



Issue #18

June 2011

Bees, Are They Required to Make Tomatoes?

Janice Johnson, Amador Master Gardener



Are bees required to pollinate your plants so that you'll have tomatoes this year? Some people say yes. Others say tomato flowers are complete, having both male and female parts, making them self pollinating, no bees required. Well, the answer is a definite maybe!

The original wild tomatoes did have a native bee as a pollinator, but when the tomato plants were taken from South America to other continents the pollinator was left behind. As modern tomato varieties were developed, the need for a pollinator diminished.

When everything is perfect a tomato flower is self pollinating. That means it's not too hot or too cold, that the humidity is not too high or too low, and that there is a breeze. Backyard gardeners can't do much about the temperature or the humidity, but we can simulate a breeze. The ideal temperature for a tomato to set fruit is between 60° and 75°. You won't get any fruit set if it is below 50° or higher than 90°, so those years when we skip spring and go from chilly winter to hot summer, we don't get many tomatoes. And, it feels like this could be one of those years!

In tomato greenhouses they can control the temperature and humidity and where there is no natural breeze they use fans, vibrators or bumble bees. Honey bees are not particularly attracted to tomato pollen, but the buzzing of those big bumble bees works great. I visited a commercial nursery that was hybridizing tomatoes. They had a homemade vibrating gadget that they made from a flashlight and a door bell to vibrate the tomato flowers so that they could collect the pollen.

This may be one of those years when your tomatoes may need your help to set fruit. Here are a few recommendations that will help. Do not over fertilize or your plants may make a lot of foliage and few flowers. Water your tomato plants deeply twice a week and keep the ground covered with 3" or 4" of mulch. Practice IPM and avoid inadvertently killing the good bugs, such as those big bumble bees that may be helping pollinate your tomatoes. Simulate the required breeze by gently shaking your tomato plants or by vibrating the flowers with an electric toothbrush. You'll have some explaining to do if your nosy neighbors see you!

To be Fire Safe remember to defend your space.

- *Keep weeds down to bare dirt.*
- *Keep gutters clean of dead leaves.*
- *Remove branches on trees to at least 10 feet near your home.*

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Master Gardeners

Advice to grow by ...

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Bug or Not a Bug?

Judie Marks, Amador Master Gardener

Recently I found an odd "bug" on a piece of mulch in my yard. I brought it to the Master Gardener office and we examined it under the microscope. It resembles three little white nests, each one with tiny discs that look like insect eggs.

Guess what? They're actually a form of fungus called bird's nest fungus. According to the Texas A&M Extension, the egg-like structures within each "nest" are called peridioles which contain the fungus' spores. When it rains, the nests act like splash cups and the spores are bounced out, sometimes projecting up to three feet in the air. The fungus is often found in decaying mulch and is easily overlooked by gardeners since it isn't very conspicuous.

Take a look in your garden to see if you can find some. If you do, marvel at the wonder of nature's creativity, but don't panic. These fungi only live on decaying plant matter and do not harm live plants.



Food Safety Tips for Your Edible Home Garden

Portions are from pamphlet from Western Institute for Food Safety and Security, University of Calif, Davis. Published July 2008.

You can develop an individual food safety plan for your home garden by applying these principles, which are drawn from research and practical experience.

Minimize Animal Fecal Contamination.

- During the growing seasons, keep domestic animals and pets out of the edible garden area.
- Carefully consider whether weed eating geese or pest eating chickens are sensible additions to your garden. Feces from these animals can contain pathogens.
- Minimize vegetation at the edges of fruit and vegetable patches. They can serve as gathering, nesting, or hiding places for animals, such as rats or mice, that can serve as sources of human pathogens.
- Minimize decaying fruits and vegetables in the area of your garden as these attract animals.
- Keep harvest equipment surfaces such as bins, totes, boxes, buckets, or bushel baskets, clean and sanitary.



