



THE YOLO

GARDENER

Winter 2023

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION BY THE UCCE. MASTER GARDENERS OF YOLO COUNTY

Enjoy Gardening? Take Care of Your Tools!

Lane Parker, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

Here in California, we're able to garden in some form all year round. Still, the winter months are usually the time when gardening activity ebbs, and consequently many garden tools go unused until the following spring. As gardeners, we love to garden. Gardening is therapeutic. Productive. Calming.

And who wants to take precious time away from such life-affirming activity to clean tools?

Yet well-maintained garden tools are important: They require less effort and are safer to use than rusty, dull implements; they help prevent the spread of pathogens from diseased plants to healthy ones; and, well, they just look attractive and ready for action. So why not send your garden tools into hibernation in their best condition?

Fortunately, you don't need to buy a lot of fancy cleaners, or specialty sharpeners dedicated to only one tool, to keep your garden tools clean and sharp and ready for action. With a few inexpensive supplies, most of which you might already have around the house, you can maintain almost any garden tool.

In addition to simple supplies, proper garden tool maintenance involves four basic steps: Cleaning, sharpening, conditioning, and storing.

Cleaning

If a tool is exceptionally dirty, spray it off with water first. Otherwise, start by soaking the blades in warm water with a liquid dish soap. (If your tool has wooden handles, try to keep those handles out of the water to avoid damaging the wood.)

For tools with normal wear, using a scrubber-sponge combination (usually the sponge is yellow, and the abrasive part is green) is enough to clean the blades and handles adequately. A fine #00 steel wool pad is also an option for tougher spots on metal parts.

If a tool has become rusty, you have a bit more work cut out for you. How much rust you're able to remove from a tool will depend on a few things, including how much rust is on the tool, and how much time and elbow grease you have available for the cleaning.

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There are different methods for removing rust, some of them even involving soaking the tool in your cola of choice. Soaking blades in a solution of distilled white vinegar and baking soda works well, and without the calories. Soak the tools for at least ten minutes, and up to twenty-four hours, depending on how rusty the tool is. Then it's time for cleaning. This is where scrubbers beyond the kitchen sponge—higher-grade steel wool, finer-grade sandpaper, toothbrush, or wire brush—will be necessary.

Even if you only need to give your tools a light wash, just remember that garden implements are not dishes: Don't leave them to drip dry. Once you've washed and rinsed a tool, dry it immediately and thoroughly.

Sharpening

Of course, sharpening garden tools isn't the same as sharpening kitchen knives. The shape, construction and sometimes the size of tool blades means you'll be needing something other than one of those honing steels used by every clichéd chef in the world.



Top to bottom: Diamond Machine Technology (DMT) pocket sharpener; Double-sided whetstone (fine and medium surfaces); 8-inch bastard-cut mill file. (Photo by Lane Parker)

Fortunately, most garden tool blades can be maintained using an 8-inch bastard-cut mill file. (The cut is “bastard” in the sense that it’s “hybrid” or “impure,” being neither very coarse nor very fine. Although this definition works for practical purposes, it would probably be impolite, or at least insensitive, to use the term in front of the file in question.) A [whetstone](#) will also serve the same purpose, if you're handy with one of those. And for daily maintenance, or for those hard-to reach places on a blade, such as on hand pruners, a small whetstone or a Diamond Machine Technology (DMT)-type pocket sharpener is an especially handy device. (If you're from Europe or just want to sound sophisticated, you can call hand pruners “secateurs,” from the French *sécateur*, and before that the Latin *secare*, “to cut.”)

Whether you're using a [mill file](#), whetstone or pocket sharpener, make sure to sharpen the blade at the angle of the blade's original bevel, moving the sharpener in one direction, away from the flat of the blade and toward the cutting edge. The blade will be sharpened when you can see the metal shine on that original beveled edge. And remember to only sharpen on the bevel side of the appropriate blade. For example, hedge shears have a bevel on only one side of each blade, while bypass loppers and bypass hand pruners have a bevel on only one side of the cutting blade.

What about all those nuts and bolts? If you're of the more adventurous type, it would be tempting to take apart your tools to clean and sharpen the blades more easily. Do this at your own risk, though, because it's possible that the tools may not work as well after they're reassembled.

