



Meeting the Challenges of a Hilltop Garden

Dianne Andre, Amador County Master Gardener

Looking back on 2011, the Amador County Master Gardeners' work at the Food Bank Demo Garden in Jackson was quite productive. No doubt about it, a year-end tally of three-hundred pounds of produce is impressive. However, this bountiful yield didn't come without challenges.



Barbara Dahlberg spearheads the garden team consisting of Kathy Freeman, Dianne Andre, and Carol Gamble, who recently joined the threesome.

When deer devoured the fruit trees one spring night, Barbara formulated a plan to keep out the hungry predators. With the help of extra volunteers, a fence was erected around the small orchard in less than a day. About the same time, Master Gardener Larry Jones constructed a storage building, unofficially named by the garden team *Larry's Shed*. In early December, the county started grading the parking lot for asphalt. Part of the fence had to come down. Once the work is complete, the fence will go up a few feet further into the already narrow orchard.



Larry's Shed, " stocked with a few tools purchased from yard sales.

Before planting, Barbara and the garden team hauled manure, one bucket full at a time, to amend the soil in a few raised beds. Throughout the year, disease and pest problems were tackled, watering issues solved, ornamental garden maintained, and onsite gardening questions answered. When a dead trout appeared under the tomato vines, the decaying carcass was chopped and used as organic fertilizer beneath two lavender bushes.



Raised beds



Natural fish fertilizer

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Master Gardeners

Advice to grow by ...

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Meeting the Challenges of a Hilltop Garden, *Continued from Page 1*

Fighting for territorial bounties, zillions of weeds were eradicated from flat land, along a foot-wide path at the hilltop's edge and on the steep incline where balance is a prerequisite. This is no easy task. Still, gloved hands remained where the soil lies while behinds took the position of most gardeners—up in the air.

“What’s nice,” says Kathy Freeman, “is working in the garden with other people makes tedious tasks like weeding, removing tomato plants, giving dead grass a haircut [by hand], go faster, and it’s more fun.”

A new area of the Demonstration Garden was the grass plot, which highlighted several variations of drought resistant grasses that should only require water twice a month during the summer. The varieties planted are Native Bent Grass, Native Mow Free Grass, and Delta Grassland Mix.



Weeding—mechanical control technique!



Carol, Jackie and Sandy prepare the plot for the grass demonstration area.



The Master Gardeners experiment with a variety of drought tolerant grasses.

Down in the dirt together, Barbara and the garden team met every challenge of 2011, a year of successful projects and a bountiful yield—valued at \$368—donated to the Food Bank.

Master Gardeners who helped with the variety of construction projects were John Otto, Glen Johnson, Jackie Tarchala, Sandy Hendricks, Carol Gamble, Larry Jones, Jerry Trottier, Barbara Dahlberg, Dianne Andre, along with Barbara and Dianne’s husbands Jim Dalberg and Joe Andre.

The garden may be small, but it produces a bountiful harvest and is an excellent example of a typical home garden. The garden is at the Interfaith Food Bank at 12181 Airport Road in Jackson. Stop by and visit any time!



Jerry, Jim, Barbara, Kathy and Dianne build a new raised bed.



What is This?

A visitor to the Amador County UC Cooperative Extension office stopped by with this strange looking thing one of his employees picked up along the side of the road. He'd been told it was a mock orange. Was it edible? Do **you** know what it is? The answer's at the bottom of page 5. *

Get Ready to Prune

Sue McDavid, El Dorado County Master Gardener

The holidays usually signal that it's time to begin pruning deciduous fruit trees and ornamental trees and shrubs. To make this job easier, make sure you have the proper pruning tools to do a good job. Tools for pruning range from small hand shears for use on ornamentals and hedges to large pruning saws for use on tree branches. Some of the tools used for pruning are described below.

Hand Pruners

Curved bypass pruners give the cleanest cut. Make sure they have a sturdy frame, a spiral-type spring between the handles, replaceable blades and a nonslip grip. Reputable manufacturers can always supply replacement parts if needed. When pruning a branch, hold the pruners so that the upper blade is toward the part of the branch that remains on the plant. This way, any damage that might occur will be on the pruned branch instead of the one left on the plant. Anvil pruners have a cutting blade that is pushed against a metal sole, or anvil. These tend to cost less than bypass pruners and are less likely to twist when cutting larger branches, but they crush wood as they cut and leave a stub. For this reason, I prefer bypass pruners.