Manure

- Properly composted manure fertilizers, domestic green manures or heat treated manure fertilizers are unlikely to be a source of pathogens. (Green manure is typically a plant cover crop that is grown and then chopped and incorporated into the soil or allowed to decompose for the purpose of soil improvement. "Green Manure" does not mean animal manure.)
- Do not use manure from pigs, dogs and cats for composting or to fertilize your garden. Some parasites from these animals are not destroyed by composting and might remain infectious to humans.
- Maximize the time between the application of composted animal manure to garden areas and harvest time.
- Be careful not to contaminate edible crops when applying uncomposted manure to other landscape areas or plants.
- If you are going to use uncomposted manure in your garden, mix it into soil at least 60 days before planting.
- Do not apply manure after seeding or transplanting edible plants.
- Do not leave manure on the soil surface. Pathogens survive longer if manure is left on the soil surface. This practice is more likely to result in run-off transfer to non treated areas.



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Food Safety Tips for Your Edible Home Garden

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Water

- Water is one of the most likely vehicles to bring pathogens in direct contact with fresh produce. Be familiar with the seasonal quality of any surface water source used for gardening. Surface water can include water from ponds, lakes, streams, and any other water source that is directly exposed to the environment.
- Carefully review all uses of graywater (wasterwater from baths, showers, clothes washers and bathroom sinks) for irrigation of edible garden plants. Do not use any water that could contain pathogens.
- Pathogen free potable water, equal in quality to water from a municipal water system, should be used for any leaf surface applications and cleaning fresh produce after harvest.
- Ensure that home wells are designed and maintained to prevent contamination of the water from surface run off or soil infiltration.
- Irrigation methods that minimize contact between the water and the edible parts of the plant (like drip irrigation) reduce the potential for contamination.



Personal Hygiene

- Personal hygiene and sanitation are essential for preventing foodborne illness in the home. This awareness should constantly be reinforced, especially among children.
- Establish family awareness of proper handwashing techniques. (Wash hands for 20 seconds using warm water and soap, rinse and dry with clean cloth or paper towel.) Pay special attention to cleaning around the fingernails – especially after working in the garden.
- Be aware of the potential for garden gloves and shoes to transfer contaminated material from one place to another (compost pile to the kitchen floor).
- Be aware of children's habits in the garden, especially toddlers in diapers.
- Wash hands after handling potentially contaminated material or playing with or petting domestic animals (dogs, cats, turtles birds or rabbits) before handling or eating produce.



Garden & Harvest Sanitation

- Any surface or implement that comes in contact with fresh produce could be a source of contamination with pathogens. Well planned food handling practices in the garden and home can reduce the likelihood of cross contamination.
- Clean all surfaces that come into contact with food including gloves, harvest containers, or bins prior to use.
- Surfaces can be cleaned with hot soapy water. Clean surfaces can be sanitized with a diluted solution of bleach (1 teaspoon liquid bleach per quart (4 cups) of water). Flood the surface with bleach solution, allow to stand for several minutes, then rinse well and dry with a paper towel or clean cloth.



Yarrow: *Achillea millefolium californica*

Yarrow is one of the most carefree and generously blooming native plants. It makes excellent, long-lasting cut flowers and may be dried for year round bouquets. It has fine, feathery, aromatic gray or green leaves and white flower heads that form flattish clusters. Often used as a medicinal plant by Native Americans and by cultures in other parts of the world, the genus name *Achillea* derives from Achilles, who, according to the myth, carried it with him into battle to treat wounds.



Yarrow thrives in the sun and once established will endure drought. A bonus: The plant is fire resistant. Native yarrows are not very different from those that grow throughout the world, but most California yarrows are white. Hybrids are available in a variety of colors and range from a few inches tall to some that are four or five feet tall. Plant them once and they'll bloom and spread over time; you'll have some to share. **Important Note: The Yarrow plant can be toxic to pets and livestock and can also become invasive. Regarding toxic details check out ASPCA at <http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/poison-control/plants/yarrow.html>.**

Summer Is Just Around the Corner ... Take Steps Now to Conserve Water

Glen Johnson, Amador County Master Gardener

As we approach the summer months and the water demands of our landscapes and gardens, it is an excellent time to review steps to take that reduce the amount of water used. This can reduce the costs if you are on a public system or the electricity costs associated with pumping water from your well. Some of us have limited well capacity but still want our gardens. Conservation is the way to achieve these goals.

