

A month-by-month guide to success in the garden

January

Wait to prune spring blooming shrubs, such as forsythia, weigela, lilac, Spanish broom and bridal wreath, or you'll be cutting off the flowers. Once they've finished blooming, then prune them back.

Do not prune wisteria vines now. Wait until two weeks after they have bloomed.

Cut ornamental grasses to the ground before new growth appears.

Nursery shelves are overflowing with summer blooming bulbs: calla, canna, dahlia, lilies, amaryllis, gladiolus, crocosmia and more.

January is bare-root season for fruit trees, berry vines, grapevines, shrubs, roses, artichoke crowns and more. Buying bare-root is less expensive than buying a plant already potted. If the soil is too wet to work, dig a trench and lay the plants in it, then lightly cover the roots with soil or compost until you can plant.

Spray fruit trees with dormant oil to kill overwintering insects (such as scale) and to control powdery mildew.

Prune fruit trees. If you don't know how, buy a book on fruit and nut trees and take it into the garden with you and read about each type of fruit tree before you make any cuts.

Cut grapevines back, leaving two to three buds per side shoot.

Prune hybrid tea roses: Cut out spindly wood. Cut away crossing branches. Take out old canes. Don't worry if there are flower buds. Leave the newest, strongest canes. The idea is to get plants ready for spring. Always use sharp shears and make all cuts on a slant. Wait until spring to prune climbing roses.

Cut sedum stalks to the ground.

Cut berry vines that bore fruit last year to the ground. Clear away all debris in the berry patch and apply a new layer of mulch.

For a succession of bloom, plant gladiolus every two weeks. Plant them in clumps.

Order seeds for this year's vegetable garden.

If you have crabgrass in your lawn, now is the best time to apply a pre-emergent.

Plant calendula, candytuft, English daisy, Iceland poppy, pansy, primrose, snapdragons sweet pea and viola.

Vegetables to plant this month: broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, parsley, peas, carrots, radishes and turnips.

Prune clematis that bloomed last summer and fall.

Sharpen blades of lawnmowers, shovels and hoes. Check pruning shears for dull blades, too.

Wait until spring to prune away frost damaged foliage or limbs. Let it look ugly. It will protect the plant and when spring comes you can see just how far back the damage is.

February

February can be our coldest month, so protect tender plants. Keep succulents near the house. Do not water succulents if the weather is going to be frosty.

Cut branches of quince, cherry and other early spring bloomers to force into bloom inside. Mash bottom inch of the branches. Fill vases with hot water. Flowers should open in a few days. Change water every couple days.

Last chance for dormant oil spray on fruit trees.

Plant seeds of summer vegetables and herbs, such as basil, indoors for late April to mid-May transplanting in the garden.

Add compost to the garden.

Camellias are in full bloom. Buy them now when you can choose the colors you like. Keep spent flowers cleaned up off the ground to prevent spread of petal blight.

Prune summer blooming shrubs now: oleanders, hydrangea and butterfly bush.

Plant bulbs for summer bloom: dahlias, begonias, gladiolus, lilies and more.

It's time to plant potatoes. They come in many colors and shapes.

Spray for brown rot on plum, apricot and almond and other fruit and nut trees when buds open. To control leaf curl on peaches and nectarines, spray with fixed copper or copper sulfate. If you can only spray once for leaf curl, the best time is when the buds start to show pink.

Watch for aphids on roses, iris leaves and bulb foliage. Wash then off with a strong jet of water.

Plant dahlia tubers.

Plant tomato and pepper seeds indoors. A sunny windowsill is a great place.

All herbaceous perennials (those that die back to the ground each year) should be cut back before new growth starts. If clumps are crowded, divide them.

Paint the trunks of young fruit trees with $\frac{1}{2}$ water-based white latex paint and $\frac{1}{2}$ water. This protects the trunks from sunburn until the tree is mature enough for the leaves to shade the trunk.

March

Take time to sit outside in the garden and enjoy the day.

