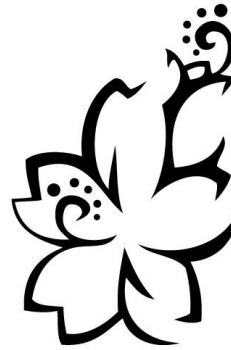


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February Gardening Tips



At the top of this month's gardening tasks are planting and pruning trees and shrubs. In San Diego County, we can plant trees of all kinds: fruit trees, shade trees and flowering trees. It is an excellent time to transplant mature or established trees and shrubs while they are dormant. Don't fertilize newly planted trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow and then only very lightly the first year.

When is the Best Time to Prune?

While you shouldn't prune flowering trees until after they've bloomed, you can now prune most shrubs and deciduous shade trees before they leaf out. Most trees and shrubs benefit from an annual pruning. It keeps them in shape, gets rid of dead and diseased wood and encourages new growth. Few birds are nesting in trees in the winter. This is an especially good time to prune coniferous trees like pines and cypress since their pests (various bark beetles) are not active at this time of the year.

However, not all trees and shrubs should be pruned early - especially some of the flowering ones. Early spring bloomers set their flower buds the fall before. Pruning them early in the spring would mean losing some blossoms. There are exceptions, though...it's often easier to prune when you can see the shape of the plant before the branches are masked by leaves. Trees and shrubs that are in need of a good shaping could sacrifice a few blooms to be invigorated by a pre-spring pruning.

When pruning shrubs, the first step is to prune out any dead or damaged branches; then thin out by removing about one-third of the canes or stems at ground level removing the oldest canes only, and lastly, shape the rest of the plant but do not cut everything back to the same height. Then, keep up with raking - fallen leaves can do damage if left to smother the growth under them.

Roses

If you haven't done it already, now is the time for your annual rose pruning. Use good shears that will make clean cuts. Remove approximately one-half of the top growth and height of the plant and leave about 4 to 8 healthy canes creating the shape of a vase with the center section remaining empty. Remove dead, dying, and weak canes. Apply a dormant disease and insect spray to the canes and immediate soil around the pruned roses. New growth will be seen approximately 8 weeks after a good pruning.

Climbing roses should be trained but not pruned. Weave long canes through openings in trellises or arbors and tie them with jute twine or plastic/wire plant ties. Securing canes now prevents damage from and contributes toward a more refined look to the garden when roses are blooming. Wait until after the spring flowering period to prune climbing or once-blooming shrub roses.

Apply your first feeding to roses when the new growth is about four to six inches long. Do not use soil-applied fertilizers combined with systemic insecticides. These products are very disruptive to soil life. Many rose aficionados also believe they reduce the vigor of the rose. Well-balanced organic granular fertilizers work especially well for roses and most of these will encourage beneficial soil life.

Pre-Order your new rose bushes now - **20% off** through the end of February - they will arrive to the nursery in mid-late March. Stop by to talk with one of our knowledgeable staff and place your order.

Miscellaneous Garden Tips...

Perennials: Get back into the swing of perennials this month with clearing, shopping, ordering, dividing, and possibly a bit of planting. February is a great time for planting perennial vegetables such as artichokes, asparagus, rhubarb and horseradish. Lift and divide perennials before they show new growth. Pinch Back

Annuals: When annuals such as pansies start to get spindly it's time to pinch back the weakened growth and promptly remove faded flowers. Then feed with a liquid foliage fertilizer. This will make the plants become full and lush again. Fill in bare spots by planting spring annuals such as snapdragons, calendulas, primroses, pansies and stock.

Start Warm Weather Vegetable Plants: You may start to grow warm weather vegetables (such as peppers and eggplant, yay!) from seeds indoors in a sunny window or outdoors in a warm location mid-month. Plant the seeds in small flats or pots. Potting soil is a good growing medium. Any container that drains excess moisture may be utilized.

Make **vegetable garden plans** now and prepare beds and garden areas before the rush of spring planting. You may still plant most all of the cool-season vegetables.

Apply a light application of fertilizer to established **pansy** plantings. Use one-half pound of ammonium sulfate per 100 square feet of bed area. Repeat the application every 4 to 6 weeks depending on rainfall.

Select **gladiolus** corms for February/March planting. Plant at two-week intervals to prolong flowering period.

Water **foliage plants** as well as other containerized plants only when needed and not by the calendar.

Watch for the earliest signs of **plant diseases** like powdery mildew or rust. If disease is spotted treat it immediately. Be on the lookout for aphid infestations on the new growth. Hose off with a strong jet of water or use a mild, organic product like insecticidal soap or Neem Oil.