There are many things we need to do to conserve water, such as growing low water use plants and native plants, mulching the soil, watering early in the morning to reduce evaporation, and taking steps to eliminate irrigation runoff. All of these contribute to the conservation effort, but generally you will be working with an existing landscape that has established plants vs. starting new and being able to select a complete low water landscape. You can, over time, take steps that will convert much of your landscape to an efficient water landscape.

Automate your irrigation with timers to control exactly how much and when to apply water. Watering by moving sprinklers or a hose from a row or basin is inherently erratic. You either apply too much or too little water, intervals vary, and runoff is frequently a problem. Use anything from a windup timer on a hose bib, a battery operated timer, or an electronic multi-station timer that allows various levels of control of duration, interval, and seasonal adjustments. If you want to conserve water and have healthy plants, automation at some level is a must.



Reduce or eliminate lawn areas. Lawns are the single greatest consumer of water and the biggest source of runoff in most residential landscapes. Lawns also frequently receive the most fertilizer and other chemicals which can be carried away in the runoff causing off property and downstream pollution. If a lawn is a must, reduce the total lawn area as much as possible, mow at a taller height (reduces water consumption), use a mulching mower to return the nutrients to the lawn, and reduce the amount of fertilizers you apply. Substitute some or all lawn with low water use plants, native plants and grasses, walkways, and sitting areas. Use permeable hardscape materials (pavers, permeable concrete, and/or gravel), or any material that allows the water to penetrate the surface, go into the soil and not run off. Some of these are expensive to install but over time the savings in water costs, labor, fertilizers, and chemicals maintaining a lawn, can outweigh the initial costs.



Use low flow devices. Drip, mini-sprinklers, sprayer, bubblers, and low flow rotator type sprinklers are some of the best ways to minimize over-taxing private wells and making sure the water applied is used most effectively by your plants, not the weeds and surrounding area, or lost in runoff.

Group plants by water use (high, moderate, low, and very low) by creating multiple irrigation zones. When this isn't possible and there is a mix of water use plants in an irrigation zone that can't be split or changed, consider using different gallon/hour devices to apply the correct amount of water for each plant. For example: mixed shrubs with some

- (1) requiring 7 gal/wk
- (2) requiring only 3.5 gal/wk.



Use a device for (2) that delivers half the gallons/hour (GPH) as required for (1) and run the irrigation the amount of time required for (1).

Create water use zones and relocate plants into zones with similar water use plants. This can be done over time by replacing plants as they die or need to be replaced for other reasons. Ideally, you would relocate desired high water use plants to areas with lower exposure and evaporation potential (eastern or northern exposure and partially shaded areas to minimize evaporation/transpiration) and choose low water use plants and native plants as replacements for the higher exposure evaporation/transpiration areas. Over time this will increase the water efficiency of your landscape and allow you to have a wide variety of plants in your landscape.

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Summer Is Just Around the Corner... Take Steps Now to Conserve Water

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Mulch your plants 4-5" deep to reduce evaporation and keep the soil and the plant cooler, reducing plant transpiration. This means the available water in the soil will take longer to deplete, thus intervals between irrigations can be extended, reducing water consumption by up to 50%. Mulch can be straw, shredded bark, bark, or anything that will insulate the soil while still allowing air to circulate. This is very effective around tomato plants by reducing water stress and the resultant blossom end rot, as just one example. **Be sure to keep the mulch approximately 4-6" away from the base of the plant so air can circulate, preventing diseases from infecting your plants.**

Irrigate early in the morning to reduce losses due to evaporation. It is best to start irrigations during the coolest time of day which is usually just before dawn. Irrigating early in the evening or at night can promote plant diseases due warm moist temperatures. Starting as early as 2 - 4 am, except on the warmest nights, allows the water to soak in with little loss to evaporation and at a time when the temperatures are cooler and less likely to promote disease.

Eliminate irrigation runoff, which in the foothill/mountains of Amador County presents special challenges to irrigation. In addition to some difficult soil conditions, moderate to steep slopes make it essential to use low flow devices such as drip emitters, mini-sprinklers or bubblers, drip tape, and soaker hose, or any method that allows the soil to accept the water supplied without running off. Hard and high mineral content water requires selecting devices less likely to be plugged or that can be opened and cleaned. Your irrigation may also require repeated short cycles to apply the required amount of water.

