

Is Now the Time to Start My Summer Garden? By Sandy Hendricks

It's time to start asking the question, is now the time to start my summer garden? There are things to consider before you plant. Is the soil too wet to work outside? What are the nighttime temperatures? What are the soil temperatures? If the soil is not too wet to work outside, then there are things to be done to prepare your soil for planting.

First, remove all dead debris that may have accumulated over the winter. Remove all the old leaves and dead material off the soil. Remove mulch, if you have used it in your garden. The mulch can remain out of the garden until the plants are established. Mulch will help the soil to warm up, it'll help conserve water and in the hot summer it will keep the plant's roots cool. Weed-free straw is a good, affordable garden mulch.

Are you planting in the ground? Do you have raised bed? Both will need some amendments. The best amendment would be compost. Compost is like a time-released fertilizer and can be added to the soil as a topdressing. You don't want to till too deep. That would disturb all the lovely microorganisms living in the soil. Those microorganisms work in the soil to break down nutrients that the plant needs to survive.

Now you are ready to plant! Seeds or seedlings? If it's seeds that you're planting then smooth out the soil, make a hole or a trench for the seeds. Carefully read your seed pack to ensure proper planting, care and harvest information. Check the seed packet for the depth, usually no more than 2-3 times the seed in depth.

If you're planting seedlings or transplants be aware each plant has a certain soil temperature requirement. If you're planting for summer vegetable harvest, then probably a soil temperature of about 50 degrees would be ideal. If you're planting flowers, they're not so fussy. But vegetables don't like to get their feet cold. They will survive but will get off to a slow start.

You may have started seeds in the winter indoors and now is the time to start introducing them to the outdoors. Start bringing them outdoors for short periods of time, slowly increasing the time each day. Don't give them direct sun right away. You could sunburn them. Start with dappled shade and slowly move them to the full sun.

Altitude has a definite bearing on when to plant. In Modesto and the Delta, plants have already been in the ground for a couple of months. In Sonora and Jamestown, people are already planting. Up the mountain, though, where a late rain and snow pelted the area, it would be wise to wait until Memorial Day to plant. Good luck and happy gardening!

Sandy Hendricks is a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Amador County.

UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ You can also find us on Facebook.