Callas are beginning to send up flower stalks. Look for an amazing variety of colors at local nurseries.

You can move clumps of daffodils, even if they are still blooming. It's a good way to see how they will look when they bloom next year. Be sure to dig up plenty of soil around the bulbs, and give them a drink of water to reduce the shock of being moved.

Resist the temptation to buy those beautiful tomato plants at the nursery. It's too early to plant them outdoors without protection. Let the nurseries protect them and take care of them until the weather is kinder.

Spring is a great time to plant trees, perennials, vines and shrubs. Get newly purchased plants in to the ground as soon as possible, but remember: Never work the soil when it is very wet. Mornings and evenings are the best

times to plant. Water the plant and the ground around it. Keep an eye out for slugs and snails. They love new plants, too.

Weeds are the No. 1 enemy this time of year. Stay on top of them. A 4- to 5-inch layer of mulch suppresses weeds.

Those foamy masses on stems of plants are spittlebugs. Gently wash away the foam, and you'll see the small brown spittlebug inside. Too many can damage a plant, but they're easily controlled. Washing them away discourages them in just a few days.

If you have aphids, chances are you have ants. Get rid of the ants and you'll have fewer aphids. Try sticky traps around the trees to keep ants from climbing up.

Hang yellow jacket traps to catch newly emerged queens.

Remove spent flowers from daffodils to prevent them from setting seed, but keep watering the foliage until it dies back completely. The foliage will feed the bulb for next year's blooms.

Prune away suckers growing from fruit trees.

April

Thin the fruit on fruit trees. Fruit should be about 6 inches apart.

Top dress roses with compost, ditto for garlic, shallots, onions and tomatoes.

Resist impulse buying at the nursery. Make sure the plant that wows you and that you think you can't live without will thrive in your garden and that you have space for it.

Earwigs are on the prowl. Seedlings and flowers are their favorite foods. Walk through the garden with a flashlight at night, and you'll likely see them everywhere. You can handpick them and toss them in a trash bag. There are baits that kill them but be careful if you have kids or pets. Sluggo Plus works on earwigs, slugs and snails, and is nontoxic to pets and children.

Be diligent about eliminating standing water to control mosquitoes. Use mosquito fish in ponds.

Last chance to plant pansies and primrose. Summer bulbs are still available in nurseries: gladiolus, tuberous begonias, cannas and callas.

Pinch back chrysanthemums for bushier plants. Old stems from last year should be cut to the ground.

The soil should be warm enough for transplanting tomatoes and peppers into the ground.

Keep harvesting leaves from chard, arugula and lettuce to keep plants producing. Once the weather gets warm, the plants will bolt (produce flowers and make seeds). There's nothing you can do about it. Replace them with heat-tolerant greens.

Frost tender plants can go outside this month.

Keep planting marigolds, cosmos, zinnias, petunias and coreopsis.

Feed camellias, rhododendrons, azaleas and gardenias with an acid-type fertilizer. If the foliage on the plants is yellow, spray with a foliar fertilizer containing iron and zinc.

Clean up fallen camellia flowers to prevent the spread of petal blight.

Pull out your hats and sunscreen. The sun is more powerful this time of year than you may think.

Trim frost-damaged limbs, winter damaged perennials back now.

Mulch garlic plants to discourage weeds and conserve moisture.

Keep row cover, newspaper, blankets handy for late frosts.

May

For a succession of crops, plant beans, radishes, carrots and corn every two weeks through July.

Pinch back fuchsias, mums and petunias to keep them full and bushy. Remove spent flowers from annuals like marigolds.

Prune away spent iris stalks. Fertilize iris with a 10-10-10 fertilizer.

When temperatures start to heat up, water early in day.

Put together a garden first aid kit. Include medication and cream for insect bites.

Pinch spent blossoms from marigolds and petunias to keep them producing. If any marigolds develop seeds, let them dry on the plant and sprinkle them where you want them to come up next year.

