



University of California

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Master Gardener Program

1ST Quarter 2025

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Christmas at the Merced County Courthouse Museum.



Tree Crew:
L-R
Karen Theofanides, Debi Swarts, Teresa Barajas, Jay Hawkes, and Marilynne Manfredi behind the camera.

Happy New Year

Dear Master Gardener Volunteers,

I appreciate the contributions of time, energy, and ideas to support our organization, develop new master gardeners, and provide outreach to our communities this past year.

I look forward to seeing you in 2025, working together with fun and friendship, as you volunteer on our many projects, including Farmers Market, Help Line, County Fair, Demo Garden, and more!

Warmest regards,

Judy MacLaren

Calendar

- ⇒ Jan 11 Public Workshop Topic TBA
10:00 am – 12:00 pm
- ⇒ Jan 13 Monday General Meeting, 8:30 - 11:15 am
- ⇒ Jan 25 Backyard Fruit Tree and Pruning Public Workshop 10

Garden To-Do's:

By Pat Shay

Winter 2024

So far, another year of low rain. Hopefully that will change as we move into real winter, but we cannot count on it. This is the time of year when the garden rests. Gardeners, on the other hand, can keep quite busy performing maintenance tasks that will get us off to a good start as spring arrives. Right now, we have time to tidy up after whatever storms come our way. We can assess our garden when it is its most 'open'...no foliage to speak of to obstruct our view. We can plan for spring planting – perusing seed catalogs, deciding to move larger plants from one location to another or add plant material that we have been thinking about for a while. Winter is the time to decide on the framework that flowers will 'decorate' as the year progresses. An excellent time to plant trees and native plants so that both get a good start for the year ahead.

Tool maintenance is important and will make all garden tasks much easier throughout the year. This link will take you to a brief overview of what to do and how to do it to keep rust at bay and keep edges sharp so that making pruning cuts will be clean and neat. <https://extension.illinois.edu/news-releases/proper-maintenance-extends-lifespan-saves-money-garden-tools>

Rose pruning should be done while temps are low – preferably no daytime temp above 55 degrees. Roses do best when given a quite severe pruning. This link will show you when to prune and how to prune to get the very best rose display possible: <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/flowers-shrubs-trees/pruning-roses>

It is particularly important to plan on frost protection as we will get some nights down into the 20's. Often citrus will do fine if given a good drink of water at evening time when frost is expected. Ground water is usually in the 50's, and water will evaporate as temps fall to provide protection for your tree. If you're so inclined, you could also run a string of lights into the tree – the warmth from the lights will keep frost away....and look rather nice, into the bargain: <https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/how-to/how-protect-plants-frost-and-freeze> If you are thinking of adding native plants to your garden, you might want to visit: www.cnps.org This group has chapters throughout California, so be sure that you follow links to a chapter in this area for more specific information for your garden. CNPS also hosts speakers on various aspects of native plants that are very informative.

Some seasonally useful reminders

When cleaning up dead or dying plant material – do NOT throw all of the clippings/cuttings away. Sages are a great source of new plant starts if you cut woody pieces, dip root end in a rooting compound and put in light potting soil. Presto – free new plants!

Also, clearing everything away deprives birds and pollinators of a good food and shelter

Garden To-Do's: Continued

source. If you have room around the far edges of your garden, leaving some prunings will provide an over-wintering home for the beneficial insects that will be your best friends as the garden awakens in spring and aphids, etc., descend to feast on new growth. The very same procedure applies to some of those leaves that storms took off the trees. An excellent, free source of mulch and/or soil amendment if you dig it into your soon-to-be flower beds. Native bees appreciate the hollow stems of large grasses, etc.

Do be careful though to dispose of fallen leaves from roses and camellias, etc. Debris left under plants can be a breeding ground for diseases that you do NOT want.

While the winter can be dismal, it is a wonderful time to plant some large or small pots with colorful annuals....and place so that they draw the eye on monochromatic days. Cyclamen, petunias, camellias, calendulas and others are in stock at garden centers.

Trim decorative grasses back to six to ten inches, perhaps adding some of the cuttings to your 'wild-life preserve'.

In mid-January and mid-February, fertilize citrus.

In March, fertilize roses and camellias that have finished blooming.

Bareroot fruit trees and roses will be in stock in garden centers starting mid-to late January. If you have been thinking about adding a tree or two to your garden, why not a fruit tree that provides both shade AND fruit??!!

