Mosquito sightings have already been reported. Expect a bumper crop of mosquitos this year because their environment—stagnant bodies of water—is more extensive than in years past due to our abundant rainy season. While wetland habitats such as ponds and marshes are the most common places mosquitos lay their eggs, our yards also have good habitats for mosquitos. Old tires, unused watering cans, pots of water, low watery areas in the yard, abandoned bird baths, you name it, any area that holds water and is not disturbed for a couple of weeks is a great place to lay eggs.

Mosquitos have been around for about 210 million years, and if they disappeared from the planet there would be no negative repercussions. (On the contrary, when wolves, a keystone species, were reintroduced into Yellowstone, the natural environment became much healthier.) The loss of mosquitos would only bring joy to many backyards, the health of some animals in the wild would improve, and one to three million people would not die of malaria each year. Mosquito-borne diseases that occur in the United States are the West Nile virus, eastern equine encephalitis, La Crosse encephalitis, St. Louis encephalitis, and western equine encephalitis. The Zika virus crossed our borders in 2016.

Male mosquitos live less than a week and are all about ensuring the continuation of the species. Females can live up to a couple of months under good conditions and are the ones that “bite,” using the blood acquired from their victims to supply
their eggs. Females lay their eggs in stagnant or still waters, up to five hundred in the course of their short life span. The adult female lays a raft of eggs on the water’s surface. The larva and pupa develop just under the water’s surface and in seven to ten days adults surface, dry out, and start flying. The male looks for a female by listening for the wings beating the air. Females lay their eggs and the cycle continues.

The website http://www.fightthebite.net/ is the Sacramento and Yolo County Mosquito and Vector Control District. It is their mission and vision to “provide safe, effective and economical mosquito and vector control for Sacramento and Yolo counties.”

You can help break the cycle by helping to reduce the number of mosquitos that reach maturity. The easy way to think about abatement is to remember the letter “D” according to Fight the Bite:

- **DRAIN** any standing water that may produce mosquitoes.
- **DAWN** and **DUSK** are times to avoid being outdoors.
- **DRESS** appropriately by wearing loose, light colored long sleeves and pants when outside.
- **DEFEND** yourself against mosquitoes by using an effective insect repellent.
- **DOOR** and window screens should be in good working condition.

Clogged rain gutters, rot holes in trees, children’s toys, low areas in the garden, neglected pools, and still ponds are other sources that may hold water in which mosquitos would lay their eggs. To limit or eliminate mosquitos breeding in your yard be diligent in eliminating and draining any standing water source, and ensure the vegetation isn’t a good hiding ground for breeding. Stock ponds with fish; the most successful biological tool against immature mosquitos in California is the mosquito fish, *Gambusia affinis*. Keep the pool pump running and chlorinate regularly. Change the water every few days in pet water bowls, stop leaking faucets (drought will always be part of our lives), clean gutters, empty containers, tightly lid any rain barrels, cover the kiddie pool or flush it a couple of times a week. The defense is clear, eliminate all egg-laying water sources.

Mosquito districts practice Integrated Pest Management with Bio-Rational and Chemical control. Bio-Rational means using biological and physical control elements to achieve acceptable control levels without harming wildlife or the environment. Natural predators, parasites, or pathogens are used to reduce population levels.

Chemical Control is the careful application of insecticides that reduce the population of adult and immature mosquitos. Chemical Control is only used when Bio-Rational control is not enough and when the population is out of control or too much disease is being transmitted. Adulticides are chemicals that specifically reduce adult mosquitos. Larvicides target mosquito larvae and pupae.

Drain any standing water and educate your neighbors if you see standing water, potential mosquito breeding grounds, on their property.

Bats and birds will not eat enough mosquitos to reduce the population, so be vigilant in your fight against the slap. For further information please see [http://ipm.ucanr.edu/QT/mosquitocard.html](http://ipm.ucanr.edu/QT/mosquitocard.html) and [http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7451.html](http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7451.html).
Do you want to move beyond growing the standard garden vegetables of tomatoes, cucumbers, and squash? Many gardeners do. It is a good way to add interest to the gardening experience, variety to the table, and to show the kids that the universe of tasty vegetables extends way beyond those offered in the supermarket or even the farmer’s market. There are, in fact, dozens of out of the ordinary vegetables that deserve a place in your garden beds. This article looks at just a few of those to whet your appetite and inspire you to discover more. These will probably not be available as small plants at the local nurseries. You may find some as seeds locally. For some you may need to locate a more distant source to order from. But the effort will be interesting, rewarding and take you deeper into the world of vegetable gardening.

