

The Green Scene

Meetings and Announcements

Master Gardener Program--It's On the Way!

From Erinne Rabanal, our Master Gardener Coordinator:

Thank you to all for your interest in the UC Master Gardener Program. The cohort for spring 2026 classes has been selected. However, we expect to begin recruitment for another group in later spring or early summer 2026, for the second cohort in January 2027. Also, Erinne is beginning a Master Gardener newsletter. If you want to support the program or join the newsletter, please feel free to contact her at erabanal@ucanr.edu

Master Gardener Classes--An Opportunity

I have heard from individuals who would like to take the Master Gardener (MG) classes, but don't have time for the volunteer component. As you may know, for many years I offered horticulture classes at several levels. We are going to offer an opportunity to sit in on the classes, but without the volunteer component. If you want to take this avenue, you could come to one or more lectures and take notes. However, you would not be able to participate in future MG social events or official MG activities, since you would not be a certified Master Gardener. The cost for the class series is \$90.

The Home Orchard, second edition

After some little time, the second edition of the UC publication *The Home Orchard* is now available.

Annual Winter Fruit Tree Pruning Demonstration

We plan to hold our annual winter pruning demonstration for deciduous fruit trees and grapes during the first week of February 2026. We have not made a decision on the date, but I will announce when available.

Next Horticultural Tour—very early announcement

We are now thinking of the Baltics in 2026, that would be Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, with likely a visit to Helsinki. More details when available.

Roses

It's a little early for winter pruning of roses. More in the next Greenscene.

Winter Solstice

The winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, is coming soon, Dec. 21. That has to do with Earth's position in its annual orbit and not the distance from Earth to the Sun. (I am personally thinking of a family fire in our outdoor fire bowl to mark the occasion.)

Dormant Treatment for Home Fruit Trees and other Plants

Kern County residents who have fruit trees may decide to apply a dormant treatment during the winter months. While a dormant spray will not harm a fruit tree if applied properly, it is not necessary in many situations. Before applying, we should ask ourselves whether we are just following habit or our neighbor's practices. Dormant sprays can aid in controlling certain insects and diseases. Some common spray materials, such as horticulture oil and lime-sulfur, are classified as organic.

Insect control usually comes to mind first, and scale insects are particularly susceptible to control with dormant oil. Application of horticultural oil can be used to reduce the overwintering population of some other tree pests, but oil is not a complete management program. The oil acts to cover insects, interfering with respiration. Addition of a small amount (1-1/2 – 2% by volume) of an insecticide will improve the effectiveness of the spray. Horticultural oil may be applied to most deciduous fruit species from December 1 to February 1. Plums and walnuts should be treated, if needed, with a delayed-dormant treatment, applied February 1 to 15. For deciduous fruits such as peaches, the insects controlled include San Jose scale, brown apricot scale, soft scale, European red mite (not common in Kern County), and peach twig borer. For apples, some aphid control is also possible. For home citrus in Kern County, dormant sprays are unwarranted. Note that many insects, such as green fruit beetle, codling moth, and most mites, are not controlled by a dormant spray. Flathead and shothole borers are also not controlled with dormant or any other spray.

Disease control is usually unnecessary in home orchards on the valley floor in Kern County because the dry climate does not favor development of fungal diseases. Additional winter rainfall, more likely further north or in foothill areas, favors these diseases. However, the diseases peach leaf curl and shothole (also called shoot blight) may develop in susceptible varieties of peaches and nectarines during a wet spring, but these can be prevented by prior application of suitable fungicides. Treatment during a disease outbreak is usually not effective because most fungicides act as protectants rather than eradicants. Unfortunately, a single spray will not control both diseases unless applied in late fall or early winter. Peach leaf curl can be controlled with Bordeaux mixture or a fixed copper fungicide, such as COCS or copper hydroxide, applied after leaf fall from late fall and during winter (December and January during the dormant season). Bordeaux mixture is difficult to apply, and some of the liquid copper fungicides are not very effective. If a fixed copper is not available, a lime-sulfur (calcium polysulfide) fungicide can be used. If shothole is a problem, a fungicide should be applied earlier in mid-November to mid-December, but lime-sulfur does not control shothole. Given these limitations and the lack of disease incidence in Kern County, it may be sensible just to skip treatment.

Fireblight, a bacterial disease of apple and pear, is not controlled by a dormant treatment.

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Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science

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