Conditioning

Once the blades have been cleaned and sharpened, they should be conditioned to keep them lubricated and rust-proof. Some websites recommend using motor oil as a lubricant and metal conditioner. Ignore that recommendation with extreme prejudice: There are plenty of perfectly fine non-petroleum options available. Vegetable oil, coconut oil, and linseed oil will all work. If you must, you can use WD-40, although that product does contain a high percent of petroleum distillates. Most of us have at least one of these products around the house.

Be sure to lubricate all hinges and other movable parts adequately. Move the handles back and forth a few times to ensure that the lubricant has worked its way completely into the mechanisms.

And don't forget about wooden handles: they're just as important as the blades when it comes to the overall life and productivity of the tool. You can clean wooden handles using a wood oil soap, and condition using linseed oil or other wood conditioner.

Storing

When it comes to storing your tools, think of them as works of art. Whether on hooks on a pegboard or on nails on a wall, door or wooden post, [tools should be hung](#), not scattered flat in a box or drawer, or stood on edge on the ground.

The important thing is to give each tool its own space, to keep it from coming into contact with other implements or items which might damage the blades or handles.

* * *

There are variations on each of these steps, of course, which means there is a method to suit all types of gardeners. Feel free to use the supplies and methods that work best for you.

The main thing is keeping your garden tools in the best condition possible. Besides flowers, nothing says spring like clean, sharp, well-conditioned garden tools, attractively hanging around and ready for action. 🍅



A hook and pegboard system is an ideal way to store tools. (Photo by Lane Parker)

Looking for Something Different?

Sue Fitz, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

Back in the good old days, when I was younger and more willing to travel long distances to shop at specialty nurseries, I encountered an amazing shrub called Harry Lauder's Walking Stick, *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta', at Western Hills Nursery in the small town of Occidental. The first time I saw it, it was early spring. The twisty, spiraling branches were bedecked with glowing yellow strands of catkins, as the shrub had been carefully sited so it was backlit by the sun. After reverently circling the plant, I asked if they had any for sale, but sadly, they did not. Seeing my disappointment, they kindly advised it probably would not like the heat of the Central Valley, so with a sigh, I added it to the long list of plants that I couldn't grow and forgot about it.



<https://www.nikiangardens.com/product-page/corylus-avellana-contorta-harry-lauder-s-walking-stick>

Imagine my surprise when a few years later, I ran into it growing less than two miles from my house, at the now defunct Davis Nursery on H street. The owner 'Tootie' Basinger had a very happy specimen planted in a large pot, and she found it easy to grow. The hunt was on for my own plant! It took a while, but I finally found a gallon specimen at Berkeley Horticultural Nursery. I gulped at the price (they



This unusual plant derived its name from a prop used by a popular, early twentieth century Scottish comedian and entertainer, Harry Lauder. Wikipedia

are slow growing and need to be grafted, which makes them expensive to produce) but I shelled out what seemed to be an extravagant amount of money and bore it home.

On Tootie's recommendation, I planted it on the east side of my house, where it got morning sun only, and got regular watering, since it was planted on the edge of my lawn. Then it sat there for four or five years, growing very slowly. I contemplated taking it out more than once, but remembering what I paid for it, I left it in and hoped for the best. My patience was rewarded when it finally started to grow at a faster pace. Now, twenty-five years, I must cut it back yearly, since it's right by my front door, and can get in the way of foot traffic, if I let it have its way.



Catkin display.

<https://www.birdsandblooms.com/gardening/growing-trees-shrubs-grasses/harry-launders-walking-stick/>

This is certainly a plant with high garden value. The bare, corkscrewing branches in winter attract much admiration from all who see it, and when it puts out catkins in spring, it is a real showstopper. In fall, if weather conditions favor warm days and cold nights, the foliage turns bright yellow, creating additional interest. It does tend to fade into obscurity in the summer, but I find the large, soft, rumpled leaves attractive as well.

Extremely old plants can get quite large, the shrub at Western Hills Nursery was ten feet tall and fifteen feet across. I keep mine at a comfortable six feet high and five feet across by yearly pruning in winter. As a bonus, the prunings make great additions to flower arrangements. The only pest problem I have had is scale, which I control with a systemic insecticide treatment once a year in early summer. A yearly dose of time release fertilizer at the same time keeps it happy and vigorous.

