



Issue #25

January 2012



Yes, it may be winter, but since we haven't had rain, remember to water your gardens and home orchards. If you're unsure about dry winter watering practices, contact your local Master Gardeners' office.

UC Wildlife Research Team Looking for Single Socks

Anne Lombardo, UCCE Mariposa County

Originally posted in [UCANR Green Blog](#), December 14, 2011

A University of California wildlife research team working in the Sierra Nevada near Oakhurst, Calif., is asking the public to donate clean, gently used socks for research on a rare weasel called the Pacific fisher. The team is part of the [Sierra Nevada Adaptive Management Project](#) (SNAMP), which is examining the effects of forest thinning, as currently done by the U.S. Forest Service, on the health of local wildlife, the forest and water resources. The U.S. Forest Service implements these treatments out of concern for excessive fire risk. Eighty years of fire suppression, reductions in logging and drought conditions have left the forest increasingly overcrowded and excessively flammable.

But what kind of research could go through hundreds of socks a month? After years of experimentation, the research team has determined that socks are the ideal receptacle for hanging fisher bait in trees. The researchers are going through 250 pair a month, at a considerable cost, to create the "chicken in a sock" bait stations.

Besides the cost, chief scientist Dr. [Rick Sweitzer](#) is spending too much time in the Wal-Mart checkout line with a cart full of socks.

The scientists don't need new socks; they would prefer old, unmatched, non-hole ones, something every American has cluttering up their sock drawers. You know the ones!

So, in an effort to reduce, reuse and recycle, the SNAMP wildlife research team is putting out a call for lost and lonely socks. Socks may be delivered or mailed to 40799 Elliott Dr., Oakhurst CA 93644.

You can also deliver socks to your local UCCE office.

For more information contact Anne Lombardo at amlombardo@ucdavis.edu. To read more about the research project visit the [SNAMP website](#).



Figure 1: A Pacific fisher, captured by researchers with a motion-detecting camera, grabs at "chicken in a sock."

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Master Gardeners

Advice to grow by ...

Amador County

209-223-6838

Office hours: 10 am–Noon

Tuesday–Thursday

mgamador@ucdavis.edu

El Dorado County

530-621-5512

Office hours: 9 am–Noon

Tuesday–Friday

mgeldorado@ucdavis.edu

Looking for Single Socks *Continued from page 1*

Other wildlife are also attracted to the bait stations:



Figure 2: A bobcat trying to get the chicken in a sock.



Figure 3: A fox at the sock bait station.

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Feed the Soil for Healthy Plants

Cindy Young, El Dorado County Master Gardener

At the end of the growing season I clean up the annual plants and put my garden to bed for the winter so that when spring rolls around there is a lot less work. The plant trimmings go in my compost bin, but if there are any diseases or insect infestations, I destroy the plants. I had no plant diseases this year, just a lot of aphids on the zucchini toward the end of the summer. Some people sheet compost or sheet mulch by simply cutting the plants off at ground level and leaving them on the ground. By spring the soil will be ready for planting. Kevin Marini, Compost Guru of UCCE Placer/Nevada counties, uses this method.

I may plant cover crops, aka green manure, in some beds. In other beds I put down organic matter in the form of compost, partially composted chicken, horse, alpaca, and/or llama manure, shredded leaves, leaf mold that was started last fall, hay, and/or grass clippings. Whichever method I use the beds have a blanket of food and protection for the worms and microbes hard at work cycling the nutrients. I will work this mulch into the soil in the spring, greatly improving the soil structure, aeration, and drainage. The bonus is there will be very little weeds— my kind of gardening!

This photo is of a beefsteak tomato plant I pulled out of my 8" raised bed. (Yes, I said 8 inches.) The massive root system is over 3 feet in length! The roots went down and all around. I give credit to compost, organic matter, and worm castings! Feed the soil, so it can feed the plants.



If you'd like to read more about the soil food web I highly recommend the book *Teaming With Microbes* by Jeff Lowenfels & Wayne Lewis.

If you haven't started gathering your fall leaves to build your own homemade compost it's not too late. You'll want to have this supply when carbon (brown) material is scarce in the summer.