Loppers

These long-handled tools are used for cutting branches too large or too tough for hand pruners, but not large enough for a saw. Avoid using an anvil model except for cutting dead wood and buy bypass-type loppers instead.



Pruning Saws

Use a bow saw for heavy-duty cutting of large tree branches. The teeth on these saws cut on both the push and pull strokes, and the handle allows good clearance. A regular pruning saw is good for cutting branches 1-3" in diameter and the teeth cut on the pull stroke. Pole pruners are those that can reach up high into a tree, freeing you from having to climb on a ladder, but are useful only on branches about an inch or so thick. Some come in one piece while others have poles of interlocking pieces.



Hedge Trimmers

There are electric and gas-powered hedge trimmers which do a good job on plants like conifers, boxwood, privet, etc. However, for broadleaf plants like laurel, hedge trimmers tend to damage the foliage too much, so use hand pruners. It's very easy to over-trim using these tools, so cut lightly at first and go over the hedge a second time if necessary. Choosing which power trimmer to use is a personal choice, but there are some things to keep in mind.



Electric trimmers are less expensive, almost maintenance free and very lightweight. However, keeping the electric cord out of the way is an important safety issue and buying one with a cord that is brightly colored is very helpful. Hold the cord over your shoulder and be aware of it at all times. There are cordless trimmers that are powered by a rechargeable battery, and will operate between charges for a finite period of time. These are ideal for use on small hedges and topiaries that need regular care. Gas-powered models are more powerful, but they cost more and make a lot of noise. Single-blade trimmers enable you to cut branches up to an inch in diameter while double-bladed models allow trimming back and forth.

No matter which tool you use, properly maintaining them will help them last a life time, will help to make them easier to use and will give cleaner cuts on stems and branches. Regularly lubricate the pivot areas of pruners, clean sticky resin or sap off blades and sharpen blades when necessary. Wiping the blades with a light machine oil after cleaning will prevent rust from forming. Also, store hedge trimmer blades in a plastic sheath to prevent damage when not in use.

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Caring for a Living Christmas Tree

Kathy Ruiz, El Dorado County Master Gardener and Jill North, Amador County Master Gardener

Thinking about purchasing a living Christmas tree this year? It's a great double-duty choice. You'll have the benefit of a tree to decorate for the holidays and a beautiful addition to your landscape afterwards.

For starters, select the location in your yard where the tree will be planted. Remember that evergreens will eventually grow to be quite large, so plan accordingly. If you live in an area where the ground is likely to be frozen in late December, it will be best to dig the planting hole as soon as possible, when the ground is not rock-hard. Be sure to cover the hole with some boards to avoid making it a hazard. Even if it doesn't freeze in your area, chances are it will be warmer outside in early December than January, when you plant the tree, so you may just want to dig the planting hole early.



Most trees will be sold in containers, but you may find some that have the root ball wrapped in burlap. Don't bring the tree inside right away. Instead, let it get used to what will be a change in climate by leaving it in the garage or on a covered porch for a few days to ease the transition to the indoors. Keep the tree well watered, and do not allow it to freeze. Hose or brush the tree off so you won't be bringing any unwelcome debris or insects into your home. Once inside, place the tree away from heating ducts or the fireplace or wood stove.

You may want to consider treating the tree (before you bring it inside) with an anti-transpirant like "Cloud Cover" or "Wilt-Pruf". These products are often used to protect a plant from freezing weather, but they also work to hold moisture in the plant when exposed to drying conditions. You will find one or both of these products at local nurseries.

It is not recommended that you keep the tree indoors for more than seven days. Long periods at warm temperatures may reduce the tree's hardiness. Before you plant the tree, re-acclimate it to the outdoors by moving it back to the garage or a covered porch for a few days. When planting the tree, ensure that the top of the root ball or tree crown is placed at or slightly above ground level. Water the tree deeply with three to five gallons of water. Anchor the tree by staking it in three places. Apply mulch to a depth of three to four inches. If freezing weather is predicted, wrap the tree in burlap.