**Ground cherries**

Ground cherries (*Physalis peruviana*) are in the same family as tomatoes and the more closely related tomatillo. They spread about two feet and are seldom over a foot high. They do not need staking. The fruit is prolific, golden when ripe, smaller than a cherry, and comes in its own husk wrapper. They are best when picked up off the ground after falling ripe from the plant - hence the name. If you want a taste of the tropics in the Central Valley, this is the plant to grow. The flavor is strongly reminiscent of pineapple. The plants are very easy to grow, drought-tolerant and generally pest-free. They will reseed from the fruit you inevitably miss the previous year. These are one bit of garden produce that will seldom make it into the house; you will be tempted to eat them all en route. There are several varieties commonly available, with Aunt Molly’s and Goldie being good choices.

**Jerusalem Artichokes**

Jerusalem Artichokes (*Helianthus tuberosus*), sometimes called sunchokes, are related to sunflowers and worth growing just for the multiple yellow blooms. The stalks and flowers grow from an edible tuber. Each will put up multiple six-to-eight foot stalks. The tubers multiply handily and just a few will give you a very respectable harvest in the fall. Be prepared for any you miss to sprout in the spring and they can, to that extent, be invasive. The tubers are knobby and would not ever be accused of being attractive but have a nice earthy flavor. They can be sliced raw in a salad and are good in a vegetable bake. They contain a protein that is difficult for some people to digest and, because of that, have the reputation of causing flatulence. So, you’ve been warned. But there are few other edible plants that provide such a spectacular show in the late summer and fall and are a hearty addition to the table afterwards.

**Fennel**

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) is a perennial that is native to the shores of the Mediterranean. The seeds of this plant are often available as a spice, having a mild licorice flavor, but the plant itself is unfortunately less common in the produce aisle or our gardens. Fennel is in the same family as carrots, parsley, and dill. It has lovely
feathery leaves and an umbrella-shaped flower head with tiny yellow flowers that bees and other insects love. One cultivar, ‘Florence,’ forms a thick “bulb” of edible stems at the base. It has a mild licorice flavor that makes a nice addition to a stir fry or a soup. The young leaves and flower heads can also be used as a garnish. It can be direct seeded in the spring. Germination is slow, so be patient. It is a hearty plant but needs ample water because it will put up a flower head before reaching full size if allowed to become too dry. Some people prefer to consume fennel as one of the flavorings in absinthe.

**Mexican Sour Gherkin**

Mexican Sour Gherkin (*Melothria scabra*) is a vine, related to cucumbers and squash, that produces what may be the cutest fruit in the world. They are small, striped, egg-shaped morsels that have earned the nickname of “mouse melon.” The plant is easy to grow from seed. It starts slowly but given favorable conditions can reach ten feet long, so lends itself well to trellising. It is not deterred by our hot summers. It is native to central America and was widely cultivated before Europeans arrived. It is still common fare in backyard gardens in Southern Mexico and Central America. The fruit has a tangy cucumber flavor that goes well in a salad or as a refreshing snack all by itself.

**Purslane**

Many of you will recognize this as a common weed in our gardens. Common purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) is quite edible and adds a nice, lemony crunch to a salad. But several cultivars have been developed that are generally much larger and upright, making for an easier harvest. Golden and Gruner Red are good choices. Purslane is called verdolaga in Spain and is commonly eaten there. When you plant it, simply leave the seeds on top of the soil and keep moist. Purslane seeds need light to germinate. It is not frost-tolerant, so wait until the soil has warmed up in the spring. The plants grow quickly and you do not need a lot to add accent to a salad. Purslane is one of the crops that you can easily grow on the edge of beds that primarily contain other vegetables or in a pot. It loves hot weather and is very drought-tolerant. Be sure to harvest it before it sets seeds as the seed pods are quite large and hard. You can simply cut the plant back, leaving two or three inches that will then grow again.

