel to near and far away places to experience garden design at the highest form of execution. I always wonder, "Who takes care of all this?" They must employ an army of trained horticulturists to keep the grounds so beautiful.

It is quite a different thing, however, to walk out our own door to experience our garden, the garden that we live with. We smell the fragrances, see the colors blending together, feel the sun beating on the earth and the breeze ruffling through the leaves, hear the bees buzzing about on their own secret mission and taste the various fruits and vegetables that are ready to eat. This is reflection.

Enjoy your summer! Enjoy your garden!

