



THE YOLO GARDENER

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION BY THE UC MASTER GARDENERS OF YOLO COUNTY WINTER 2024

IPM/SPM Series: Cultivate Sustainability

Paula Haley, UC Master Gardener, Yolo County

For many years, I have referred community members to the University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management (UC IPM) for help with pests and diseases affecting their gardens. However, a recent workshop I attended revealed how the IPM program has broadened. The same research-based advice is available, but a sustainable approach is being emphasized: Sustainable Pest Management (SPM). UC IPM staff worked with a California state work group to develop a roadmap for sustainable pest management. The roadmap adds three sustainability pillars: human health and social equity, environmental protection, and economic vitality.



Pollinator garden. Photo by Paula Haley

The point is that IPM/SPM is more than a checklist of pest control measures; it considers impacts on communities, environmental issues such as water and biodiversity conservation, soil health, climate impact, and economic issues. You can find more information and read the recommendations at [Accelerating Sustainable Pest Management: A Roadmap for California](#).

My overall impression was that these principles contribute to a healthy garden. A healthy garden is in harmony with nature and produces beautiful plants and healthy soil.

We can use these principles to reduce pests and diseases in the least harmful and most effective manner. The workshop defined sustainable as “the quality of not being harmful to the environment or depleting natural resources, and thereby supporting long-term ecological balance.” This definition is consistent with supporting and inviting pollinators and beneficial insects into your garden and producing vibrant vegetables and flowers. Of course, community gardeners are not only concerned about pests. There are questions about water, fertilizer, the cost of materials, and finding space for a garden. As the IPM program embraces SPM I believe it will help us address these broader questions and concerns. Stay tuned for more IPM/SPM articles in upcoming newsletters.



Winters Library garden. Photo by Paula Haley

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Ground Covers: Selecting and Planting from the Ground Up

Mike Kluk, UC Master Gardener, Yolo County

The removal of all or some portion of a lawn has become popular and makes good economic and environmental sense. Many people choose to replace their lawn with native or other Mediterranean climate adapted bushes and trees. But sometimes we may want to preserve, at least in some areas, the look and



Dwarf Plumbago.
Photo from UC Marin Master Gardeners – Low Growing Ground

use of a low growing, open expanse of green that lawns have typically provided. Or maybe you just want to spiff up an area now dedicated to growing weeds. Ground covers are suited to fill those landscaping niches. Ground covers provide a variety of benefits, from erosion control and weed suppression to water conservation and aesthetic appeal. Selecting the right ground cover and planting it effectively can be one key to creating a thriving and sustainable garden.

Depending on your garden aesthetic, ground covers can take on the neat, trimmed appearance of a lawn or a taller more informal look. Ground cover species can be mixed or combined with native or other flowers for a varied appearance throughout the year.

Important Considerations in Ground Cover Selection

There are dozens of ground cover species that can thrive in our area. As always, selecting the right plant for your area is the first step in gardening success. Consider the following factors:

Water Requirements - Select drought-tolerant species if your goal is to reduce irrigation needs.

Sun Exposure - Identify areas of full sun, partial shade, or full shade in your garden. Certain ground covers, like creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*), thrive in full sun, while others, like ajuga (*Ajuga reptans*), perform better in shaded areas.

Growth Habit - Decide whether you need a low-growing mat, a spreading vine, or a more structured plant. Fast-growing species are great for quick coverage, but they may require more maintenance.

Intended Use of the Area - Some ground covers can tolerate substantial foot traffic while others are better suited for areas that will get little use or are adjunct to a pathway.

Erosion Control - For slopes or areas prone to soil erosion, select plants with deep or spreading root systems, such as white clover (*Trifolium repens*).

Wildlife - Some ground covers, like white clover, attract pollinators and other beneficial insects. Others may deter pests.

Aesthetic Appeal - Consider foliage texture, color, and bloom season. Ground covers can add visual interest year-round with vibrant flowers, variegated leaves, or seasonal changes.

Soil Type - Conduct a soil test to check your soil's pH level and nutrient content. Amend the soil, if needed, and choose plants that thrive in the existing conditions.

Popular Ground Cover Plants for the Sacramento Valley

Here are some of the most reliable ground cover plants for the Sacramento Valley, categorized by their growing conditions. (Not included here are large perennial plants that sometimes serve the same function as a low growing ground cover such as prostrate rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Prostratus') and low growing varieties of California Fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*).