**Egyptian Walking Onion**

Egyptian Walking Onion (*Allium proliferum*) is a member of the onion family, also known as tree onion or top-setting onion. It originated in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent, not in Egypt. They are like the
onions we are familiar with but where those species would put up a stalk with flowers, these form a cluster of bulblets. As these mature, the tall stalk will bend over to touch the ground where the bulblets will sprout and grow, “walking” some distance from the parent bulb. The parent bulb tends to be quite strongly flavored although it is edible. The young plants can be used as scallions. The marble sized bulblets can be used like regular onions and are popular pickled. This is a perennial vegetable so plant it in an area where it can be left undisturbed for many years. This plant serves double duty as a culinary addition and a conversation piece.

Kohlrabi

Kohlrabi (Brassica oleracea) is a common vegetable in eastern Europe and grows well here as an early fall or late winter planted crop. It forms a spherical “bulb” just above ground level that the leaves sprout from. The bulb tastes like broccoli stems or cabbage heart although it is generally sweeter. The leaves are also edible and taste like cabbage. That is not surprising since Kohlrabi is one of the lesser known of the “cabbages.” For the taxonomy geeks among you, it is not just related but is, in fact, the same species as the more commonly known cabbages: cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, collard greens, and Brussel sprouts. They were all developed by plant breeders from the same European wild cabbage. They can all cross-breed and would create who knows what if we let them. Like its siblings, Kohlrabi thrives in cool weather and is very tolerant of frost. So, plant it when your summer garden is waning in the late summer or in the late winter to grow into the early spring and enjoy a versatile vegetable that can be sliced and tossed in a salad like its cousin the radish, or steamed like another cousin, turnips.

New Zealand Spinach and Malabar Spinach

These are listed together because they can both provide a welcome source of greens during the heat of a Central Valley summer. They are not otherwise related.

New Zealand Spinach (Tetragonia tetragonoides), also known as sea spinach, is a leafy, thick stemmed ground cover that can be used in place of spinach. Like spinach, it is high in oxalates and is best cooked when mature. It thrives in hot weather although does require regular irrigation. It is generally trouble free, even slugs and snails seem to avoid it. It should be eaten before it sets seeds as the seeds are large and hard. It will reseed readily.

Malabar Spinach (Basella alba) is a fast-growing vine, native to tropical Asia. It likes hot weather although needs regular water. It can grow to thirty feet long but is not likely to do so here and is easily trimmed back. Trellising is recommended, however. It is a tender perennial but grows as an annual in our climate. Malabar spinach is common in Southeast Asian cooking. It is best sautéed in a stir fry. It is not a particularly good salad green and tends to be mushy when boiled.

There are many other uncommon vegetables that you can successfully grow in your backyard garden. Try some of the examples here and then explore more.
The winter months are the ideal time to correctly prune crape myrtles for maintenance purposes and for reversing the damage caused by topping or “crape murder.”

The crape myrtle (Lagerstroemia; Lythraceae) is one of the most popular flowering tree or multi-trunk shrub used in landscapes. It is showy, tough, drought-tolerant, and subject to few plant pests. Its most destructive pest is probably the gardener or landscaper who, through unawareness or old habit, continues the destructive pruning techniques of crape murder called pollarding.

Why has the pruning practice continued? Most likely it’s a copycat crime; people see it done everywhere so they assume it’s the right thing to do for their crape myrtle. Sadly, it is not. A naturally growing, correctly pruned crape myrtle has a beautiful vase-shaped form with gently arching branches and interesting light cinnamon bark. That beautiful bark, elegant trunk, and branches that show it off do not develop to the fullest potential when the crape myrtle is amputated, knuckled, or disfigured, which I simply called pruning “murder.”

Crape myrtle flowers thrive for up to three months during the hot, dry Yolo County summer months when other plants are wilting. While some people think that crape murder produces larger flowers, the thin branches that result from improper pruning cannot support them. This leaves flower-laden branches to flop to the ground, especially after a strong north wind or unexpected heavy rain. In winter the knobby, misshaped stumps create a less than pleasing silhouette in the landscape.