Compost - because a rind is a terrible thing to waste.

Erosion: Problems and Solutions for Residential Properties

Is there a problem in the picture below?



Do you live on sloped land? Are you trying to figure out how to landscape it or did you give up and let the weeds take over because at least weeds keep the soil from washing away?

Do you live on a rocky hilltop and wonder how in the world you can create your dream landscape on top of boulders?

Do you know the ramifications of eroded soil and why you should be concerned? It's good to know before the heavy winter rains arrive. (Will the rains arrive?)

On **Saturday, January 14**, come to a free Master Gardener class from 9am to Noon and learn from experienced Master Gardeners John Otto, Tim Jelsch and Roger Taylor how to tackle a variety of gardening and landscaping issues surrounding the basic problem of erosion. Learn about terracing, detention and infiltration basins, and other water management techniques. See examples and good suggestions of beautiful plantings which also conserve water. And relive the experience of a Master Gardener who turned his boulder strewn property in El Dorado Hills into a showcase yard.

This free class is at the GSA Building at 12200-B Airport Road in Jackson from 9-Noon. Join us!



Sample mulching and detention basin options



Sample eave line dissipation and infiltration options

Sample terracing options



Be a Beekeeper, Not a Bee-Haver

Kathy Keatley Garvey, UCCE Communications Specialist

If you're planning to join the ranks of backyard beekeepers in 2012, you should keep a few things in mind, says Extension apiculturist [Eric Mussen](#) of the UC Davis Department of Entomology.

Mussen, a member of the UC Davis Department of Entomology faculty since 1976, advises what to do and what not to do in his current edition of [from the UC Apiaries](#).

One of the most important things, says Mussen, is not to become a laissez-faire beekeeper, that is, "place the bees in a hive and walk away, leaving the bees to fend for themselves." This can lead to serious problems for your colony and the health of your neighbors' colonies, he points out. Plus, it could lead to more stringent city and county ordinances.

You should always provide water for your bees on your property, Mussen says. Otherwise, they will visit the neighbor's "hanging laundry, bird bath, swamp cooler, dog dish, leaky hose connection, etc."

Mussen also advises:

Use fencing or bushes to get the bees to fly up, then away from the apiary. "They will also attain that altitude on return flights.

- Use gentle stocks and "work" the bees during warm, nice middays. That "free" swarm you catch may not be of gentle stock (and it could be Africanized bee stock if it's collected in areas where Africanized bees are).
- Use smoke and slow, gentle movements.
- Inspect the brood periodically, twice a month, "to be certain that the queen is laying a good pattern, that the brood is healthy, and that there are adequate food stores for the time of year."

And, Mussen says, "if you need to feed the bees, start feeding after flight ends for the day, to help prevent robbing."

Mussen offers a wealth of information in his [current newsletter](#), the other bimonthly editions (dating back to 1976), and [Bee Briefs](#).

Bottom line: if you're going to keep bees, Mussen says, "be a beekeeper, not a bee-haver."



Backyard beekeepers must provide water for their bees or they will visit a neighboring yard, where they may not be welcome. (Photo by Kathy Keatley Garvey)

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Public Education Classes 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.

January

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.

28: Beekeeping

Location: Gov. Center Hearing Room, Building C
Bees are a critical part of gardening in El Dorado County – without them we wouldn't be able to enjoy many of our fruits and vegetables. But bees are under threat of disappearing from our landscape because of the inappropriate use of pesticides. Master Gardener Sharlet Elms will discuss how to raise bees and handle them safely.

February

4: Citrus in the Foothills

Would you like to grow oranges, lemons and other citrus fruits in your own yard? Learning about microclimates and choosing the correct varieties and rootstocks will allow you to grow citrus in the foothills. Join Master Gardeners Julianne Melchor and Suzanne Wisowaty as they explain ways of becoming a successful citrus grower in our marginal climate.