Colorado Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens* 'Glauca'), Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and White Fir (*Abies concolor*) are some of the most popular choices for living Christmas trees. These are moderate to fast growers, depending on your elevation. The Silver Tip, also known as a Red Fir (*Abies magnifica*), is a good choice, but only if you live above 3,000 feet. The Serbian Spruce (*Picea omorika*) and Dwarf Alberta Spruce (*Picea glauca* 'Conica') are also attractive and very conical in shape. These two cultivars are very slow growing.

What kind of living Christmas tree should you avoid? Be careful of White and Nobel Firs because they are common carriers of *Phytophthora cinnamonomi*, a relative of our sudden oak death fungus, which has spread across our country and five other continents, killing manzanita here and oaks in Mexico. It is a water-borne fungus mainly transferred by soil. It also thrives in avocado orchards and has had an impact on production. This isn't a new pathogen; it is just spreading more and affecting more trees.

Nurseries have to do their part by not transferring soil or allowing standing water around these trees in pots. But there is no cure. If you do buy a live fir for Christmas, DON'T replant it unless you know the nursery used sterile potting soil, started with clean stock, and kept the trees on coarse, sloping gravel beds to avoid standing water. Choose an older tree with a strong root system.

The University of California Cooperative Extension Central Sierra's Christmas Tree website has information about how local growers are providing Christmas trees less susceptible to *Phytophthora cinnamonomi*, and how to manage it. Learn more at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Agriculture/Christmas_Trees.

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Three New Weed Management Educational Videos

Joe DiTomaso, UC Davis Specialist

The Weed Research and Information Center (WeedRIC) has developed three educational on-line videos that are directed towards homeowners and Master Gardeners. These three videos are housed on the wric.ucdavis.edu website under the Quick Links Online Education Program button. There is no cost for their use.

1. The first video focuses on weed identification and the resources available to determine the identity of hundreds of weed species. This is a 30 minute video that provides an overview of the herbarium and how scientists use keys to identify plants. It then goes into detail on the various interactive identification programs, including the on-line program also housed on the WeedRIC website.
2. The second video describes the principles that are critical to weed science and management. This includes prevention strategies, life cycles, weed competition, weed seedbanks, and discussion of the best timing for controlling different groups of weeds. The video is about 40 minutes long and features many of the experts on weed science in the state.
3. The third video is also 40 minutes long and focuses on the different weed control techniques that could be employed by homeowners. This includes mechanical, cultural, biological and chemical control options, with particular attention to herbicide safety and proper calibration. Again, this video utilizes the expertise of many of the most knowledgeable weed scientists in California.

Go to http://wric.ucdavis.edu/education/online_programs.htm to directly access videos.

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Old Christmas Trees Can Benefit Wildlife

Don't throw away your old Christmas tree—use it to feed wildlife in your yard. Remove all lights and ornaments but leave any strings of popcorn and cranberries. Add table scraps and other treats and watch as wildlife is attracted to your yard. Old Christmas trees can also be used to build brush piles which will furnish cover for rabbits and other small animals. Place the brush pile near other thick cover to encourage animals to use it.



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What is This?, *Continued from Page 2*



If you also thought this was a mock orange, guess again. It's a breadfruit, and yes, it is edible.

Breadfruit is a member of the fig family. When baked, the fruit has a starchy texture and fragrance reminiscent of fresh baked bread.

Unripe breadfruit is green and bumpy. The bumps flatten out and the skin color lightens as it matures. For more information, visit the UC Davis Post Harvest Technology website at <http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/PFfruits/Breadfruit/>.



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



Most classes are from 9 am – Noon. Please call ahead to confirm locations.

El Dorado County

Unless otherwise noted, location for all El Dorado classes: Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville.

December

3: Selecting & Planting Bare Root Trees

Location: Gov. Center Hearing Room, Building C

Master Gardener Walt Miller will present essential information on the selection and the proper planting of bare root trees. The focus of the class will be on planting techniques and tree selection. Fruit tree varieties best suited for our El Dorado county and Central Sierra location will be discussed in depth.

10: African Violets

Location: Bethell-Delfino Ag Building

Now is the time most gardeners move indoors, but still want to continue growing things. Join Master Gardener Julianne Melchor for a presentation on how to plant and care for the many varieties of African Violets and other house plant selections.