So, if you are looking for something different from the usual run of the mill shrubs like Photinia, Rhamphiolepis, Pittosporum, and have the time and patience to let it get established, I suggest you consider the contorted filbert. You might have to mail order it, it's not something you find routinely offered at local nurseries. (I did a search for mail order nurseries offering this plant and found there is a new form of the plant that has red leaves in spring for even more interest! It can be mail ordered from Gossler Farms Nursery in Oregon). 🍅

The Joy of California Fuchsias

Michelle Haunold Lorenz, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

The first time I saw California Fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*) I was enchanted. Those deep ruby-red trumpets dangling at the end of pale sage-green stems captured my attention immediately. Once I learned they were hummingbird magnets, tolerant of a low-water landscape, and native to California, it became my goal to establish this beauty in my garden.

I purchased two varieties at the spring U.C. Davis Arboretum plant sale, one a hybrid developed at U.C. Davis, 'Hybrid' from Putah Creek, with pale silvery-green narrow leaves, a floppy mounding form, and orangey-red flowers, and 'Wayne's Silver', also a low-growing mounding variety with darker green, wider leaves, and deep crimson flowers.



Epilobium canum Putah Creek Hybrid
Photo by M. Lorenz

I happily took them home and planted them in my front yard in full sun with a little added compost to amend the clay soil. I watered regularly to help the plants get established before the blistering hot dry summer set in, and eagerly waited for the burst of red flowers at the beginning of fall.

Instead, all I got was withered dried plants that finally crumbled to dust by the end of the summer. What had I done wrong? I was deeply disappointed and perplexed. I saw these plants growing vigorously all around the neighborhood, happily blooming away by September, and yet, I had failed with a plant I had been assured would thrive in my garden.

I gave up and forgot about my dream of a vast spread of red flowers, instead focusing my attention on other plants in my garden. The winter cold and rain set in, and by the next spring, I had moved on and planted Santolina, native grasses, and sage where I had hoped to have the California Fuchsias take over.

Curiously, about two years later, little silver tips started to push up through the soil around May. My California Fuchsias had survived and decided to make an appearance! I was thrilled and enjoyed a robust fall filled with bright red spikes of flowers and many

happy hummingbirds darting among the branches. I added a tall, upright variety, *Epilobium canum* 'Catalina' which stands almost three feet tall and features larger cherry-red tubular flowers dangling at the end of the stems like little bells.

Blooming from September through December, these plants add a splash of color in the late fall and early winter. Needing little supplemental water through the hot summer, mounds of silvery-green foliage emerge in late April/early May and add a beautiful contrast to spring and summer-blooming plants. Why did the plants decide to make an appearance after I thought they were long dead? I have no answer to that. But now, the plants have spread like wildfire around my yard. Clumps of California Fuchsia have sprouted up far away from where I originally planted them; while I'm happy for the spread and color, some may find this pushy behavior unwelcome as it can be difficult to remove once established. They spread by runners as well as by seeds that can blow in the wind to other areas in the garden.

To maintain a less wild look, cut back both the mounding and erect varieties after blooms have faded. This will encourage a tidier reemergence in the spring. Cutting back the plants as blooms wither will also prevent the seed heads from establishing and being blown to other areas.

I love to use the cut flowers in bouquets as the splash of color in late fall pairs well with branches of sage and grasses for autumn displays indoors.

As this plant becomes better known, it is much easier to find in local nurseries and garden shops. More varieties are available with varying flower colors and forms, so experiment and enjoy the beauty these wonderful plants can bring to your garden. But don't be surprised if they disappear after you plant them like I was; they will likely reappear when conditions are just right. Also don't be surprised if they spread throughout your garden!

For more information about California Fuchsias, visit <https://tinyurl.com/5accjx3t>



Pruning Asters to Prevent Flopping

Tanya Kucak, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

Last year, I waited until the middle of October for my spring-planted native asters to bloom. The profusion of lavender flowers for about a month was worth the wait, except that the tall four-foot stems could not hold themselves up. The stems were not sturdy enough to support the weight of the flowers, so this part of my driveway garden looked disorganized and a little weedy, with stems awkwardly flopping on the ground, on top of other plants, and onto a neighbor's overgrown rosemary bushes.