Irrigation season is not far off as we move into March. This is THE time to check all irrigation systems and repair and replace as necessary. Also, if the weather has been dry, monitor all plantings to be sure they have enough moisture. When temps are low, a little water goes a long way so do not over water. A water meter is a wonderful tool to have to be sure moisture levels are "just right".



**Jay Hawkes Presents
Volunteer Recognition
Awards go to Debbie Mor-
row, Tom Dinwoodie, and
DeEtte Silbaugh**

Field Trips

Note from Delores: The photos here are a sample. If you're interested in seeing more, log into the VMS, photos, and look for the 2024 Field Trips Album.



Merry Christmas Master Gardeners!



Thanks to Pete and Debi for opening up their beautiful home for the 2024 Master Gardeners Christmas Celebration!



Nut Festival Corina Longoria

Merced Master Gardeners participated at the Merced County Nut Festival for the first time in 2024. It was a lively event where the community was able to welcome autumn while acknowledging the importance of nuts – almonds, pistachios and walnuts, to our local economy.

The mission of the Merced County Nut Festival is to celebrate the industry that connects our county and touches every part of our community, almonds, pistachio and walnuts. It is also to educate the public on the process from grower to table. Notably, it gives back to the community in the form of sponsorships and scholarships to organizations working with youth 13-17 years of age through educational and arts programs.

Merced County Master Gardeners Jacky Aguiar, Jay Hawkes, Corina Longoria, Judy and Pete McClaren, and Dennis Evans staffed, in collaboration with the Merced Coop Extension Farm Advisor Cameron Zuber, to set up a booth with educational information for the home gardener. Master Gardeners were available from 10am – 5 pm to advise and consult with the public on topics of interest for the home gardeners and general public. We were visited by both the young and young at heart throughout the day. A total of 98 members of the public stopped by the booth, 71 adults and 27 youth. There was a lot of interest in Master Gardener workshops and our public newsletter.



Climate Change in Merced County

Dino Migliazzo



I have lived in Merced/Atwater all my life. In fact, I am the third generation to be born in Merced County on my mom's side of the family. During my 68 years, I have witnessed a lot of severe weather events in our area, from floods to drought and extreme heat, to days and weeks of tule fog during winter months without seeing the sun or extreme cold and snow (for zone 9) and hailstorms that did significant damage to our dairy facility. However, one difference I have noticed is the frequency and severity of weather events I have encountered in the last two decades. Let me share my observations.

One of my favorite holidays growing up was Halloween. My brothers and I grabbed the biggest pillow slip we could find to collect candy. We ran from house to house to get as much as we could before our mom picked us up to return home. She was not a fan of Halloween because the weather was almost always cold, wet, and foggy. This was during the 1960's and 1970's. We would come home wet and cold and sick the next day from everything we did the night before. Now, flash forward to my children and the holiday of Halloween. Dry, hot, late falls. No rain, fog, or frost. The kids wore t-shirts, shorts, and tennis shoes. This was during the late '90s and early 2000's.

When I was born, 1956, I was living on Bear Creek Drive. Our home was on the west side of town and next to the railroad crossing on Bear Creek. That winter, '56-57, the rain began to come down and went on for days. The creek began to swell, and debris started to "dam" the train trestle and soon flood waters began breaching the banks. I was floated in a plastic bathtub to my grandparents' home across the driveway. It had been years since Merced had flooded and many decades later before it flooded again. Now, think about the "Miracle March" we had in 1991. Extreme drought to an unbelievable wet March that filled our dams and provided the valley farmers and residents with the water needed to survive the long dry summers in our valley. Water, water, water!

Our area of California was once a desert and has become the heart of food production through water storage and convenience. I would like to address a few observations concerning our dependency on water.

Annual rainfall totals for Merced over the last 20 years vary significantly, reflecting both dry and wet periods. On average, Merced's annual rain fall is about 12 inches, but totals can fluctuate due to our Mediterranean climate and periodic El Nino events.

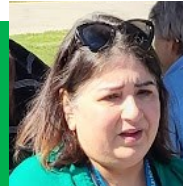
Following are some notable years. (Merced Irrigation Website)

2004-2005: Amazing 19.44 inches; 2013-2014: Only 4.97 inches; 2016-2017: Over 16 inches; The last five years. (Merced Irrigation Website) 2018-2019: Approximately 13.37 inches; close to historic average; 2020-2021: Only 7.00 inches; 2021-2022: Only 7.44 inches; 2022-2023: Amazing 21.04 inches; 2023-2024: Over 15 inches.

