

## **Gardening in Winter? You bet.**

By Rachel Oppedahl

You know how the success of a lot of household projects, from painting to replacing floors, is determined by prep work? How, if you don't plan ahead and do the necessary preparation, the job just doesn't turn out right? It's kind of like that with gardening. And if you ask me, the dead of winter is the perfect time to adopt a preparation state of mind.

It may be cold and rainy, or dumping snow, but there are things you can do this month to continue to create the garden of your dreams (or protect the one you already have) by preparing for the growing season.

**Keep the bugs at bay.** Rather than waiting until mid-spring, when hoards of aphids and other pests cover your beloved plants, one of the simple actions you can take now to prevent or minimize their presence in your garden is to use dormant oil (also called horticultural oil) sprays. Many common pests overwinter on plants and/or in surrounding soil, so these sprays work by smothering the pests that are actually on the plant and the soil surface at the time you spray. They can even kill eggs and larvae. Horticultural oil sprays are relatively nontoxic, and come in heavier, dormant versions for use in winter, and lighter, summer sprays. Always read the labels to ensure you use them wisely.

Another thing you can do now to prevent pest damage is to stock up early on some store-bought and homemade insect deterrents, such as copper foil rings and/or diatomaceous earth to place around plants to repel snails; repellent spray and/or caging to foil the deer; and used tuna cans filled with cooking oil that you position by plants that have been attacked in the past by earwigs (they'll crawl in and drown).

**Prune wisely.** The best time to prune many trees, shrubs and hardy perennials is in the dead of winter when they are dormant. That said, don't assume you can use your loppers and pruning shears with abandon. It's always wise to look up any plant you want to prune to determine the best time of year to do so. For example, some bushes flower on new wood formed this year (typically, in spring), so this might be the last month to do any hard pruning, lest you remove the very twigs or vines that would produce blooms.

**Make a mindful shopping list.** In March, nurseries (especially the big box stores) will no doubt explode with colorful annuals, shrubs, trees and everything in between. Resist the temptation to wander those dizzying aisles without a thoughtful plan. Things to consider in making your shopping list:

Even though the nursery shelves are overflowing with petunias, lobelias and begonias, we all know that in the foothills, snow and hard frosts can occur well into May. Just say no until Memorial Day. Instead, shop now for useful garden tools and/or equipment that will make gardening easier, and hence, encourage you to spend more time there. Think ergonomics: stools, knee pads, tool totes or extension rods to help you reach what you couldn't before. Or maybe you need efficiency: better irrigation systems or books/websites for landscape planning.

Or how about helpful products like gardeners' hand cream, solar path lights, or more sturdy, yet comfortable garden shoes?

**Curl up on the couch with these garden “chores.”** Some cold, grey Saturday or Sunday in January or February, curl up on the couch with a hot cocoa and peruse a good seed catalog, put some gardening related events on your calendar (the Tuolumne Master Gardener Demonstration Garden lectures start in February!), or start a new notebook to track your plant purchases and performance through the season.

And you thought winter had nothing to do with gardening!

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*UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: [http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardeners/](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/) You can also find us on Facebook.*