Floppy asters at the end of October 2022: Some stems are supported by neighbor's overgrown rosemary bushes, and other stems are falling onto the ground and covering up a hummingbird fuchsia.

Photo by Tanya Kucak

I designed this part of the garden to take care of itself, with minimal water (maybe twice a summer), and with other low-care native perennials such as goldenrod, California fuchsia, deerweed, and hummingbird sage, as well as a nonnative yarrow and a preexisting grapevine. So, I was not inclined to add stakes to support the floppy stems.

Still, I wanted this area to show some “cues to care” rather than looking like another version of the weed patch that was there before we moved in. With all these plants in an area less than seventy-five square feet, there was no room for misbehaving plants. Years ago, I read about cutting back perennials early in the season to help them stay upright when they bloomed a few months later. So, when I noticed the asters were getting to be about three feet high around April 20 this year, I dared to cut them back by one-third to one-half.

And it worked! When the asters bloomed in mid-October, the whole patch stayed upright. The pruning stimulated more branching, so each stem was held up by the ones around it. Not even the autumn winds blew them down!

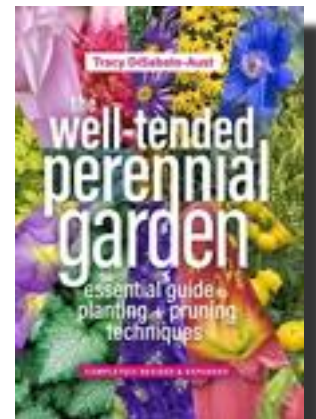
The book I remembered was by Tracy diSabato-Aust, entitled *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden*. It was first published in 1998, to glowing reviews. The “expanded edition” came out in 2006, and finally a “completely revised and updated” edition in 2017. The author has gardened in Ohio for forty years, and her advice about which plants can tolerate pruning, when, and how much is reliable. But she covers different species growing in a different climate, so for California, and especially for native species, it's best to do your own experimentation. As she says, “pruning methods, as with many gardening techniques, are not set in stone.”

With those caveats in mind, I reviewed her chapter on Cutting Back. She advocates pruning some perennials earlier in the season to control height and, depending on the timing, to delay flowering times for a couple weeks. For asters, diSabato-Aust recommends pruning back half to two-thirds when the plants are one to two feet high. Furthermore, she says, “The outer stems can be cut lower than the inner ones to create a more rounded habit and reduce the ugly legs usually associated with asters.” That's a good idea for next year! Even though I'm growing



Upright asters at the end of October 2023: Aster stems are self-supporting, and the hummingbird fuchsia has been liberated.

Photo by Tanya Kucak



a different species of aster, they are still robust perennials that bloom profusely in the fall with almost no care. In addition, my experience with cutting back this year gives me confidence that further experimentation will yield good results.



Winter in the Native Garden

Joy Sakai, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

Not long after Thanksgiving, I took a walk around my neighborhood, and was heartened to notice that a couple of homeowners had removed lawn and planted some native plants. Whenever I am in the position of giving gardening advice, I encourage native plantings for their low water requirements, and vibrant flowers that do double duty by supporting native birds, bees, and insects. Besides those benefits, when you chose natives that are adapted to the Sacramento and Central Valleys, you know they will thrive in our hot summer climate. But there is always a little concern in the back of my mind that people will see their native plants get shaggy looking in late summer and give up on the native concept.

Although people often plant natives for all the right reasons (they need less resources and care than a lawn) they may not know how to manage their native plants after the spring, summer, or autumn blooms. Native gardens are not completely maintenance-free if you want them to look their best. With native gardening, and frankly any no-lawn gardening, maintenance happens in short stretches that are spread around the calendar year.

One of my first late fall to winter chores is to remove (deadhead) any flowers and stalks left over from summer blooms. I often leave dead blooms on into autumn so birds can pick up seeds on their way through. California Goldenrod (*Solidago velutina*), Buckwheat (*Eriogonum*), Foothill Penstemon and other native Penstemon (*Penstemon heterophyllus* and others), and Hummingbird Sage (*Salvia spathacea*) get all of their flowering stalks cut back now. Deadheading is appropriate any time of year, and when this kind of pruning is done in time, the gardener will be paid back with many more blooms in the next blooming season.