When fruit begins to ripen, hang old CDs in the trees to scare away birds. Hang them just before harvest or the birds will get used to them. You can also hang strips of aluminum foil, anything that is shiny and moves to scare them away.

Plant pumpkins, squash and melons. You can seed them directly where you want them to grow.

Break off old flowers on rhododendrons. Be careful not to damage the new buds or you won't have any flowers next year.

Flowers to plant from seed this month: sunflowers, zinnia, marigolds, cosmos, salvia, celosia and asters. You can sow them where you want them to grow (pay attention to sun and water) or in pots.

Vegetables to plant now: cucumbers, radishes, tomatoes, squash, eggplant and melons.

Pinch asters marguerites, petunias, mums and fuchsias for busier growth.

Feed your lawn. For most lawns, nitrogen is the only nutrient needed on a regular basis.

Watch newly planted trees, shrubs, vegetables and perennials for signs of stress, mainly from heat or lack of water while they are getting established. A slow soak that wets the entire root area is best. Apply mulch to the soil to conserve water.

Prune spring blooming shrubs like forsythia after they are done blooming.

Watch for aphids on roses – hose them off or use insecticidal soap.

Begin summer pruning of fruit trees to keep them small. Keep thinning fruit on fruit trees, especially near the ends of the branches.

Mark the raspberry and blackberry stems that are producing fruit. You'll cut these vines to the ground at the end of the season.

Cut gladioli stalks back when flowers have died.

June

Keep tomato plants caged or staked. The vines can get quite large and top heavy. Make sure they are staked before they fall over.

Be vigilant: Walk through all of the garden every few days and look for weeds, pest damage, plants that aren't getting enough water, anything out of the ordinary. It's easier to correct problems before they get too big.

There's still time to plant pumpkins, winter squash, radishes and beans.

Set lawnmower blades to high to reduce turf stress and conserve water during the summer.

Water the lawn in the morning.

Cut Shasta daisies to the ground after bloom to promote a second bloom in the fall.

Mulch strawberries with grass clippings, straw or leaves to conserve moisture and keep the soil from drying out. Strawberries need at least an inch of water each week during the growing season.

Thin fruit trees. Be ruthless. If you can't thin fruit to 6 inches apart, try thinning just a few, then come back the next day and thin a few more. Always thin away the smallest ones. You'll end up with a smaller crop of larger fruit. And it will be easier on the tree.

Prune hedges now after spring growth has slowed.

Watch for powdery mildew. Our dry conditions are perfect for powdery mildew to grow. You'll see it on crepe myrtles, grapevines and more. Overhead watering helps wash it away. Or treat plants with neem oil or jojoba oil. There is also a biological fungicide, Serenade, that controls it.

Shop for daylilies while they are in bloom.

Mow the lawn in the morning to reduce chance of brown spot.

Prune oleanders after they have finished blooming. You can cut them almost to the ground. In fact, you'll be doing the plant a favor if you do. They can get quite messy and overgrown if not kept trimmed.

July

High temperatures are here to stay: Adding mulch helps conserve moisture and keep soil from baking and drying. Spread 2 to 4 inches of mulch over the entire garden. Remember to keep it a couple inches away from tree trunks and shrubs and plant stems.

Check potted plants when temperatures exceed 100 degrees. They may need watering more than once a day. When watering, water gently until water comes out the bottom, and then water again.

Cut Mexican evening primrose to the ground when flowers are finished and you'll get another flush of bloom in September.

Remove flowers from basil plants to keep them producing leaves.

Don't worry if squash and melons wilt during the hottest part of the day as long as they recover each evening. If they don't recover, they aren't getting enough water.

Plant a second crop of squash and beans to extend the harvest into fall. Cover newly planted seedlings with shade cloth or newspaper during the hottest part of the day until they are established.

Shop for crepe myrtles while they are in flower, so you know you'll get the colors you want.