Full Sun

Creeping Thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*). This is a fragrant, low-growing herb with tiny purple flowers. It stands up well to foot traffic. It is drought-tolerant but does best in well-draining soil.

Dymondia (*Dymondia margaretae*). Also known as silver carpet, this plant has silvery-green foliage and yellow flowers. It is ideal for sunny areas and requires minimal water once established.

White clover (*Trifolium repens*). The most common clover is used as a ground cover in our area. Also common is micro-clover (*Trifolium repens* var. *Pipolina*) which has much smaller, more dense leaves for a look closer to lawn. Both are relatively drought tolerant. White clover blooms in the spring, micro-clover does not bloom. Both can handle moderate foot traffic.

Dwarf Plumbago (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*). This plant has clusters of intense blue flowers in summer that continue into fall; leaves turn a colorful maroon in autumn; tolerant of sun or shade.

Cooper's Ice Plant (*Delosperma cooperi*). This succulent's linear foliage creeps along the ground, making an attractive apple-green mat; bright pink-purple flowers bloom in spring, summer, and fall.

Partial Shade

Ajuga (*Ajuga reptans*). This is a shade-tolerant ground cover with dark, glossy leaves and vibrant blue flowers. It prefers moist, well-draining soil.

Lamb's Ear (*Stachys byzantina*). Known for its soft, silvery leaves, this plant thrives in dappled sunlight. It is drought-tolerant and adds texture to the garden.

Full Shade

Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*). This is a hardy plant with glossy green leaves and lavender-blue flowers. It spreads quickly and suppresses weeds but can be invasive so be sure to plant it in an area where it can be contained or where you don't mind if it takes over.

Sweet Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*). This plant features delicate white flowers and fragrant foliage. It is ideal for areas with consistent moisture.

Yerba Buena (*Clinopodium douglasii*). This is a low-growing, aromatic herb with tiny white flowers. It is perfect for shaded or partially shaded areas.

Evergreen Currant (*Ribes viburnifolium*). This California native plant is a good shade-tolerant groundcover under native oaks and in other dry, shady areas. Its shiny and fragrant foliage looks attractive all year and it attracts hummingbirds and beneficial insects.



Dwarf Plumbago.
Photo from UC Marin Master Gardeners – Low Growing Ground Covers

Planting Ground Cover

Once you've selected the appropriate ground cover for your area and usage, proper site preparation and planting are important next steps.

Begin by clearing the area of weeds, grass, and debris to create a clean planting surface. Condition the soil by incorporating compost or other needed amendments to improve soil structure and fertility. At least two inches and up to six inches of compost can be worked into the first four to twelve inches of native soil.

Determine the spacing requirements based on the plant's growth habit. Knowledgeable staff at a good nursery will be able to give you this information. Some ground covers, such as clover, are planted from seed although most will be available as small starts or in one-gallon pots. Fast-

spreading varieties may need more room between plants. Patience is helpful here since planting too close together can result in unnecessary expense and unhealthy plants.

The best time to plant is in the fall or early spring when temperatures are moderate. If planting small plants, dig holes slightly wider than the plant's root ball but no deeper. Place the plant at the same depth it was in the container to avoid crown rot.

Apply a two to three-inch layer of mulch around small plants to retain moisture and suppress weeds. A light cover of compost on seeds can help retain moisture and deter birds from snacking. Small plants should be watered deeply after planting to help establish roots. Seeds should be watered enough to well moisten the soil and surface moisture should be maintained until the seeds have germinated and started to grow.

Drip irrigation or micro-sprinklers work well for most ground covers. Be sure to group a ground cover in its own zone or in one with other plants with compatible water needs. Even drought-tolerant ground covers will need to be watered every one to two weeks, and more often during hot and windy periods for the first year until established.

Ground cover plants can be a valuable addition to your yard. By selecting species suited to our region's climate and soil, you can create a low-maintenance, water-efficient landscape that enhances the beauty and functionality of your outdoor space. Thoughtful planning, preparation, and care will ensure that your ground cover thrives and provides lasting benefits for years to come.

For additional information, see [Low-growing Groundcovers – UC Master Gardeners, Marin County](#).