Late fall or winter is also the time to remove dead wood and shape native *Salvia* species, such as *Salvia clevelandii*, *Salvia leukophylla*, or their hybrids. Pruning these plants can be tricky. I have had native salvias respond poorly (as in they bit the dust) to severe pruning, so be careful. Annual pruning is unnecessary, but when they start to look ratty, a trim is worth a try.

Some California natives need severe pruning before spring blooms show up, and late fall or winter is the right time to dig in. California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*) gets cut down to six inches or less. You can even mow it. Matilija Poppy (*Romneya coulteri*) and Lilac Verbena (*Verbena lilicina* 'De la Mina') get cut down significantly, too.

Some plants, such as California fuchsia, spread easily, so we use a shovel to dig up around the edges when it gets just too happy. Spreading can happen with the native Goldenrod, California Blue Flax (*Linum lewisii*), and Blue-Eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium idahoense*). When you dig these up, try putting them in a pot and sharing with your neighbors. They transplant well.

There are a few native species that need to be trimmed with real discretion, including *Ceanothus* species (known as wild lilac) and *Arctostaphylos* (the Manzanita family). Both groups are prone to fungus and should never be trimmed during the wet part of the year. Even in dry times pruning should be limited to shaping and removing any dead wood.



Woodland Tree Foundation

Jan Bower, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Davis, of which I am a member, has a policy of donating its Sunday Worship offering on the second and fourth Sundays of each month to a nonprofit organization. In November, the recipient was the Woodland Tree Foundation, and we were honored by a talk from Board Member Mark Aulman.



The Woodland Tree Foundation has sustained its urban forest for twenty-four years and is run completely by hard-working volunteers from Woodland and neighboring cities. It maintains partnerships with several organizations: City of Woodland, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Sacramento Valley College Corps, Tree Davis, and Sacramento Tree Foundation. Its motto, "Building Community Through Canopy," reflects its primary purpose—to improve Woodland through the planting of trees.

To date, the Foundation has planted 6,270 trees in Woodland and the surrounding region. Its primary ongoing focus areas for planting and maintaining trees has been in underserved neighborhoods, public schools, parks, city facilities, the Regional Park Nature Preserve, and along Highway 113.

Woodland's Landmark Trees

Woodland, known as "The City of Trees," has many Landmark Trees. By designating them as such, removal or major alteration of the trees require review and approval by the City of Woodland.



*Gibson House Valley Oak
Photo by Jan Bower*

Woodland's largest and oldest trees are the Valley Oaks (*Quercus lobata*) at 512 Gibson Road (Gibson House Yolo County Historical Museum), 625 Elm Street (Dingle Elementary School), 520 West Street (Lee Middle School), and several other sites. The majestic Valley Oak is the native tree species that inspired the City of Woodland's name. It can live for centuries, but unfortunately, many are disappearing due to past use for fuel wood and clearing to make room for crops and urban development. The large Gibson oak is 57.2 inches in diameter and 77 feet tall.

A new tree for me is the London Plane (*Platanus x acerifolia*). The plane trees were all the rage in the 1920s and heavily planted throughout Woodland. They are fast growing, provide spectacular shade, and were affordable in those early days, selling for \$1.00 each or ten for \$8.50. The planes can be seen up and down Elm Street (where they replaced the diseased American Elm), throughout the middle-class neighborhoods east of Bruton's House, and in Beamer Park. Although many of the Planes have become disfigured due to the anthracnose fungi that hosts on them, the huge specimen nominated for landmark status at 524 Third Street is still vigorous and monumental. Its diameter is 58 inches; its height, 107 feet.



Gibson Cork Oak at Beemer Elementary School
Photo by Jan Bower

Cork Oaks (*Quercus suber*) were brought to California as acorns in 1865 from southwestern Europe and northwestern Africa. They are named for their bark, which contains the cork used in glass bottle stoppers. During World War II, an effort was made to start a cork industry in California patterned after the big cork industry in Portugal. Cork Oaks can live for over two hundred years. A classic specimen is at the Beemer Elementary School, 525 Beamer Street. Its diameter is 47.5 inches; its height, 45 feet. Another is located at First Street/Marshall Avenue with a 61.1-inch diameter.