Trim spent flowers from black-eyed Susan, coneflowers, roses and agapanthus. Cut spent flower stalks of watsonia, daylilies, kniphofia and agapanthus.

Order bulbs for the best selection: lilies, daffodils, hyacinths, tulips, crocus.

Cut iris leaves to about 3 inches. Dig up rhizomes if crowded and replant.

Beware people smoking around tomato plants. They can spread tobacco mosaic. If you smoke, wash your hands before handling tomato plants.

Pick vegetables – especially zucchini – daily to keep plants producing.

Add fresh water to birdbaths at least every other day.

Continue deep watering fruit trees through summer.

Plants not to trim after July: rhododendron, camellia, dogwoods, deciduous magnolias. If you trim them now, you'll be cutting away next year's flower buds.

Fruit trees can be summer pruned now. At this time of year, they won't respond with lots of wild growth.

August

Renew mulch in flowerbeds. Make sure you always have 2 to 4 inches of mulch. It protects the soil and conserves water.

Plant a second crop of bush beans.

When the weather is really hot, plants in containers, especially those in full sun, may need watering twice each day. Water them deeply and thoroughly.

Cut lavender back severely, almost to the ground, once it has finished blooming. Lavender only lasts about five or six years before it gets woody and needs to be replaced.

Any additions to the garden should be planted in the evening and watered well. If it's really hot and sunny, put a piece of shade cloth or newspaper over the plant until it is acclimated to the site.

Cut flowering stems of yarrow, columbine, salvia, coreopsis and butterfly iris to the ground after they've finished blooming. Keep dahlias deadheaded.

Pinch back fall-blooming chrysanthemums and asters to keep them bushy.

Deeply water grapevines, fruit trees and ornamental trees.

Shop for fall blooming and winter blooming annuals at local nurseries.

Brighten up dark corners with coleus and impatiens. They'll bloom until November.

Shear back petunias and coreopsis; they'll respond with another crop of flowers.

Fertilize almond, nectarine, apricot, peach, cherry and walnut trees this month.

Time to plant broccoli, spinach, cauliflower, cabbage, onion sets, peas, carrots, garlic and beets. Add organic matter to the soil before planting.

September

Plant chrysanthemums. When they're done blooming, cut them back and chances are you'll get another flush of growth and bloom. They get better every year.

Harvest broccoli when heads are bright green and tight. Don't let them bloom.

Keep deadheading hybrid tea roses. Stop feeding them. Leave flowers on old-fashioned roses so they develop hips.

If you didn't get your irises trimmed back or divided in July, do it now. Cut foliage almost completely to the ground. Clean up and discard any dead foliage.

Don't cut ornamental grasses to the ground just yet. They are on the verge of taking on their golden fall hues and will give the late fall garden substance and interest.

Sow seeds of winter vegetables like cauliflower, broccoli and cabbage. Also, this is the time to plant onion sets.

Try some less common bulbs in the garden: ranunculus, allium, muscari and watsonia.

Scatter California poppy seeds, but remember they prefer to grow along the distressed verges of gardens and roads and don't like competition from other plants.

Don't let cool mornings and evenings lull you into thinking plants don't need to be watered. They do, although not quite as often as in August. Continue to pay attention to water needs.

Plant seeds for bok choy, carrots, peas, radishes and spinach in vegetable garden. Flowers to plant by seed include hollyhocks, foxglove and larkspur.

For bigger flowers, thin buds on camellias. Pinch away the smallest one in each cluster.

Check winter squash. Pick ones that are ripe and store in a cool, dark place.

October

Continue to clean up dead and fallen debris in the garden – spent flowers, dying foliage and leaves – so harmful insects don't have a cozy home for winter.

Keep pulling weeds. Bag and discard the debris rather than composting it since composting doesn't always kill weed seeds or diseases producing organisms.

Keeping plants watered and fed will encourage many perennials to bloom again.

Pot up herbs like thyme and parsley to bring indoors.