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

Michelle Haunold Lorenz, UC Master Gardener, Yolo County

All photos by Michelle Haunold Lorenz



Pacific Ocean

A few months ago, I was invited to a Labor Day weekend getaway on the wonderful Mendocino Coast. I had never been there before but had often heard about the dramatic views and breathtaking beauty. Despite the long drive (almost four hours from my home in Elk Grove), I was energized when I pulled into the quaint little town of Mendocino. Made popular by the 1980s TV show *Murder She Wrote*, Mendocino is a small village packed with rustic charm and stunning natural scenery. It overlooks plunging ocean cliffs and is home to artists and families alike. It's filled with pubs, cafés, shops, and plenty of wonderful places to walk.

Founded in 1961 by retired nurseryman Ernest Schoefer and his wife Betty, the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens is perched at the edge of the Pacific Ocean with dramatic cliffs and expansive ocean views in the background. A short drive from the village, the gardens are open from November through March from 9 AM to 4 PM daily, and in the summer from 9 AM to 5 PM daily. Parking is free but get there early as the parking lot fills up quickly. Dogs are allowed in most areas but make sure you keep your canine companion leashed. At the time of this writing, general admission is \$20, \$17 for seniors, \$8 for children eight to seventeen, and children aged five or younger are free.

*Fuchsia*

whites, the display was magnificent. It was captivating and filled with the movement of butterflies and bees flitting about from bloom to bloom.

Following the map provided when we entered, we wandered through the Woodland Garden and Meadow Lawn onto a rustic footpath that passed through a wooden gate warning about potential predators such as mountain lions and bears. As we meandered through the forest there was a burbling stream hidden by overgrowth, we felt close to nature as we listened to it while we moved down through the south trail. The conifer forests opened into a wide lawn area filled with thousands of dahlias. Some of the flowers towered five to six feet tall. A local gardener was pruning and sharing the blooms with visitors. Butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds were drawn into the magnetic display of color and scent.

This appeared to be the most popular area in the gardens as it was filled with hundreds of visitors sitting on wooden benches, strolling along the paths, or taking pictures while others meditated, enjoying the beauty. I've always loved dahlias and have struggled to grow them in our area. But the foggy cool mornings, brilliant sunshine, and the moist soil at Mendocino create the perfect habitat for their breathtaking displays of dahlias. The gardens are worth visiting just for the dahlia display alone!

*Dahlias*



The vegetable garden

challenging or not accessible are marked. The next time you're heading toward Mendocino, make sure you put the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens on your to-do list.

For more information visit [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#).



After we had our fill of dahlias, we continued along the coastal trail heading out toward the bluffs. The trail opens into a vast panoramic view with the Pacific Ocean sparkling in the background. We circled back toward the gardens taking the north trail through the Native Plant Garden then visited the Woodland Garden and the Heath and Heather Collection. We decided it was time for a snack, so we enjoyed a delicious lunch at Roadies Garden Café within the Botanical Garden's grounds. It is open daily from 10 AM to 4 PM with a variety of sandwiches and Paninis, including vegetarian options. We enjoyed our lunch, which was decorated with edible flowers and relaxed in the sunshine.

After our meal, we decided to venture to the one area we had not yet visited: the Vegetable Garden. It's created with an artist's eye. With hooped row covers hung with gourds and pumpkins to rustic wooden boxes stuffed with flowers, herbs, and vegetables, it is clear that the people minding this area love to create visually pleasing displays as well as educational opportunities.

Bathrooms are conveniently located throughout the gardens. The garden paths are also wheelchair-accessible, while the areas that are more

Notes From My Garden: Pondering the Winter Garden

Joy Sakai, UC Master Gardener, Yolo County

My family was raised by a scientific thinker and an avid reader. My father was the scientific thinker, and my mother was an avid reader and a person of faith. She would've liked to go to church more often, but Dad preferred to spend his spare time in the woods. He said that was his church. Around our kitchen table we debated questions of religion, politics, current events, science, you name it. That's how I came to be a ponderer and questioner of nearly everything. I drive my husband batty, but personally I think questioning, and pondering new avenues for solutions results in better answers to problems.