Method: Run irrigation until water starts to runoff (record length of time required to get runoff), turn off for one hour, repeat irrigation until water starts to runoff (record length of time required to get runoff), turn off for one hour, repeat process until required amount of water has been applied. Next set timer for just less than the average time to runoff and schedule the number of cycles to get the required amount of water applied. Results = NO RUNOFF.

El Dorado County Fair: June 16-19

Join the Master Gardeners at the county fair for a variety of 10-15 minute presentations sure to engage the interest of foothill gardening enthusiasts. Many presentations include demonstrations of techniques or methods you can easily apply in your own yard. Rest your feet in the shade for a bit, have fun, learn, and be inspired to try something new in your garden this year.

Thursday, June 16th

2:00 Sharpening Garden Tools
3:00 Beekeeping
4:00 Attracting Beneficial Insects
5:00 Lawn Substitutes

Friday, June 17th

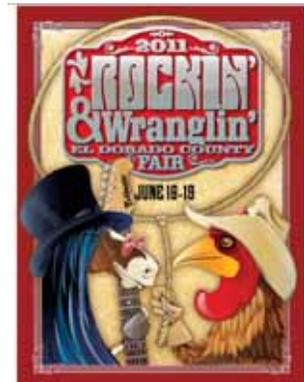
1:00 Demystifying Drip Irrigation Systems
2:00 Growing Culinary Herbs
3:00 Beekeeping
4:00 Song Bird Gardening

Saturday, June 18th

Noon Container Gardening
1:00 Gardening with Deer in the Neighborhood
2:00 Sustainable Gardening
3:00 Beekeeping
4:00 Wildlife Gardening
5:00 Identifying & Destroying Weeds Using Environmentally Safe Methods

Sunday, June 19th

Noon Raised Beds
1:00 Water-wise Irrigation
2:00 Container Gardening
3:00 Beekeeping
4:00 Identifying & Destroying Weeds Using Environmentally Safe Methods
5:00 Composting



Why are my flowers a different color than last year?

Jackie Tarchala, Amador County Master Gardener

This spring certainly brought some new and interesting challenges. As I write, I see a light out my window....could it be....yes, I think it IS the sun! After several queries came into the Master Gardener office about the sudden appearance of new flower colors, I did some investigating. I was curious about reports of Iris reverting to white or lavender, roses with a new color on the bush, and a butterfly weed in a color other than purchased.

I contacted one of the most renowned Iris farms in the country, Schreiner's Gardens. Annette confirmed what I suspected; it is not genetically possible for an Iris to change color. What can happen is a white or other more dominant variety will multiply to the extent that it crowds other varieties and they are not able to multiply. Since it is the new rhizomes that produce bloom stalks, they cannot bloom if they aren't creating new rhizomes. The way to correct this is to pull out the dominant variety when they bloom so the other varieties can begin to multiply.



An Iris can also give the illusion of changing colors when weed killer is sprayed in the area and the drift gets to the Iris, which can cause deformities. A purple Iris may end up with as a washed out lavender, or a white flower may develop that is very small and not properly formed. If left alone, the plant can recover.

In the case of Roses, another color on your bush means you are getting growth from below the graft. Not all roses are grafted onto root stock. Some are "own root" roses. You can tell if you have a grafted rose by the large bump in the main stem. In our area this graft should be above the soil level.

With Daylilies and Peonies, color change is only possible from seed varieties. You propagate these plants by root divisions so the plant will be exactly like its parent. When planting seed or when your plant throws seeds in your garden, you will get some plants of one of the parent plants and some varieties other than the plant with which you started. This is kind of like our families. Not many children look exactly like their parents and many siblings carry qualities of each parent but don't look like each other. There have been reports of butterfly weed (Asclepias) coming back another color. This is because the mother plant seeded new or original color plants into the garden bed. Another way Peonies and other flowers change color is that a new flower fades to another shade of the same color.

Hydrangea is a plant with a color we try to manipulate. There are three main colors of Hydrangea: white, pink and blue. White cannot be changed to another color. They sometimes, however, age to pink or red. If you live in a hot climate it is unlikely you will ever see a red Hydrangea.

