



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Helpful Garden Tips for March 2023 (March 4, 2023)

by Peyton Ellas, UCCE Master Gardener

Will March be rainy, frosty, windy, sunny, snowy, or all of the above? That would be normal. Spring is in the air, but we could have reminders of winter and hints of summer all month. Then again, we could have endless warm days and cool nights. That is all typical of spring in foothill, mountain and valley California. With all the precipitation we've received, expect abundant growth especially in our California native plants and lots of flowers.

PLANTING: Spring is the second season of major planting. You can plant all varieties of trees, shrubs, perennials, ground covers and vines. In the edible garden, plant heat-lovers like cucumber, tomato, melon, beans, eggplant and squash towards the end of the month. You can also plant potato, radish, chives, greens, beets, and herbs of all types. Citrus, avocado, and other frost-sensitives should also be planted late in the month to avoid late-frost damage.

When buying citrus, please be sure to buy from a reputable Tulare or Kings County nursery so we don't spread the Asian citrus psyllid. That means saying "no" to the neighbor or family member who has an extra citrus tree for you, and that means not bringing citrus trees into the county from elsewhere in the State. There are regulations about movement of bulk quantities of citrus fruit to save the California citrus industry, much of which is in our counties. You can find out more from the CDFA website or read the University of California Pest Note at: <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74155.html>

Many plants, native and non, bloom profusely in March. If you need quick color, plant ageratum, alyssum, bachelor buttons, begonias, celosia, cleome, coleus, cosmos, duster miller, gomphrena, inpatients, lobelia, marigolds, nasturtiums, nicotiana, petunias, portulacas, salvias and verbena. It is also the month to start planting summer blooming bulbs such as cannas, calla lily, crocosmia, dahlia, gladiolus, liatris, lilies, ranunculus, tuberose and zephyranthes.



MAINTAINING: Along with bursts of flowers and foliage, March also begins the major insect season. Hand picking large insects is easier on the garden and the ecology. Using traps like boards or rolled up newspaper is another way to catch and remove insect pests like snails, slugs, and earwigs.

If you must use chemicals for slugs and snails, use baits containing iron phosphate, which is not toxic to children, wildlife, or pets. Baits containing metaldehyde are extremely toxic. Tolerate some plant damage, especially from caterpillars and especially on your ornamental (non-edible) plants. Think of them as the pretty butterflies and moths they will become. Bugs are also a major food source for nesting and hatching birds and for other bugs, toads, lizards and small mammals.

Start setting baits out now for Argentine and other non-native ants and rotate the chemical every three months. Eliminating ants will help control soft-bodied insects like aphids.

Spittle bugs are occasionally an unsightly nuisance, but do little damage and don't stay long. They look like little blobs of wet foam on foliage. They seem to prefer rosemary and sage. If you can't stand it, a strong blast of water can dislodge them.

Water your new transplants well and keep them from completely drying out. This attention to irrigation is one reason planting in the spring is more difficult than in the fall, although some springs are wetter than fall or winter, and maybe that will happen this season. If we have a dry spring, deep water trees and large shrubs and keep your controller on to provide some moisture to all plants throughout the month. During active growth is not the season to try to make your plants tolerate drought. Because of the abundant winter rain we received, many soils are saturated to deep levels, which is good news. Remember your new transplants need water where their roots are until they grow out. Let the top of the soil dry out a little in between waterings and then soak the rootball thoroughly. If your fall and winter-planted transplants show little top growth but otherwise look healthy, don't fret. They are growing roots, which will help them withstand the stress of the dry and hot months to come.

March is also a good month to fertilize roses. Use a specialty fertilizer meant for roses and do two smaller feedings instead of one. You can also fertilize non-native perennials and established citrus trees that are emerging from dormancy. Your California native

plants don't need fertilizer, although you could give your acid-loving manzanita a weak dose of fertilizer labeled for camelias, azaleas and magnolias.

Weed control is in high gear. Cool season grasses have seeds; warm season weeds are blooming. Whether you use mechanical, chemical or a mix of control methods, remember weeds are trying to protect the earth's crust by reducing erosion. If you clear an area of weeds, what will replace these plants? Use rock, bark or living mulch (ground cover plants) to keep your soil on your property. When spraying herbicide, remember that many of your plants including roses and California native species are highly susceptible to damage from small amounts of drift, and you may not see that damage immediately. Follow label directions and protect desirable plants.



CONSERVING: While planting for spring, include at least one plant that increases the garden's diversity and usefulness for pollinators and/or other wildlife. Matching a plant with your soil and climate (including water availability) ensures fewer pests and less maintenance. If you want to try milkweed for the Monarchs, search out the native varieties, such as "narrow leaf."

If you haven't already done so, check your drip and sprinkler systems, cleaning filters, checking for leaks and make needed improvements. Get ready for summer. Make sure your system is as efficient as possible. You may consider upgrading to a "smart" controller that can better adjust to the weather and water needs of the garden. I've tried several of them now, and most of them are reliable, affordable, and easy to use with a smart phone app. You still should check your system periodically to make sure there are no leaks or other problems.

With all this work, it's also important to remember to take time to enjoy the garden's bounty. Don't be afraid to leave the work for another day and just read a book in the sun or shade or watch the busy activity of your California garden in spring. For many gardens, this is their Glory season. Be sure and take time to celebrate the beauty you work hard, in partnership with plants and many creatures, to create!

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

Visalia Farmer's Market- 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears)

Feb. 3, 4, & 5 – Visalia SpringFest Home & Patio Show – Visalia Convention Center

February 11 - Rose Pruning Workshop, Woodlake Botanical Garden - 10 am – 1 pm

February 11 – Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop, Hurley School, Visalia – 11 am – 1 pm

February 18 – Gardening Central Valley Style class – Hanford Library – 1:30 – 3 pm

February 18 – Square Foot Gardening class – Tulare Public Library – 11 am – 12 pm

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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