Proper pruning of crape myrtle involves little if any cutting of the main trunk, focusing instead on removing thin and poorly placed branches and opening up the center for better air circulation. A well-pruned crape myrtle should not look like it has been “pruned” at all. Branches should be removed back to the larger branch or trunk, leaving no stump. Here are four basic pruning tips:

1. Remove all suckers from the base.
2. Remove side branches from the main trunk up if imposing a hazard on walkways or distracting from the desired final vase shape.
3. Remove higher branches that grow inward toward the center of the tree or shrub instead of outwards, and any crossing, rubbing, and diseased branches.
4. Seed pods can be removed if you don’t like the look of them, but it will not affect flowering the following year. Plus, it’s a tough job on a larger crape myrtle tree. However, removing green seed pods immediately after summer bloom can encourage a second flush of flowers.

Stand back and look at the tree. Are there any dead branches, or branches growing in a weird direction that should be removed? No? Good-you are done. Your crape myrtle looks great!

If your crape myrtle is already murdered, you might be able to repair previous poor pruning. It will take a few years to reverse the damage. Prune off the knobs, leaving clean trunks. For a more natural look,
vary the height of the cuts. In the spring, the trunks will sprout new growth. Select only one or two sprouts per trunk and prune off the rest. Let those shoots develop into strong new trunks, and maintain them as outlined previously. Remove any small sprouts that develop near the base of the shoots you choose to keep. In a few years, the new sprouts will have thickened to nearly the size of the original trunk.

If crape murder occurs because the tree or shrub is too tall or too wide for the location, you need to face the hard truth that the cultivar’s growth habit is wrong for that landscape spot. If purchasing a new crape myrtle, read the plant information tag attached to the tree or shrub to select the perfect one for your landscape.

Nature knows how best to grow a tree, and our job is to guide it to its full beauty, not change the inherent nature. Hopefully you now recognize the signs of crape murder and will become a valiant defender of defenseless crape murder everywhere.


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To Mulch or Not to Mulch—That is the Question!

Michelle Haunold, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

To mulch or not to mulch—this is the question. Hauling bags of compost or wheelbarrows of bark may seem like a herculean task that you’d rather not tackle. With the abundant rains we have had this winter, plants have had a head start to the growing season. However, not only are the plants we want growing abundantly, but so too are the plants we don’t want, i.e., weeds!

One way to cut down on the growth of weeds is by mulching. You have probably heard this term repeatedly, but what is mulching exactly? The short answer is that it is a layer of material placed over bare earth. It can be plant-based, such as bark, straw, or leaves, or man-made, such as landscape-cloth.

There are numerous reasons why every one should be mulching their gardens. The most basic benefit of mulching is that a thick layer of mulch keeps weed seeds from germinating by blocking out light and air. The more you can keep weed seeds from germinating, the less time you have to spend managing them.

In our hot summers, a thick layer of mulch keeps the soil cool by decreasing evaporation, thus keeping moisture in the ground, so you need to water less. Cutting back on watering is something we still need to be very mindful of despite the abundant moisture we have experienced this winter.

Another benefit of mulching with plant-based materials and organic matter is that mulch provides nourishment for plants as it breaks down and decomposes. This process improves soil structure so more air and water can penetrate the soil particles, making a healthier foundation for plants to survive the extremes of our
climate. The increased moisture and organic matter then provides a healthy base for organisms such as worms and microorganisms that also aid in soil fertility and aeration.

Choosing the right mulch for your garden will go a long way in improving the health of your soil. Organic matter and plant-based mulches such as bark, wood chips, compost, leaves, or straw all have the beneficial side effects of adding nutrients to the soil as they decompose as well as effectively blocking weeds and keeping the ground cool and moist. Ideally a layer of about four inches deep should be spread across all bare earth. Bark and woodchips can provide a pleasing finished look to the garden as well.

Less desirable mulches would be rocks, plastic, and weed cloth. Rocks can heat up in the summer and raise the temperature of the soil beneath them. While it may look nice, rocks don’t decompose and add the extra nutrients that plant based mulches do. Plus, since they heat up the soil, you may find yourself watering more just to keep your plants happy.

The same goes for plastic, which effectively blocks moisture from evaporating, but also keeps moisture from getting in. Plastic is effective at weed control, but the long-term damage to the soil by keeping air, organic matter, and water from penetrating suggests this would be a last resort mulch of choice. Landscape cloth can be effective as several brands are now manufactured that allow water and nutrients to penetrate. But it is still a barrier between the soil and the mulches on top, allowing less organic matter to penetrate the soil, so keep this in mind when considering this option.

The ideal time to mulch would be during the winter and early spring to take advantage of the seasonal rains. As the mulch absorbs the rains, this can maintain the moisture content in the soil and can delay the start of additional watering once the weather starts to warm up.