To change a Hydrangea to blue, aluminum must be present in the soil. You can add aluminum sulfate to the soil around the plant. First soak the ground thoroughly and then use a solution of ½ ounce or 1 tablespoon per gallon of water applied around the plant through the growing season. This needs to be done at least 6 months before bloom. The soil PH should be between 5.2-5.5 for the aluminum to be available to the plant. You can also add coffee grounds, fruit and vegetable peels, and grass clippings to the soil. If your soil naturally contains aluminum and is acidic, the color of the hydrangea will automatically tend toward shades of blue and purple.



To change a Hydrangea to pink, add dolomite lime several times a year. This helps raise the PH of the soil, which must be between 6.0-6.2 for pink blossoms. If it goes higher than 6.4, you may experience iron deficiency. Since aluminum is what causes Hydrangeas to be blue, using a fertilizer high in phosphorus prevents aluminum absorption.



For better control of soil mix, grow your plants in large pots. When adding aluminum sulfate to pots reduce the amount to ¼ ounce per gallon of water.

Planting hydrangeas near a concrete foundation or sidewalk will often affect the color since the PH of the soil may be raised considerably by lime leaching out of these structures, making it difficult to obtain blue. How about using a cement pot to obtain pink?

Save the Strawberries

Ora Emmerich, El Dorado County Master Food Preserver

Plump, juicy, red, ripe strawberries pop up at every roadside intersection to tempt passersby with tasty spring goodness. Who can resist stopping to buy a basket or three? With such an abundance of the delicious fruit available at this time of the year, smart consumers will find many ways to preserve the scrumptious berries.



Keep fresh strawberries in the refrigerator, in a partially opened plastic bag or in a plastic clamshell to keep the humidity level up. Store in the crisper drawer, and do not wash the fruit until just before eating. Washing will cause the berries to spoil faster because of the added moisture. The best way to wash strawberries is under cold, running water. While the temptation exists to fill the sink with water and soak the berries, resist it! Contaminants may be spread through the standing water to all the fruit, and the safest cleaning method remains rinsing under cold running water, perhaps with a soft rub on the surface of the strawberries while washing.

For any fruit you will not eat within seven days, the University of California Davis Extension recommends several satisfactory methods of preservation. Strawberries may be frozen, dried or made into jams and jellies. Freezing strawberries, with or without a syrup pack, results in a product with good flavor but a "mushier" thawed result, although sweetening before freezing keeps the texture better than not.



Jams and jellies made with strawberries usually require the use of pectin. Although freezer jam requires no cooking, most jams and jellies combine cooked fruit with sugar and pectin to create a wonderful spread for toast or bagels. Safely process strawberry jams and jellies in a water bath canner, following the times and temperatures on the recipe instructions.

Eat dried strawberries out of hand as snacks, mixed into cereal or added to ice-creams and milkshakes. Crush completely dried berries to a powder and add to smoothie drinks. Strawberries make wonderful fruit leathers and may be combined with other fruits for a variety of flavors. The University of California Davis Extension recommends preheating strawberries to 160°F before using in a puree for fruit leathers. This destroys bacteria and mold that may be on the berries and preserves the color of the fruit while hastening drying.



To make fruit leathers at home, simply line a cookie sheet with plastic wrap. Puree the strawberries and pour onto the plastic wrap, spreading the puree to a thickness of 1/8-1/4 inch in the center of the mixture. Dry at 140° for up to 18 hours in the oven, about 4-8 hours in a dehydrator, or for 1-2 days in the sun. If solar drying, be sure to keep insects and birds from infesting the fruit leather while it dries. When the leather peels easily from the plastic wrap and pressing in the middle does not leave a mark, the process is complete. Eat and enjoy the great taste of strawberries!



Questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups.

Visit the Master Food Preserver website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/.

Stop by for samples of delicious preserved foods at the El Dorado County Fair. You'll find the Master Food Preservers in the Marshall Building June 16-19.



Let patience grow in your garden. Anonymous.



Public Education Classes for Amador and El Dorado Counties – Free!!



Most classes are from 9 am – Noon. Please call ahead to confirm locations; they may change.

Amador County

Location for all Amador classes: GSA Building, 12200-B Airport Road, Jackson.

June

11: Preserving the Harvest – Canning

July

16: Preserving the Harvest – Freezing, Dehydrating, and Fresh Produce Storage

Do you have a garden, fruit orchard, or berry patch? Do you have friends who share theirs with you? Would you like to preserve your bounty? If so, we have the classes for you.