A very old American Elm (*Ulmus americana*) located at 430 Third Street is one of the few remaining historical elms planted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The elm leaf beetle started denuding the tree canopies in the 1930s. In 1936 when Woodland began spraying to control the beetle, there were about 650 elms. More than eighty years later, there are now only seventy-five American Elm Street trees cared for by the city, with a handful of others dotting private residences. An effort is being made to reintroduce a hybrid Asian and disease resistant elm.

Other notable Landmark Trees are the Paradox Walnut Tree at City Park, donated to the people of Woodland by Luther Burbank, and five Canary Island Date Palms rising majestically in front of the Woodland Public Library.

Foundation Goals

Looking now and into the future, the Woodland Tree Foundation is involved in or has plans for several major programs, in addition to preserving its Landmark Trees:

- California ReLeaf Tree-Cover Program
- California Division of Forestry (CalFire) Neighborhood Shade Tree Program
- Three-year Green Schoolyards Program—increase tree canopy to 30 percent at five public schools, construction of outdoor learning centers, and curriculum development
- Valley Oak census leading to a City Oak Preservation Ordinance
- Woodland Urban Forest Management Plan

Further information is available on the Foundation's website: www.woodlandtree.org.



Winter Garden Tips 2023

Peg Smith, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

As gardeners we are reliant for our successes on a steady supply of water. This year the dam storage levels are healthy, but a dry winter may mean that this stored water must last through next summer.

Where does Yolo County water come from?

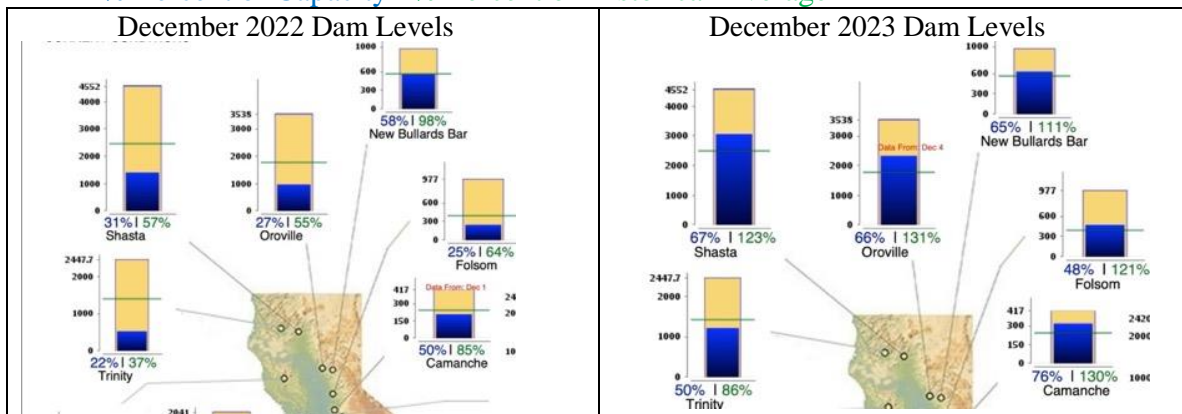
That depends where you live in Yolo. Water resources for Yolo are general rainfall from about October to March, river water, dam water and well water.

Woodland and Davis Water Supply:

A major water project completed in 2016 had several important goals with a focus of “providing a sustainable, high quality water supply to help meet existing and future needs.”

The project included building a water intake access to the Sacramento River with distributing pipelines to regional water treatment facilities and then transmission to Woodland, Davis and UC Davis. With this access to Sacramento River water the Shasta Dam becomes a significant contributor to the water supply. Depending on water levels Sacramento River water is combined with well water, the amount pulled from the river is contractually determined. Prior to this project Woodland and Davis relied entirely on well water with its high mineral content. The existing groundwater well system would not have met future needs or met water quality standards.

% Percent of Capacity % Percent of Historical Average



Winters Water Supply

Winters water supply is drawn from 5 wells that reach into 2 different aquifers from 158 feet deep to 630 feet deep. Two wells are equipped with auxiliary water pumps that can supply the whole system if necessary.