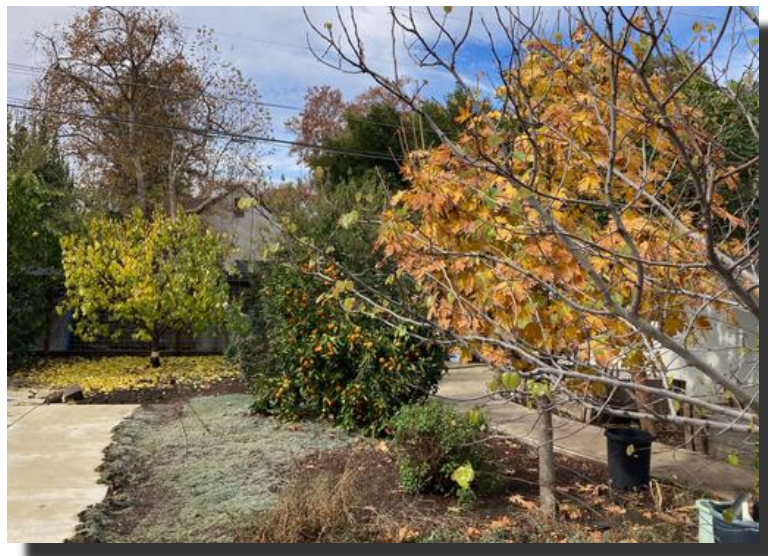
Let me share with you a small problem I've pondered in my garden. We have a large dog that we love dearly whose intestinal tract works like every other dog's. We are faced with the difficulty of cleaning up after him without stepping on the very wet ground, which is not good for the soil. A week or so ago we had a man come over and do some trimming of our trees. He said he might need to bring in heavy equipment to do the job, and I asked how he was going to do that without ruining my cool weather garden. It is planted right in front of the double wide gate that we rarely use. He said a wide piece of plywood laid across would prevent soil compression (his weight would be spread out) and he could walk between the young plants. Aha, I thought, dog poop problem solved with a wide piece of plywood!

Here's a much bigger problem to ponder: climate change. As a college freshman at one of the Universities of California, I took a philosophy class. I thought this class was good for an easy A and completely unrelated to

my education in the sciences, but it actually made me think in ways I hadn't before. The class demanded logic, yet the conclusion of everything we read and argued was that there are paradoxes that cannot be explained by logic if the classic description of God as omniscient, omnipresent and perfectly divine, and the idea that humans are endowed with free will, are both true. My "piece of plywood" solution correlates with my philosophy class conclusion that although I am only one tiny grain of sand on the beaches of humanity, if there is truth in religious texts then I am a steward of the earth and I had better do my part.

Too Much Water?

While we can collect scientific data and show that a thing (like climate change) is happening, we can only model and project how it will turn out. In other words, we make educated guesses. Some models project that



In the foreground is an Oklahoma Redbud pushing new leaves in November (weather confusion?), behind that a native Big Leaf Maple looking beautiful even though it should be in the cooler foothills, and in the background, our super productive Aprium shedding bright yellow leaves. Photo by Joy Sakai

climate change will produce higher temperatures and more severe droughts in California, while another scenario is that higher temperatures and a warmer ocean will bring more rain and a shallower snowpack. After a week of rain, my guess is that for this year, scenario B is our concern. That means we really cannot do much in our gardens right now.

It takes about a week between rains for the soil to be dry enough to walk on, and we need to sit tight before we get out there and cut back our California natives, prune our fruit trees, pull weeds in our cool weather gardens, or plant new things. Is this perhaps a good time to contemplate what we can contribute to others or to nature? One thing that could be very timely is to investigate water storage options, such as rain barrels or water gardens.^{1,2} Maybe you would like to learn more about soil health.³ Or would you like to reduce household waste by composting?⁴ If the holidays

become overwhelming, perhaps you could find a quiet spot to gaze out at the beautiful fallen leaves and make some you-time to learn about small ways to make your space a bit better than you found it.

Wishing you the peace and joy that is found in a garden this season.

Recommended Resources:

[UCCE Cooperative Extension Ventura County – Rain Barrels](#)

[UC Master Gardeners of Tulare & Kings Counties - What to do with the Rain](#)

[UC Davis Global Soil Health Portal](#)