If you have bare garden beds, now is the time to start layering on the mulch. Take some time to visit a garden center or landscape supply outlet and consider the options. If you have been consistent about mulching your garden in the past, this is also a good time to check to see if you need to add more mulch to continue the ongoing benefits of previous mulching.

To mulch or not to mulch then really isn’t much of a question. The answer is yes, everyone should mulch!

**Identifying Weeds**

Jack Kenealy, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County

Now that the torrential rains have passed, they have left in their wake vast numbers of beautiful wildflowers and weeds. Looking over my yard I see pink, purple, yellow, and white flowers contrasted by many green grasses all waving in the wind. But while I appreciate the bucolic scene I know that, if left to grow, some of these flowers will become thorns and stickers, goat heads or burrs. Some of these torments are still sticking through socks I must have worn last summer. It becomes important to know which of these plants are wildflowers and which are weeds. And of the weeds, it is important to correctly identify them. According to *The Ortho Home Gardener’s Problem Solver*, “knowing whether your weeds reproduce from roots, rhizomes, stolons, seeds, or a combination thereof allows you to take appropriate action” against them.

There is no clear definition of what constitutes a “weed.” “There are no weeds in nature,” wrote Lawrence J. Crockett in his book *Wildly Successful Plants, A Handbook of North American Weeds*, just as there are no
peasants. Ralph Waldo Emerson posited that a weed “is a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.” But generally, there is recognition that a plant that is growing where it is unwanted is a weed. Invasive plants, considered cultivars in their original setting, become weeds when they pull up siding or destroy fences. But few of us have difficulty recognizing the ivy or morning glory causing such problems. It is the unknown plant that concerns us.

If sometimes it is difficult to identify a weed as a weed, it follows that, “creating a system of classifying weeds is truly a tricky business—particularly since there is no consistent definition of what constitutes a weed.” The varying methods of approaching weed identification in weed identification guides are discussed by Ronald J. Taylor in *Northwest Weeds: The Ugly and Beautiful Villains of Fields, Gardens, and Roadsides*. Taylor lists five common approaches.

Weeds can be classified from an ecological point of view. This relates to the environment in which the weed is found. *Weeds and What They Tell Us*, by Ehrenfried E. Pfeiffer, takes this approach. Pfeiffer divides weeds into three major groups: those living on acid soil, those whose presence indicates crust formation or hardpan, and those which follow human cultivation. Subgroups are based upon the composition of the soil. Marsh mallow, wormwood, and knapweed, for example, are found in soil with excess potassium. Sagebrush and woody aster prefer alkaline soil. *Weeds and What They Tell Us* is recommended for those interested in the medicinal qualities of weeds.

Another classification of weeds is by flower color. *Wildly Successful Plants* takes this approach. A problem arises though, when the weed being identified has not flowered or has no flowers. Weeds can be classified by an alphabetical list of either common name or Latin name. The problem here is if one knew the common name they wouldn’t be engaged in trying to identify it.

*The Ortho Home Gardener’s Problem Solver, Adapted from the Professional Edition of the Ortho Problem Solver*, classifies weeds as warm season annual or perennial and cool season annual or perennial. Other guides discuss biennials, such as muellin, as a separate category. Nancy Peters, a self-styled “weed lady,” in *Garden Weeds, Invasive Plant Identification*, approaches the subject by asking ten questions of any “suspect” plant. Questions include whether the suspect is invasive in the wild, difficult to eradicate, exceptionally adaptable, harmful or poisonous and others. This text is good at suggesting tips on how to kill difficult to control weeds.

Finally there are collections of photographs of weeds laid out by family. Ronald Taylor in *Northwest Weeds* calls this being laid out according to “natural groups.” Spurges, borages, geraniums, and mustards are examples of families containing many species. *The Weeds of North America* by Richard Dickinson and France Rover is a huge, eight hundred page collection of color photographs of weeds in various stages of development. Weeds are listed by a number of characteristics including “leaves opposite or leaves basal” as well as by flower color and type. But there cannot be a printed volume large enough to capture a photograph of every weed. The genus *Centaurea*, for
example, has 350-600 species of thistle like plants, many with very
different characteristics.