Does Lake Berryessa provide water to Yolo County? No!

Lake Berryessa is the reservoir for the Solano Project operated by the Solano County Water Agency/Solano Irrigation District. The water is used primarily for agricultural irrigation and some is pumped to the cities Vallejo and Benicia in Solano County. A small amount goes to local residential areas such as Berryessa Highlands.

Knights Landing Water Supply

The new Ridge Cut Well came online in 2015

Esparto Water Supply

Esparto is serviced by 4 wells.

West Sacramento Water Supply

West Sacramento water supply is drawn from the Sacramento River via the Bryte Bend Water Treatment Plant which opened in 1988.

Yolo County Aquifers: the source of Yolo Well Water

Much of Yolo County is dependent on a healthy aquifer for its wells, with increases in population and agricultural use more and more water has been drawn from this natural underground water storage. In July of 2023 the Yolo County Board of Supervisors received an update on the data concerning the aquifer “Since 2021, Yolo County has documented 49 dry wells, 21 of which still remain dry,” “While groundwater levels in the subbasin as a whole have improved due to the wet periods, (it was) noted that there are localized areas that staff has coined as ‘areas of special concern’ due to the dire conditions of the groundwater in these areas.”

With repeated droughts the ability of cities to draw water from the various aquifers is a concern for California. The State has “as part of ongoing efforts to invest in water resilience programs in communities across California, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) celebrated a \$7.9 million grant awarded to the Yolo Subbasin Groundwater Agency to support groundwater recharge, sustainability planning, and water management.

Funded by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Grant Program, the award will support five projects benefiting underserved communities and Tribes in the region. As a result, the projects will help with groundwater sustainability planning, understanding water supplies, and support three groundwater recharge programs. The three recharge projects will divert winter storm flows into underground storage while also creating habitat for shorebirds and addressing goals in [Adapting to a Hotter and Drier Water Supply Strategy](#).

It's important that our water conservation ‘good’ habits be maintained in home and garden to ensure the continued supply of water, the liquid gold, on which we all rely.

When winter comes gardeners have a tendency to ‘clear the decks’ and rake everything but a slightly messy garden gives shelter through the winter to many of our beneficial insects so a moderate approach is useful to encourage these beneficials. Lift a scattering of leaves and you will most likely find overwintering lady beetles. Come the spring these very useful beneficial insects will emerge, lay eggs and then the developing larvae will consume large numbers of aphids when they emerge in hoards in the spring. It is important to clean up any old fallen fruit as this will reduce the possibility of bacterial or fungal disease infecting the new spring growth or developing fruit. With the winter rains, make sure pots and trays don’t accumulate standing water, mosquitos only need a very shallow amount of water to lay eggs as soon as we have a warm period and the temperatures are ideal for them.

Enjoy doing some research and planning for the spring. What would you like to change or add to your garden? What new vegetable do you want to try to grow this year? Local websites such as sacvalleycnps.org (California Native Plant Society) and arboretum.ucdavis.edu are great resources for ideas and plant varieties to transition your garden to a reduced water use landscape. Enjoy the seed catalogues and try a new vegetable or different variety of vegetable this coming year.

WINTER CLEANUP

- Removing fallen leaves is a judgement call. If too dense a blanket of leaves cover plants this can encourage bacterial and fungal disease. A light layer of leaves on the soil will prevent soil erosion from the heavier winter rains. By leaving some leaves you provide shelter for overwintering lady beetles, burrowing bumble bees and other beneficial insects.
- Remove spent annuals and vegetable plants.
- Add disease free plants and leaves to your compost pile.
- Clean garden pots, rinse pots with a dilute solution of bleach – 1 part bleach, 9 parts water and store for future use. Turn all unused pots on end to prevent water collection which provides a breeding area for pests and diseases. As little as a ¼” of water can provide a place for a single mosquito to lay hundreds of eggs which develop into larvae in the water. They look like small worms. These larvae will molt several times and then pupate. The adult mosquito will emerge from the pupae and once its body parts have hardened it will fly off.
- Sharpen, clean and oil garden tools.
- Properly dispose of any old or unneeded pesticides and herbicides. The Yolo County Landfill accepts household hazardous waste every Friday and Saturday from 7:30 AM – 3:30 PM.