These totals reflect the unpredictability of year over year challenges for our cities and farmers and ranchers when availability of water changes so much. In addition, the timing of rain events varies greatly as well with more periods of multiple rain days or multiple days of little rainfall. Many reading this may remember the 2+ inches that fell in our area within an hour this past spring. This caused regional flooding and commuter traffic hazards. As mentioned above, later falls, warmer winters, periods of extreme rainfall, droughts, and later springs have become the "new normal". This past summer, Merced recorded several record-breaking high temperatures as well as the number of days that reached or exceeded 100 degrees. This extreme stretch of high heat is especially hard on cattle, crops, and people, as well as increased demand on our energy infrastructure. In addition, air quality has been compromised even though we've tried to mitigate carbon sequestration through solar, wind, and EV transportation. Part of the air quality issue is due to increased wildfires and dust. Both can be attributed to rainfall and longer, hotter, and drier summers. So, what can we do?

The Festive Holiday Plant: Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*)B

By Corina Longoria



<https://ucanr.edu/blogs/CoastalGardener/blogfiles/77150.jpg>

This elegant popular plant with several varieties and colors brings instant cheer and beauty to your holiday trimmings. As the celebrations wind down many of you may still have the plant at home; however, most often the plants don't make it from one holiday season to the next, but with care, you may have some luck. Getting poinsettias to reflower isn't impossible, but they do require special care. This article will focus on trying to reflower poinsettias for the following year.

The poinsettia is native to Mexico's Pacific facing mid-elevation slopes (around 2,000 feet). It thrives in these elevated dry tropical forests; ideal temperature range is between 50 degrees and 70 degrees F, or USDA zone 13. In Merced County, its best chance of survival is as an indoor plant. Therefore, this reflowering project is based on maintaining your plant indoors. However, even with diligent care, the plant may not rebloom as hoped. It is certainly worth a try for the Poinsettia lover.

Reflowering:

A year long schedule of care is required for this plant to reflower.

New Year's Day – Fertilize with an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer as recommended on the label. Continuing to provide adequate light and water which will prolong the bloom for several weeks. Place plant in a sunny window that is south, east or west facing.

Valentine's Day – Check for insects and manage them if you find them. White fly is a common pest. If the plant has become leggy, now is the time to trim it back to about 5 inches tall. Pruning will promote a more compact growth.

St. Patrick's Day – Prune to remove dried and faded parts of the plant. Remove leaves which have dropped to the soil. Continue to keep inside at a bright sunny window. Check soil level, add more soil if needed, using commercially available sterile soil mix.

Memorial Day – Trim off branches a couple of inches to promote side branching. Locate an outward facing node and cut above node. Repot to a larger container (2-4 inches larger) using a sterile growing mix.

Fourth of July – Trim again. Maintain in sunny window. Continue to fertilize and water through the summer.

Labor Day – As new growth begins, reduce fertilizer to one-quarter the recommended strength.

Fall Equinox (approximately September 21st)— Give the plant 16 hours of uninterrupted darkness and 8 hours of bright light every day. They are short-day plants and require darkness to rebloom. Note: this is critical as during the 16 hours the plant cannot receive any light. Maintain night temperatures in the low 60° F range. Continue to water and fertilize (at ¼ strength). During the 8 hours of bright light, rotate to give all sides even light.

Thanksgiving— Discontinue the short day/long night regiment. Place plant in a sunny window that will get at least 6 hours of bright direct light. Reduce water and fertilizer.

Christmas— Enjoy your “new” poinsettia. Start the cycle all over again after the new year.

Watering— Examine the soil frequently, daily if you can. Do not allow the soil to completely dry out. If the plant starts to wilt, it is starting to die. Water until the water runs freely from the pot’s drainage holes. The plant shouldn’t remain in standing water. Drain standing water from it after watering. Continue this watering schedule until the beginning of April when you allow it to dry gradually. Following this drying period, store in a cool 60-degree airy location.