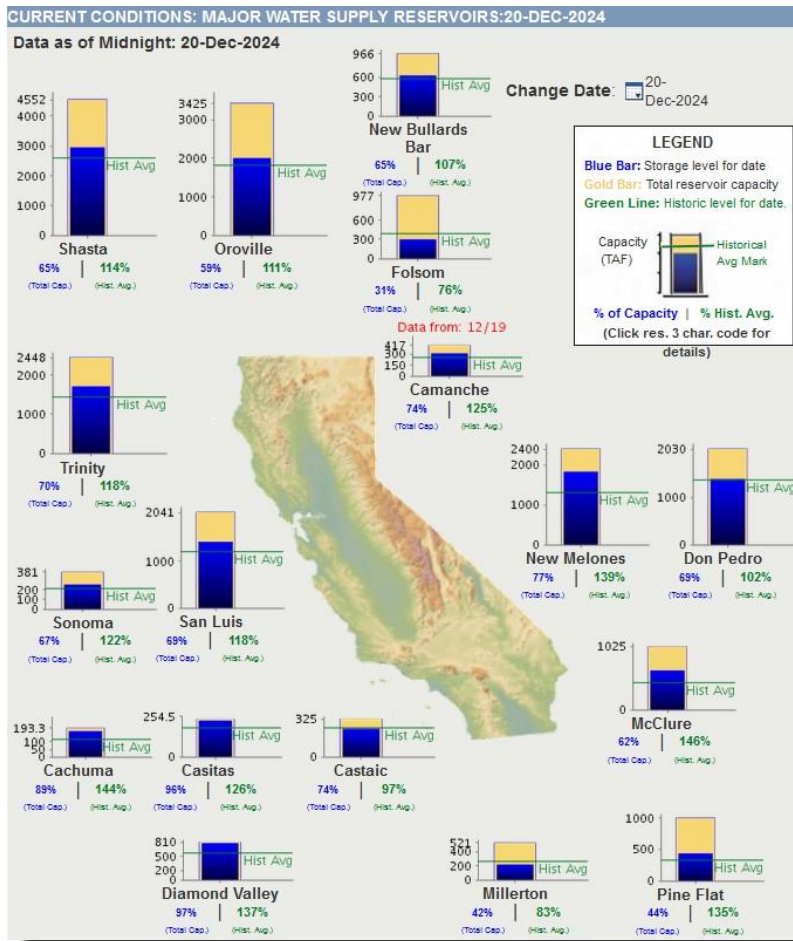
[UC Master Gardener Program of Contra Costa County - Composting for the Home Gardener](#)



Winter Garden Tips 2024

Peg Smith, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

Winter is a good time to remind ourselves how our water supply stands. We rely on it for our homes, gardens, parks, farms, and wonderful California countryside. A healthy annual rainfall and snowpack during the winter months is what we count on to carry us through our dry summers. This year the dam storage levels are healthy, but it is important to maintain ‘good’ water conservation habits in our homes and



Graph from [Department of Water Resources \(DWR\) California Data Exchange Center \(CDEC\)](#), adapted.

gardens year-round to ensure the continued supply of this ‘liquid gold’ through both the dry years and the more plentiful years.

Winters Water Supply

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

Knights Landing Water Supply

The new Ridge Cut Well came online in 2015

Esparto Water Supply

Esparto is serviced by four wells.

West Sacramento Water Supply

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

Lake Berryessa

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 of Vallejo and Benicia in Solano County. A small amount goes to local residential areas such as Berryessa Highlands.

When winter comes gardeners have a tendency to ‘clear the decks’ and rake everything, but a slightly messy garden through the winter provides shelter for many of our beneficial insects. 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 beneficial insects will emerge; lay eggs and the developing larvae will consume large numbers of aphids when they appear in hoards in the spring. It is important to clean up any old fallen fruit to reduce the possibility of bacterial or fungal disease infecting the new spring growth or developing fruit. During

winter rains make sure pots and trays don't accumulate standing water, mosquitoes only need a shallow amount of water to lay eggs as soon as we have a warm period when the temperatures are ideal for them.

I enjoy using winter to research and plan for the spring season. What would you like to change or add to your garden? What new vegetables do you want to try to grow this year? Local websites such as the [California Native Plant Society](#) and the [Arboretum at UC Davis](#) 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 vegetables this coming year.

WINTER CLEANUP

- Removing fallen leaves is a judgement call. If too dense, a blanket of leaves 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 – one part bleach, nine 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 one-quarter inch 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 Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays 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 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.
 - 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 shrubs, roses, or trees.
- Turn over the top four inches of soil in the vegetable beds and add compost.
- Sow favorite vegetable seeds in trays in early February for your summer garden.

FERTILIZER

- In late winter, you can 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 allows the development of fungus and bacteria.

Recommended Resources:

[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. It gives details on the best season and growing conditions for a variety of fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Describes most common pests, diseases, and their solutions for each crop.



WE HAVE MOVED!



Photo by [Dina Badamshina](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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UC Master Gardeners, 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.

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