January 2012

7: Pruning & Remedial Pruning of Deciduous Fruit Trees

Master Gardener Walt Miller will present information on good pruning practices to keep trees healthy and under control. Proper pruning leads to more fruit production on fruit-bearing trees! Hands-on demonstrations using the proper tools will also be a part of the presentation.

14: Rose Pruning

Join Master Gardeners Julianne Melchor and Eve Keener as they present a class on proper pruning of roses. The proper tools to use will be discussed as well as the right time of year to prune and different techniques for various rose varieties. There will be hands-on demonstrations.

21: Living with Oaks

El Dorado County is graced with handsome and enduring California Oaks. New construction, irrigated lawns and cultivated land can endanger them, and they need proper care to continue to thrive. Join Master Gardener Heidi Napier for a presentation on the various methods to maintain and protect these wonderful trees.



Amador County

Unless otherwise noted, location for all Amador classes: GSA Building, 12200-B Airport Road, Jackson.

January 2012

14: Erosion - Problems and Solutions

Learn the fundamentals of erosion and why we should be concerned. Learn about terracing, detention and infiltration basins and other water management techniques. See examples and good suggestions of beautiful plantings which also conserve water.

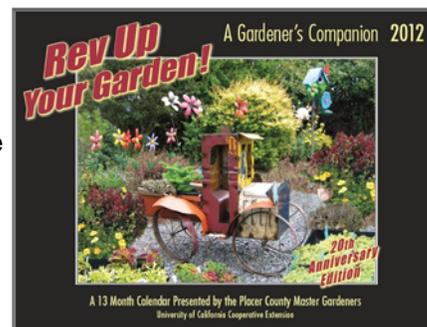
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2012 Master Gardener Calendars Available!

Perfect as a gift to yourself or a fellow gardener, Placer County Master Gardeners' 2012 Gardener's Companion 13 Month Calendars are for sale at the Amador and El Dorado UC Cooperative Extension office for \$10.

Calendars in Amador are available Monday through Thursday from 9-1.

In El Dorado they are available Monday through Friday from 8-5. and at the December public classes.



Each month features an informative article with tips and ideas; beautiful color photographs; lists of what to plant for our region; garden chore reminders; fun facts, and recommendations on where to get more information about the topics presented.

Pay by cash or check at the UCCE office (make checks payable to "The University of California, Regents" or at an upcoming Master Gardener class, while supplies last. You can also purchase calendars online with a credit card at http://ucanr.org/sites/ucmqplacer/2012_Calendar.

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Rake Leaves, Save Livestock and Deer

Janice Johnson, Amador County Master Gardener

If you have a home orchard, the recent windy days may have stripped your trees of their remaining leaves. Take a few minutes to rake up any stone fruit tree leaves and add them to your compost pile instead of letting them blow into areas where animals may graze on them. In addition to building your compost pile, you're helping keep grazing animals safe.

Did you know that wilted leaves from stone fruit trees, such as cherries, peaches, and plums, can be poisonous to animals? These wilted leaves might seem especially tasty to deer or goats whose regular food is covered by snow this winter. The University of Delaware Extension explains why these leaves can be deadly.



“Cyanogenetic plants contain under certain conditions, prussic acid (hydrocyanic acid), a deadly poison which interferes with the oxygen-carrying ability of the blood. Death in these cases is usually rapid and with little outward symptoms. Members of the prunus family of plants are dangerous, especially wild cherries.

Peaches, plums and other stone fruits belong to this group of plants. Wilting of the green leaves caused by frost, storm damage, or by cutting, changes a glucoside found in the leaves to hydrocyanic acid (HCN) and sugar. The sweet, wilted leaves are thus more attractive to animals than normal foliage. HCN content varies widely; but under some conditions a few handfuls of leaves may be enough to kill a horse or cow.

This type of poisoning should be suspected when sudden death of animals follows windstorms or early sharp frosts. These leaves apparently lose their poison after they have become dry; the limp, green or partially yellowed leaves are the most dangerous.”

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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
 Editor: Linda Hagye
 Assistant Editor: Janice Johnson
 Know someone who would like to receive our newsletters and notifications on classes and events? Have them sign up online at <http://ucanr.org/mgenews>.

Get Answers to Your Gardening Questions Online

http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Gardeners

- Information about Master Gardeners
- List of public classes
- Calendar of Master Gardener events
- Useful links to gardening websites
- Home gardening publications



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