Amador County

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

January

14: Erosion: Problems and Solutions for Residential Properties

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 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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Sowing Seeds with Style

Sheri Burke, El Dorado County Master Gardener

When I sow seeds, I start with a handful of different seeds, then make a wish and toss the seeds over my shoulder and hope they all land on my nicely prepared seed trays. Then I wait and see what comes up in a month. How exciting is that? Basically, I sow twice as many seeds than I need to accommodate the wide margin of error with germination.

Sowing seeds, or shall I say “planting” seeds, is about as exciting as watching grass grow; seriously, I’m not kidding. However, this technique has brought forth beautiful plants, which have bloomed in my garden for years, and is a rewarding and cheap exercise. But let’s take a step backward and think about how to choose these seeds.



First, while staring, hyperventilating and drooling over the seed packets on the store wall, a catalog, or website, you may be overwhelmed about which seeds to buy. I say, “Buy them all.” How can I pick just one viola —my favorite— when there are ten different viola colors and a choice of frilly, frizzy or fuzzy petals?



Think about what you would like to accomplish in your garden. Do you have a plan?



Long ago I began by sowing hundreds of seeds that had an 85% or better germination rate so it would appear that I was successful, which was a correct assumption. After a couple of years, I started adding seeds with only a 50% rate of germination because these plants were generally not found in nurseries. This experiment resulted in 300-400 seedlings all sprouting at the same time, so I started giving plants away. Mind you, I am a nice, generous person, but I slaved, sweated, and babied those little seedlings to puberty, and I wanted to reap the rewards. This is when I started to think about having a PLAN.

I now choose my seeds as follows:



Red Velvet Coleus

For my shade garden, I might include a Red Velvet Coleus, a variegated Jacob’s Ladder, Double Circus Orange Impatiens, and a stunning Pin-up Flame Begonia.



Green Wizard Rudbeckia

For a full sun garden, my favorites are Bonfire Zinnias, Double Cascade Orchid Petunia, Sacred White Datura, Hello Gorgeous Dahlias, Double White Hollyhock, Green Wizard Rudbeckia, and Purple Volcano Salvia.



Frosted Chocolate

In the winter my favorite picks are violas such as Brush Strokes, Frosted Chocolate, Johnny Jump Ups, Sorbet, and also a little Peacock Red Kale, and Calendula Lemonade.



Baby eggplants

I try not to forget to mix in some vegetables and herbs such as Purple Ruffles basil, Baby eggplants, and a few beets to add interest, texture, and colored foliage.



Starting from seed is the cheapest way to experiment with garden design and with hard-to-find plants. The only downside to my plan is that my friends and family no longer receive free plants — well, maybe on occasion. Now I tell them to come to the Master Gardeners’ plant sales.

Next, there is a reason why there is writing on the back of the seed packets. This little 3x4 inch of paper is filled with information, particularly, when and how to sow the enclosed seeds.

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Sowing Seeds with Style *(Continued from page 6)*

All seeds have a germination cycle, meaning that given the right conditions at the right time, they will sprout. However, if the conditions aren't to their liking, it can take a couple of weeks longer for germination to occur. How do I know this? I have had my share of throwing out trays of seeds into my "graveyard," due to lack of germination, and a month later my husband informs me that my plants have come back to life. Just because the seedlings do not emerge from the soil does not mean that the roots haven't already started, which is the first part of the seed to sprout.

When seedlings are ready to be transplanted into the garden but there is no time for this chore, I set up "holding" containers which can be either wine barrels or left over nursery pots, until I figure out where to place the seedlings in my garden. These "holding" containers are like shopping in my very own nursery.




Finally, label the seeds with their name and date of germination and then store the seeds properly. You don't want to end up with 35 tomato plants instead of 35 exquisite and expensive orange cosmos. Tomatoes, anyone? Store the seeds in the packet that they came in, or in glass jars with a teaspoon of dried milk which will help absorb any moisture coming off the seeds, or use the plastic stacked bead containers, or tiny little white paper bags, or even a suitcase. As long as the

seeds are stored in a dry, cool, dark place, all is well. However, I have been known to accidentally leave my seed suitcase in the greenhouse on the hottest day of summer, and yet they still manage to germinate!



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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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