WATER

- We have had extended dry periods in winter at times and even though plants are dormant they still need some water, so the soil needs to be moist. Adjust the irrigation system to water more infrequently with the cooler weather or turn off once there is enough rainfall to penetrate the soil.
- Check potted plants for moisture, too much water and inadequate drainage can lead to root rot.
- Make sure pots sheltered from the rain by eaves get any supplemental watering needed.
- Consider collecting rainwater for watering plants during dry periods.

PROTECTION

- **Protect frost sensitive plants during heavy frost** including citrus, with a frost cover. Plastic sheeting is not recommended to protect plants because it cannot breathe and traps moisture. Old sheets or commercial frost protection covers work well.
- Adding a string of old holiday lights can provide additional heat. The newer holiday lights (LEDs) do not generate enough warmth to be effective.
- If the soil is dry watering will also help the soil retain heat and can help the plant's roots and lower branches survive. Well-hydrated plants will survive a heavy frost better than a plant that is underwatered.

PLANTING

- December is the last month to plant spring blooming bulbs such as daffodil, anemone, and crocus.
 - What to plant now:
 - Cool Season Annuals:
 - Primroses, pansies, violas, snapdragons, calendulas and poppies. Look for CA Native seed
 - such as Tidy Tips and CA poppies. Loosen the soil surface with a rake, scatter the CA Native seeds, lightly whisk the topsoil to mix in the seed, water gently to settle the seed, moisten the soil when needed.
 - Cool Season Perennials:
 - Cyclamen, Hellebores, Daphne and Iberis.
 - Herbs: cilantro, flat and curly parsley
 - Bare-root fruits and vegetables: strawberries, berries, rhubarb, grapes, fruit trees, artichokes, asparagus, horseradish, onions, and garlic.
- Keep up slug and snail abatement with hand picking and beer traps.
- Use row covers to protect seedlings if plants are sensitive to cold nights. Row covers will also protect plants from torrential downpours
- Extend your harvest time by planting vegetables every two weeks through the recommended planting calendar period.
- Late winter is the best time to plant or transplant most any shrubs, roses, or trees.
- After you have discarded your summer vegetable plants, turn the soil over and add compost.
- Sow favorite vegetable seeds in trays early February for your summer garden.

FERTILIZER

- Late winter apply a fertilizer to dormant roses to encourage bud break.

PRUNING

- Roses can be pruned in late December through early February.
- Dormant prune fruit trees and grape vines.
- Spray deciduous fruit trees and roses with dormant oil to smother pests, such as insect eggs, mites, and scale.

MULCH

- Spread three to four inches of mulch in the garden to retain moisture and prevent soil erosion from winter rains. Make sure that the mulch does not cover the crown (the interface area at the base of the plant where the branch

growth emerges upwards and the root growth descends) of a plant. Covering that area with mulch will allow fungus and bacteria to thrive.

For further information on the above points refer to these websites: www.ucanr.edu/sites/YCMG and www2.ipm.ucanr.edu

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

California Master Gardener Handbook - Second Edition.

This handbook will be your go-to source for the practical, science-based information you need to sustainably maintain your landscape and garden and become an effective problem solver.

Home Orchard: Growing Your Own Deciduous Fruit & Nut Trees.

Step-by-Step information from soil preparation and planting to watering and fertilizing; pruning and grafting to thinning pest control and harvesting.

Western Garden Book of Edibles – Sunset Menlo Park

Illustrates ideas for growing vegetables in spaces large and small. Gives details on the best season and growing conditions for a variety of fruits, vegetables and nuts. Describes most common pests and diseases and their solutions for each crop.

Check the UCCE Yolo County Master Gardener website for more gardening information and detailed topics. <https://yolomg.ucanr.edu>



**Questions about your garden?
We'd love to help!**

UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County Hotline.....(530) 666-8737

Our message centers will take your questions and information. Please leave your name, address, phone number and a description of your problem. A Master Gardener will research your problem and return your call.

E-Mail..... mgyolo@ucdavis.edu

Web Site <http://yolomg.ucanr.edu>

Facebook.....UCCE Master Gardeners, Yolo County



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<http://yolomg.ucanr.edu/>

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