Table 1. Recommended watering

Diameter of Pot (in inches): Fluid Ounces per pot

4:6, 5:9, 6:12, 7:16, 8:20

<https://ucanr.edu/blogs/CoastalGardener/index.cfm?tagname=Poinsettia>

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/urbanhort/files/80155.pdf>



Continued from Page 7

First, practice water conservation. A couple of examples would include incorporating smart irrigation systems and limit water use in our homes by fixing broken and leaking faucets, valves and toilets. Limit and reduce over-watering of lawns and landscapes. Incorporate native plants and drought tolerant landscapes. Some may even collect rainwater to be used later. Next, as citizens, support sustainable agriculture by buying from local farmers and farmers' markets. Commercial farmers must continue to develop and incorporate water conservation practices with such technologies as drip irrigation, moisture sensors, and record and monitor evaporation rates and plant requirements to use water wisely. Changing cultivars and other drought tolerant varieties of plants that have lower water requirements and higher tolerance to heat and less chill hours during winter months is important.

Another area is to learn about regenerative agriculture. This farming approach, which can be used in both rural and urban environments, focuses on restoring and enhancing soil health, biodiversity, water cycles, and ecosystem resilience while improving productivity and profitability. The goal is to halt climate change through carbon sequestration and improved soil management. Some examples are no-till or low-till farming, diverse crop rotation and polyculture, cover cropping, and water management and conservation.

I hope we can agree that our weather is different than it was in the past with more people, more demand on natural resources, more people commuting to work and school, more demand on energy, and unpredictable replenishing of our most valuable resource, water! We can call it "Climate Change," "Global Warming," or "Mother Nature." I think it is everyone's responsibility to protect the environment around us for future generations to live and thrive. Whether you are a city dweller or commercial farmer, together we can make a difference regarding how we handle climate change. I believe changing weather patterns and more extreme weather events will be the "normal" for the foreseeable future. I also believe we can adapt to these changes in a positive way.

I hope I have given you something to think about and discuss with your family and friends.
Happy Gardening!

Stay Tuned: Dino has written an interesting article on Regenerative Agriculture that will appear in the next newsletter.

Newsletter Changes Are Coming!!

The 2nd Quarter Newsletter will be in the new email format instead of a PDF created with the program Publisher. You will not see full articles, but rather snippets of articles and a link to take you to the full article if you want to read more. It'll be the first time we'll be using Constant Contact to create the newsletter, so be patient.

We are changing as per direction from the UC. If you are interested in seeing a newsletter created with a similar format, follow this link <https://mailchi.mp/75af197de4b6/master-gardener-news-and-events-for-november?e=96ea16e032>

for a newsletter from Butte County Master Gardeners.

It will be a learning curve, but one we are looking forward to. Our new assistant, Allison Plagenza, will be a great help I'm sure.

Information

MMG Officer Slate for 2024-2026

President: Judy MacLaren
Vice-President: Denise Glassett
Secretary: Cathy Fossum
Treasurer: Mary Shasky
Past President; Mindy Muchmore-Thompson
Member-at-Large: Bri Freeman
Volunteer Coordinator: Tom Dinwoodie

Newsletter: Delores Cabezut-Ortiz/Cathy
 Dunn cabezut48@gmail.com
 Column & Photos Contributors: Every-
 one: Corina, Dino, Tom, Pat S.,
 Want to write a column? Let me know
 the subject at mmgnewsletr@yahoo.com

Good to know gardening basics:

Merced/Atwater USDA Growing
 Zone 9a (low temperature range 20-
 25°F)
 Average First Frost 11/11-20 Aver-
 age Last Frost 3/11-20

Meetings:

Executive Board: Last Thursday of
 the month, 9:30-11:15.

General Membership: 2nd Monday
 of the month at UCCE Office at
 Wardrobe Ave, Merced, CA **No gen-
 eral meeting is scheduled for June
 or December.**

At least one evening meeting
 (and/or Saturday) per year, TBA.

**Always check the VMS Calen-
 dar for meeting times.**

From Tom: Training Young Trees

A well trained tree is easier to maintain, will live
 longer, be more structurally sound and have a low-
 er risk of branch failure than an untrained tree.
 Trained trees have good structure, such as a strong
 central leader, vertical spacing between branches,
 branches radially spaced around the trunk, and
 strong branch angles attachments. If you want to
 know more about training and pruning your fruit
 trees, learn at the classroom and field pruning ex-
 ercise on January 25, 2025.

Our Only Saturday Meeting So Far



For info on
 the MG Pro-
 gram, click
 the QR
 Code..



Merced Master Gardeners

ucanr.edu

HELPLINE: Look at the VMS to sign up for the Helpline, Monday
 afternoons and Thursday mornings. If you need training, contact
 Marilynne Manfredi or Debbie Morrow if you have ???'s.