The Internet is a wonderful source when it comes to images of weeds. Several universities have websites that include weed identification tools that can be very useful. The use of weed identification programs requires a fairly sophisticated knowledge of plant biology and structure. Answer only those questions that you are sure of, as a wrong selection on any of the drop down menus will result in skewed results.

Weed identification can be difficult and frustrating at times. I have spent hours thumbing through photographs as if they were wanted posters but was still unable to find the weed I was looking for. I have sought to cross check a weed from one guide to another only to discover the subject wasn’t included in the second or third guide. But here are some suggestions that hopefully can make the process less frustrating.

Grow your enemy. A weed appeared recently among some cuttings I rooted last fall and I was curious to know what it was. I potted it and watched as purple flowers developed. In time these flowers turned into the green needles that made the identification of the plant certain. It was a Storksbill (Erodium cicutarium.) Often what makes weed identification difficult is that we are trying to identify it before its true “weediness” is apparent.

Yank a specimen of the weed you are trying to identify and refer to it as you look through your weed guides or sit at your computer. At a minimum have several photographs of your weed taken from all angles. Do not depend upon memory. Check out the “Weed Gallery” and “Weed Identification” links on http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/menu.weeds.html I attempted to get the result “dandelion” to come up on a weed tool and could get no result. It was the same with other weeds I thought I knew. And by pulling the weed you wish to identify you’ll know if the sap is white or not, often a choice on drop down menus.

Familiarize yourself with the various parts of a plant and flower before you attempt to identify your weed. Often weed guides include detailed drawings on such subjects. Upon attempting to identify several plants, I was amazed at how little I knew about flowers. I found it helpful, also, to read the glossary of the weed guide to learn technical terms used at the beginning.

Be patient. Accept that you may not find the weed you are looking for. I have many weeds around my yard, not just the one I am looking for at any given moment. In looking for one, I have identified several I hadn’t gotten around to yet. I have decided to look at weed guides in the same way I look at seed catalogues, only with different ends in mind.

It can be useful to approach the study of weeds as you might approach science or history. Dr. Pfeiffer’s book is filled with interesting and fun observations. Mayweed, for example, is also called, “dog fennel, or fetid chamomile,” for its putrid smell, like dog’s urine. Old-time beekeepers used to rub it into the skin to repel bees—even fleas will faint for a while. It is reported to repel mice, too, if rubbed into the floor…” Elsewhere he relates how the poison of a mountain buttercup (Ranunculus thora) was once used by beggars to rub into the skin of their children in order to produce pitiful looking sores.

Peters tells the story of Swiss engineer George de Mestral, who, after pulling from his dog’s fur the burrs of the common burdock (Arctium minus) he examined them under a microscope. The “curved, spiny, tiny
multiplicity of hooks” inspired him to invent Velcro. There is a free book on the Internet, *The Manual of Weeds* written by Ada E. Georgia in 1914. In it she tells the story of how Johnson grass came to be introduced into the country prior to the Civil War because the Sultan of Turkey wanted to learn to grow cotton in the Ottoman Empire in the 1830’s and a Colonel Johnson grew seeds from Turkey on his Alabama plantation. Such stories are common in many weed guides.

Finally, the French have an expression, “to work for mulleins,” which means to work for nothing, to no avail. It alludes to the fact that the mullein weed produces 185,000 seeds per plant and grows everywhere. Setting out to identify any particular weed can be a bit like “working for mulleins” but the process can be rewarding and entertaining.

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**Spring Garden Tips**

*Peg Smith, UCCE Master Gardener, Yolo County*

In spring the urge to eagerly tackle garden tasks is strong. It is a time to take care of tools, weeds, new plantings and other garden tasks that may have been delayed by this winter’s very wet weather. But most of all it is a time to take care of the best garden tool of all – your body. Take the time to stretch before heading out to pull the weeds. If using a ladder take the time to make sure it is well balanced on the ground and will not sink into the soft earth. Move the ladder rather than over reach when pruning. Save your back, use the knees to lift pots or loads in wheelbarrows. Take care and have a wonderful season of spring gardening.

If you have time, visit the Jepson Prairie Reserve. These vernal pools are a fascinating collection of remarkably resilient native plants and insect life.

