



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Helpful Garden Tips for March 2025 (March 1, 2025)

by Peyton Ellas, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

The wildflowers and some fruit and nut trees have begun to bloom; oak trees are leafing out...the parade of spring has begun. The equinox is March 20, but we could have reminders of winter and hints of summer all month. Wildlife, including insects and lizards, emerge, and we see increased activity of all kinds in our gardens this month.



PLANTING: Spring is the second season of major planting. You can plant all varieties of trees, shrubs, perennials, ground covers, and vines. In the edible garden, plant heat-lovers like cucumber, tomato, melon, beans, eggplant, and squash towards the end of the month. You can also plant potatoes, radishes, chives, greens, beets, and herbs of all types. Citrus, avocado, and other frost-sensitives can be planted late in the month.

When buying citrus, please be sure to buy from a reputable Tulare or Kings County nursery so we don't spread the Asian citrus psyllid. That means saying "no" to the neighbor or family member who has an extra citrus tree for you, and that means not bringing citrus trees into the county from elsewhere in the State. There are regulations about the movement of bulk quantities of citrus fruit to save the California citrus industry and our backyard trees. You can find out more from the CDFA website or read the University of California Pest Note at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74155.html>.

Many plants, native and non, bloom profusely in March. If you need quick color, plant ageratum, alyssum, Bachelor Buttons, begonias, celosia, cleome, coleus, cosmos, Duster Miller, gomphrena, inpatients, lobelia, marigolds, nasturtiums, nicotiana, petunias, portulacas, salvias and verbenas. It is also the month to start planting summer blooming bulbs such as cannas, calla lily, crocosmia, dahlia, gladiolus, Liatris, lilies, ranunculus, tuberose, and zephyranthes.

MAINTAINING: Along with bursts of flowers and foliage, March also begins the major insect season. Monitor for common spring insect pests like aphids, earwigs, slugs, snails, whiteflies, thrips, and codling moth worms. Handpicking or spraying with a strong stream of water is the least toxic option. Ornamental plants can often withstand moderate infestation from these insect pests, but the vegetable and fruit garden tolerate only small populations and lend a helping hand if the beneficial insects can't reduce the number of pests within a few days.

If you must use pesticides, identify your pest first. Many a beneficial insect has been killed because of haste to destroy all insect life in the garden. Some common beneficials that are often mistaken for pests are lacewing, syrphid flies, spiders, parasitic mites, and parasitic wasps. Read more about biological controls for insect pests at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74140.html>.

Handpicking large insects is easier in the garden and in the ecology. Using traps like rolled-up newspaper or boards is another way to catch and remove insect pests like snails, slugs, and earwigs.

If you must use chemicals for slugs and snails, use baits containing iron phosphate, which is not toxic to children, wildlife, or pets. Baits containing metaldehyde are extremely toxic. Tolerate some plant damage,

especially from caterpillars and especially on your ornamental (non-edible) plants. Think of them as the pretty butterflies and moths they will become. Bugs are also a major food source for nesting and hatching birds and for other bugs, such as toads, lizards, and small mammals.

Start setting baits out now for Argentine and other non-native ants and rotate the chemical every three months. Eliminating ants will help control soft-bodied insects like aphids.



Spittlebugs are occasionally an unsightly nuisance but do little damage and don't stay long. They look like little blobs of wet foam on foliage. They seem to prefer rosemary and sage. If you can't stand it, a strong blast of water can dislodge them.

Water your new transplants well and keep them from completely drying out. This attention to irrigation is one reason planting in the spring is more difficult than in the fall--although some springs are wetter than fall or winter, and maybe that will happen this season. If we have a dry spring, deep water trees and large shrubs keep your controller on to provide some moisture to all plants throughout the month (according to your city's water schedule). Active growth is not the season to try to make your plants tolerate drought. Remember, your new transplants need water where their roots are and just below them. Let the top of the soil dry out a little in between waterings, and then soak the root ball thoroughly. If your fall and winter-planted transplants show little top growth but otherwise look healthy, don't fret. They are growing roots, which will help them withstand the stress of the dry and hot months to come.

March is also a good month to fertilize roses. Use a specialty fertilizer meant for roses and do two smaller feedings instead of one. You can also fertilize non-native perennials and established citrus trees that are emerging from dormancy. Your California native plants don't need fertilizer, although you could give your acid-loving manzanita a weak dose of fertilizer labeled for camellias, azaleas, and magnolias. If you have container plants, including California native species, you can give them a timed-release fertilizer that will last all year.

Weed control is in high gear. Cool-season grasses have seeds; warm-season weeds are blooming. Whether you use mechanical, chemical, or a mix of control methods, remember weeds are trying to protect the earth's crust by reducing erosion. If you clear an area of weeds, what will replace these plants? Use rock, bark, or living mulch (ground cover plants) to keep your soil on your property. Small-level areas of bare dirt are fine and provide a habitat for solitary ground-nesting native bees. When spraying herbicide, remember that many of your plants, including roses and California native species, are highly susceptible to damage from small amounts of drift, and you may not see that damage immediately. Follow label directions and protect desirable plants.

CONSERVING: While planting for spring, include at least one plant that increases the garden's diversity and usefulness for pollinators and/or other wildlife. Matching a plant with your soil and climate (including water availability) ensures fewer pests and less maintenance. If you want to try milkweed for the Monarchs, search out the native varieties, such as "narrow leaf" (*Asclepias fascicularis*).



If you haven't already done so, check your drip and sprinkler systems, clean filters, check for leaks, and make needed improvements. Get ready for summer. Make sure your system is as efficient as possible. You may consider upgrading to a "smart" controller that can better adjust to the weather and water needs of the garden. I've tried several of them now, and most of them are reliable, affordable, and easy to use with a smartphone app. You still should check your system periodically to make sure there are no leaks or other problems.

With all this work, it's also important to remember to take time to enjoy the garden's bounty. Don't be afraid to leave work for another day and just read a book in the sun or shade or watch the busy activity of your California garden in spring. For many gardens, this is their Glory Season. Take time to celebrate the beauty you work hard to create in partnership with plants and many other creatures.

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

Visit our website for past articles, sign up for our e-newsletter, or email us with your questions:

http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/

Facebook: *<https://www.facebook.com/mgtularekings14/>*; Instagram at: *@mgtularekings*

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

March 1, 10 am – 2 pm: STEAM Expo, TCOE Conference Center, 6200 S. Mooney, Visalia

March 8, 10 am - 2 pm: Luis Nursery Plant Clinic, 139 S. Mariposa Ave., Visalia