

January in the Garden



January is prime camellia season, so be sure that the surface roots of your camellias (and azaleas and rhodies) are moist despite our lack of rainfall. Mulch all your acid-loving plants to help their soil retain moisture, and maintain their need for acidity by feeding them with acid fertilizer. After blooming, camellias, rhodies and azaleas develop green growth and new buds for next year. So, feed them again and prune them. Frequent light pinching of the tip growth right after blooming encourages compact

growth. We have 11-year-old plants on our driveway, and I prune back the driveway side before they lose their battle with cars and bikes.

In fact, January is prime time for all dormant trees and deciduous plants. Cut the roses ALL THE WAY BACK. Get rid of the doglegs on roses and hydrangeas by finding a small teenage pimple in the branch before the dogleg, and prune there, slanting back from the pimple. Look for suckers, any shoots or canes growing below the bud union, that knobby mass just above the soil. Thin out all shrubs to let the light in and to remove damaged, diseased, and crossing branches. Even citrus shrubs should have dead inner twigs removed. Then clean up around your newly pruned plants. To control overwintering buggers such as aphids, mites, and scale, spray roses with a dormant oil, completely coating the trunk and branches. If your fruit trees had peach leaf curl or your apple tree had worms, they need dormant oil also. If citrus has a coating of black on the leaves, it usually is sooty mold. When I have nothing urgent to do, I put about a half cup of liquid dish soap in a spray bottle, fill the bottle to the top with water, spray the front and back of each leaf, and wipe dry with a soft cloth. To prevent future invasions, spray with insecticidal soap, which I use on rare occasions. It is made from potassium salts of fatty acids found in plants. I know it works and is not poisonous to humans - just not sure what fatty acids look like!

Do you need to replace any of your rose bushes? Or want to try a new fruit tree?

December and January are prime time for buying and planting bare root trees and roses. Soak the new bare root in a bucket overnight, and plant it the next day. Don't wait more than a day. Their feet need to be in the soil before they dry out. You can also plant bare root edibles like thornless blackberry and raspberry canes, plus strawberry plants and grapes. Summer Winds has now in stock about 40 varieties of roses, plus berry canes.

January should be designated Clean Your Garden Tools Month. Use a wire scrubber to get rid of rust on tools. Even get shovels and hoes sharpened. Once again, the tool sharpener at Palo Alto Hardware does a great job. Are your major plants labeled? I trim discarded mini blinds to the size of label I need, and use a Brother labeler to identify plants. The laminated tape lasts many



years, far better than a Sharpie.



The snow pea seeds I planted in 4-inch pots in September and installed in the wine barrels vacated by the tomatoes in late October were a bust, mainly because the animal deterrent that I have touted did not get enough sun to keep the solar batteries working, a fact that I did not notice until the pea pods were gone! The bok choy, Swiss chard and kale in the middle of the barrels were all stripped of their leaves systematically by the same varmints, who did not leave calling cards – just naked stems. When they moved on to my lettuce in flower boxes, I declared war. The replacement lettuce is now covered with chicken wire and a revitalized animal deterrent. Will I discourage the culprits? I'll let you know in February. How do farmers grow fields of greens without standing guard morning, noon, and night?

To brighten your Spring, sow Sweet Pea seeds now for spring blooms. Pin up the vines as they grow. January in this area is often the coldest month of the year. So mulch to keep roots of your favorite plants, like roses, azaleas, camellias, and all evergreen shrubs warm. Out of mulch? Look around you! Gather up all those leaves and pile them around your youngest plants. Help them hunker down for our Winter. Happy Gardening!

Happy Gardening,

Vicki Sullivan
Horticulture Chair