From the website [http://nrs.ucdavis.edu/jepson.html](http://nrs.ucdavis.edu/jepson.html): “Walking tours are held each year from mid-March to early May at the Jepson Prairie Preserve, located south of Dixon in Solano County. The Preserve protects a portion of the last remaining vernal pool grasslands of the Central Valley. Easy, docent guided walks past rain filled pools and through its mound-dotted landscape will yield glimpses of the past with views of rare and endangered vernal pool shrimps, colorful flower displays of its unique flora and remnant stands of native perennial bunchgrasses. Tours begin at 10:00 a.m. every Saturday and Sunday. For more information and an up-to-date schedule, please visit [http://solanolandtrust.org](http://solanolandtrust.org).

Many attendees at a recent Master Gardener Public Workshop ‘Growing Citrus Year Round’ described similar problems with their citrus. The UC Davis IPM website is a good resource to identify possible citrus problems [http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/C107/m107bpleaftwigdis.html](http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/C107/m107bpleaftwigdis.html).

Here is the link to Seasonal Landscape IPM Check: [http://www2.ipm.ucanr.edu/landscapechecklist/checklist.cfm?regionKey=2](http://www2.ipm.ucanr.edu/landscapechecklist/checklist.cfm?regionKey=2).

**SPRING CLEANING**

- Examine trees and shrubs for winter damage. Prune damaged foliage and branches.
- If you haven’t pruned your roses and fruit trees, this is the last month to ready them for their
spring bloom. Cut back seasonal grasses.

• Do not prune early flowering: rhododendrons, magnolias, camellias, azaleas, viburnum, and forsythia. It is best to prune them after the blossoms are spent or to wait until early fall.

• Apply the final application of dormant oil spray to all fruit trees before the buds swell. Roses need to be sprayed to prevent over-wintering insects and fungal spores. [http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/GARDEN/PLANTS/rose.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/GARDEN/PLANTS/rose.html)*

• Apply final application of copper and Volck Oil to peach and nectarine trees. [http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7426.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7426.html)*

• Apply Imidacloprid as a soil drench, for Hackberry trees to prevent wooly aphid. [http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74111.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74111.html)*

• Spray a fungicide to control anthracnose on Sycamore and Ash trees. [http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7420.html#MANAGEMENT](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7420.html#MANAGEMENT)

• Weeds are starting to sprout, so take care of them before they take over.

• Once your spring bulbs have finished blooming, deadhead (remove blossom ends); however, don’t remove the leaves until they turn yellow. This will help the bulbs store energy for next spring’s bloom. If they are unsightly, braid them or fold them over and secure with twine, until you remove them in late spring.

*As always please carefully read and follow label instructions and properly dispose of excess materials.

**FERTILIZING, COMPOSTING AND MULCHING**

Your plants are hungry. Begin to lightly cultivate your perennial garden, being careful not to dig too close to your plants. Loosen the soil as soon as it is not too wet to work.

• Add soil amendments, such as compost, peat moss and organic fertilizer.

• Roses and fruit trees need special attention now. In addition to organic rose fertilizer and soil amendments, add a cup of alfalfa pellets and to each rose plant. This helps the rose to produce more basal breaks (new growth) and more chlorophyll.

• Be sure to use fertilizer that is recommended for each plant type. In particular, too much nitrogen will make the plant grow too quickly, producing growth which will not be as sturdy and which is more susceptible to sucking insects.

• Resume your fertilizing schedule for your lawn and fruit trees.

• Fertilize your spring blooming plants, such as camellias and azaleas after they bloom and repeat for the next three months.

• Fertilize your houseplants.

• Mulch your garden to a depth of four inches. The reward will be fewer weeds and less watering in the months ahead.

**PLANTING**

Perennial plants need attention now:

• Remove any old growth.

• Dig and divide crowded perennial plants.

Select early-blooming annuals:

• Plant candytuft, pansies, violas, dianthus, Iceland poppies, and primroses.

Select summer-blooming plants.

• Bulbs, corms, and tubers can be planted now. Some colorful choices are cannas, begonias, lilies, and dahlias.
Shade plants include: Serpentine Columbine, Lillian’s pink coral bells, Rosada coral bells, Island Alumroot, and Giant Chain Fern.

Drought-tolerant and sunny location plants: Island Pink yarrow, blue gamma grass, California fuchsia, Santa Margarita foothill penstemon, hummingbird sage, and Cascade Creek California goldenrod.