Master Food Preservers from El Dorado County will present these two preserving classes.

The first class (June 11) covers canning, both water bath and pressure canning. You will learn the best and safest method to use for canning, pickling, making jams, jellies, and preserves from all your different fruits and vegetables. Each requires a specific method to ensure it will be safely preserved. You will also get tips on how to improve the quality of your canned product.

The second class (July 16) covers freezing, dehydrating, and fresh fruit and vegetable storage. If you tried freezing vegetables you may have questions on how to freeze the various varieties so they retain their near fresh quality when used. Fruits are easier but there are lots of tips to improve the quality and make them convenient to use. Dehydrating opens a whole new world to what you keep and how you can use the dried fruits and vegetables. Finally, if you want to keep everything fresh longer, the fresh storage methods portion of the class is a must.

If you have any questions about the classes or have other gardening questions, call the Master Gardeners at the UC Cooperative Extension Office from 10am to noon, Tuesday or Thursday, 223-6838. You can also contact us by e-mail at mgamador@ucdavis.edu.

El Dorado County

Location for all El Dorado classes: Veterans Memorial Bldg, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville.

June

11: Hanging Baskets

If you want to optimize all your unused space outdoors, such as above walkways and on decks, plan to attend this class. Master Gardener Kristen Rankin will show you how to take advantage of vertical spaces and how to get instant color in containers. She will show you how to plant in containers, talk about the best types of containers to use and how best to care for plants once put into containers.

25: Orchids

Join Master Gardener Heidi Napier for her presentation on growing orchids and caring for them in El Dorado County. Plan to bring any of your orchids that may need attention or repotting and you'll receive hands-on help.

July

9: Garden Bugs – The Good, Bad, & Ugly

Want to cut back or eliminate using costly and potentially destructive pesticides? You can do it by luring beneficial predator insects to your property to eat the insects that can wreck havoc on your garden. Learn how to turn your garden into an environmentally friendly habitat for your plants, animals, and other beneficial (pollinators) insects. Heck, us humans would benefit too.

16: Container Gardening

Do you want to add a splash of color around your front door? Are there times that your perennial beds lack color and bloom? Container gardening is a great way to add new elements of interest and beauty to your garden. Master Gardener Julianne Melchor will help you learn to create a container garden that suits your needs.



Check out the El Dorado Master Gardener Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/El-Dorado-County-Master-Gardeners/164653119129>.

Free Master Food Preserver Classes



Here are more opportunities to learn to preserve your garden's harvest, taught at the El Dorado County UCCE Office, 311 Fair Lane, Placerville. Call 530-621-5502 for more information. No reservations necessary.

July

9 & 12 , 10am - Noon	Food Safety & Basic Water Bath Canning
16 & 19 , 10am - Noon	Jams and Jellies
23 , 10am - Noon	Dehydrating & Freezing
26 , 10am - Noon	Christmas in July—Holiday Gifts
30 , 10am - Noon	Pickles, Relishes & Sauerkraut



Pest Notes

Free Pest Notes are available on a variety of topics. For more information, call or email your local Master Gardener office.



To explore the Pest Notes on the UC Integrated Pest Management (IPM) website, go to <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu>.

Amador & El Dorado Counties Master Gardener Newsletter
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 Assistant Editor: Janice Johnson

Not on our e-newsletter distribution list yet? Know someone who would like to receive our newsletters and notifications on classes and events? Sign up online:

Amador:
<http://ceamador.ucdavis.edu/newsletterfiles/newsletter3145.htm>

El Dorado:
<http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/newsletterfiles/newsletter3286.htm>

Get Answers to Your Gardening Questions Online

Don't forget about our great Master Gardener websites — they're loaded with gardening goodies:

- Information about Master Gardeners and even how to become one
- List of public classes
- Calendar of Master Gardener events
- Useful links to gardening websites
- Home gardening publications
- Information request form to get answers to your gardening questions

http://ceamador.ucdavis.edu/Master_Gardener
http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Gardener

Got a specific question? Just email us!

Amador: mgamador@ucdavis.edu
 El Dorado: ceeldorado@ucdavis.edu



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