The best time to choose shrubs and trees for fall color is when they are in their glory. This way you'll be sure to get the colors you want.

Cut back watering succulents. Give them just enough to survive. Too much water during a freeze causes them to turn to mush.

On mild October days, take houseplants outside (in a shady area) and give them a thorough watering and hose down the foliage. Don't leave them out overnight if temperatures are dropping.

Cut away dead canna foliage. If they are crowded – lack of blooms is one sure sign – now is the time to dig them up and divide them.

Many perennials die back gracefully and beautifully. If the plant looks good, leave the dying foliage. When it gets messy or ugly, cut it to the ground.

Make a bouquet of colorful leaves.

Before the frost takes you by surprise, move tender succulents and cactus to a sheltered location.

Bring houseplants that have spent the summer outside back into the house. Houseplants that have been outside should be checked carefully for aphids or whiteflies before bringing them indoors.

Now is the time to reseed lawns that need sprucing up.

Plant garlic October through December and harvest it next June.

Begin planting spring blooming bulbs like daffodils, tulips, narcissus, crocus and more.

November

Shop for Japanese maples while they are in fall color, so you know what you're getting.

Cut fall foliage to bring inside for arrangements.

There's still time to plant broccoli, garlic (cloves), lettuce, onions, peas, shallots and Swiss chard.

Bulbs to plant include crocus daffodils, freesias, hyacinths, ranunculus, fritillary, star of Bethlehem and tulips. Gophers love tulips so pots may be a good alternative.

Clean and fill hummingbird feeders.

Keep raking and cleaning gutters.

Be vigilant about finding and killing slugs and snails. They're hiding beneath big-leaved plants, on the bottoms of pots and beneath piles of lumber.

Now is the best time to take rose cuttings.

Sow seeds of California poppy.

Mulch citrus trees. Don't let mulch touch the trunk.

Plant sweet pea seeds for spring blooming. Soak seeds overnight in lukewarm water to hasten germination.

Plants spending the winter under eaves against the house will need to be watered. If the weather is going to be dry, you can get a jump on spraying weeds that come up in paths and along fence lines.

December

Shop for poinsettias. Don't leave them outside on cold nights. They'll freeze. Keep them in a sheltered area and put them out when company arrives.

If you have any vines that need cutting back, use the long pieces you cut to make wreaths. Take a piece about 3 feet long, make a circle the size you want the wreath, and weave the rest of the piece in and out. Keep adding more lengths of vine until you have a wreath as thick as you want it. If any tendrils or stray leaves are still attached, leave them. I used grapevines, and to have a few tendrils and leaves still hanging on the vines makes them more interesting and beautiful. Decorate them with berries or cedar or whatever you want.

Now is the time to build those raised beds you've always wanted for the vegetable garden. An ideal size is 4 feet by 4 feet. Beds should be 8 to 12 inches deep.

Take a walk through the garden and collect all the hand tools that are lying around. Clean the dirt from them. Remove gas from the lawn mower and clean the blades. Inspect equipment such as gloves, hats, kneelers, garden bags, wheelbarrows and tools. Make sure they are clean and stored in a dry place.

Clean the gutters again.

Drain water from hoses and coil them up. Water expands when it freezes, so drain it away anywhere it can burst fittings.

Frosty weather is coming, and while you might want to put newspaper or row cover over the lettuce and other greens each night, you don't have to worry about Brussels sprouts, broccoli, spinach and those types of crops. They can take the cold. In fact, they welcome it.

Keep planting hardy items like shrubs, trees, perennials, and bulbs, even though many of them are dormant. They'll get a good root system established before spring and be ready to grow as soon as the weather permits.

If you haven't pruned the hybrid tea roses, now is the time. Don't leave any buds. Take out dead or spindly branches. Remove any crossing branches. Take out old canes, leaving the newest ones.

Plant foxglove, columbine, salvia, gaillardia, cyclamen, snapdragons and pansies.

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BY PAT RUBIN - SPECIAL TO THE BEE

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