Replace shrubs and roses. Be sure to select these plants with care to insure they have the correct growing conditions. Careful selection ensures healthy plants that are easy to grow and maintain. Young plants need additional water to help them through their first summer.

After you have completed your planting, be sure to lightly fertilize your plants and mulch well. Remember that plants do better if they are planted at or slightly above grade. If you are planning to grow your vegetables from seed, begin your seedlings indoors under lights. By late April or early May you can harden off and plant the seedlings in your vegetable garden. The soil temperature needs to be 50 degrees Fahrenheit before you set out your young plants.

DISEASE AND PEST CONTROL

If you have applied your dormant oil and fungicide, your plants will be off to a good start.

- Periodically check plants, especially roses, for signs of black spot, rust and mildew. These often appear first on the interior or lower parts of the plant. If the spring is especially rainy, you will need to be more vigilant, and either remove the affected leaves or spray more often.
- While you are checking for disease, note whether slugs, snails and earwigs are munching on your plants. As the weather warms, aphids, mites, thrips and scale creep into your garden. These pests are usually kept in check by a variety of beneficial insects such as lacewings, mantises, ground beetles, tachinidae, and robber flies. Many plants attract beneficial insects including yarrow, alyssum, feverfew, dill, parsley, coriander, penstemon, and asters.

If you need to use commercial pesticides, consult http://ipm.ucdavis.edu/ for excellent information on controlling pests and diseases.

LAWN CARE

Lawn is often the forgotten plant and one of the most neglected plants in the garden. Lawn does surprisingly well if given a modicum of care. Most importantly, it needs to be fed and watered regularly.

- Check your irrigation system and be sure that the lawn is getting the proper amount of water. The amount will gradually need to be increased as the days become longer and warmer.
- You will also need to raise the mower blade to a height of 3 inches, as spring gives way to summer.
- Re-seed thin spots in your lawn and begin your fertilizing and mowing schedule in March.
- While it is easier to use commercial fertilizer, applying a light topcoat of compost to your lawn will greatly benefit your lawn’s growth and health. Leaving grass clippings on your lawn will add needed nutrients, if you do not mind an untidy lawn. Grass clippings make excellent compost.

FINAL SPRING TOUCHES

- Paint the lower trunks of young trees with water-thinned white latex paint to prevent sunburn and borer problems. Stake tall-growing perennials and vegetables before they begin to bend over in late spring.
- In late spring, thin fruit trees, leaving six inches between each fruit. This will help the remaining
• fruit to mature properly and keep the branches from being over-weighted and splitting.
• Deadhead spent flowers to assure a long blooming season in your garden.
• Plant containers with your favorite annuals and herbs.
• Clean and re-stock bird feeders. Sharpen and maintain garden tools.
• Hang your hammock or set out your favorite garden chair. Relax with some lemonade and take time to enjoy a new gardening book or listen to a local garden radio program.

UCCE MASTER GARDENER EVENTS, CONTACTS AND OTHER GARDENING RESOURCES IN YOLO COUNTY

The Master Gardener program offers free public workshops throughout the county on a variety of seasonal topics. Check the website for topics, dates, and details.

There are several ways to contact the UC Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners-Yolo County Office: 70 Cottonwood Street Woodland, CA 95695;
Phone: 530-666-8737-hotline, 9:00 am to 11:00 a.m.- Tuesdays and Fridays;
E-mail: mgyolo@ucdavis.edu Facebook: UCCE Yolo County Master Gardeners Webpage: http://yolomg.ucanr.edu.

Resources for Yolo Gardeners WEBSITES of INTEREST:
http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu Information about Plant Pests, Weeds, & Diseases (IPM)
http://cagardenweb.ucdavis.edu California Gardening Website
http://publicgarden.ucdavis.edu/public-garden_drought Drought information for the Garden
http://homeorchard.ucdavis.edu Information about fruit & nut trees
http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.turf.html Information about Lawn and Turf
http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu UC Davis arboretum-check out the Arboretum All-Star plants for drought
http://mg.ucanr.edu UC Master Gardener Program (statewide program)
http://ccuh.ucdavis.edu/ California Center for Urban Horticulture
http://www.sacstormwater.org/wise Waterwise Pest Control
http://www.xerces.org/ Xerces Society-conservation of invertebrates & their habitats-pollinator information
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http://yolomg.ucanr.edu/