

# The Digging Fork

A Davis Garden Newsletter

May - June 2010



Composted cleanings from horse stalls (left) and wood chips (right) make great mulches.

	May	June
<b>Planting</b>	<p><u>Warm season vegetables:</u> eggplant, sweet and chile peppers, tomatillo, sweet potato slips, tomato, basil</p> <p><u>Warm season annuals:</u> coleus, petunia, lobelia, moss rose, celosia, impatiens and more</p> <p><u>Perennials:</u> All. Can finally plant frost tender plants!</p> <p><u>Warm season bulbs</u></p>	<p><u>Warm season annuals</u></p> <p><u>Perennials</u></p> <p><i>Can still plant, but it is important to keep plants well watered until they are established.</i></p>
<b>Seeding</b> directly into the garden	<p><u>Warm season vegetables:</u> beans (dry, snap, lima, yard long), cucumber, corn (all kinds), melon, okra, pumpkin, soybeans, summer/winter squash, watermelon, peanuts</p> <p><u>Warm season annuals</u> sunflowers, tithonia, zinnias, scarlet runner bean, cosmos and more</p>	<p><u>Warm season vegetables</u> beans (dry, snap), corn (sweet and baby), okra, melons, pumpkin, summer/winter squash. <i>(Snap beans &amp; summer squash often have disease problems, a second planting will prolong the season)</i></p> <p><u>Warm season annuals:</u> see May</p>
<b>Fertilize</b>	<p><u>Lawns</u> as needed</p> <p><u>Roses</u> after bloom</p>	<p><u>Lawns</u> as needed</p> <p>Look for nutrient deficiencies – especially iron and nitrogen.</p>
<b>Pest &amp; Disease Control</b>	<p><u>Snails, slugs and earwig</u> damage –use baits or traps. Emerging seedlings and transplants are the most vulnerable!</p> <p><u>Aphids.</u> Can spray off with water and watch for lady beetle &amp; parasitic wasps</p> <p><u>Scale.</u> Keep ants under control with ant stakes and rub off scale insects</p>	<p>See May.</p>
<b>Tasks</b>	<p>Prune deciduous shrubs and vines after they flower. They will soon start setting buds for next spring.</p> <p><u>Spring garden cleanup begins.</u> Cut back spring blooming perennials, pull out cool season annuals, cut bulb foliage when yellowing. Good time to dig and mulch.</p> <p>Thin stone fruits, cover cherry trees (bird control)</p> <p>Weed control continues!!</p> <p>Many plants benefit from support: dahlias, peppers, tomatoes, eggplant, etc. Add stakes and/or cages when planting.</p> <p>Lift ranunculus-leave dirt on them and store in cool place in open container.</p>	<p><u>Spring garden cleanup continues</u> (see May)</p> <p>Stake dahlias and other tall plants that need support</p> <p>Weed control continues!!</p> <p>Tall, fall bloomers like mums, asters, perennial sunflowers, etc. can be cut to 12” in late June to early July to encourage branching and reduce plant height. This may delay the bloom time.</p> <p><u>Paint fruit trees.</u> Young fruit trees need to be protected from sunburn. Paint the trunk starting 2” below the soil with white latex paint mixed with a bit of water. Paint unshaded limbs too!</p>
<b>Water</b>	<p>Water deeply and infrequently to encourage deep roots!!</p> <p>Water compost piles.</p>	<p><i>This is a month of high water needs due to rapid plant growth and warmer temperatures.</i></p> <p>Water as needed, deep watering trees and shrubs.</p>

## Mulch, mulch, mulch!!

Spring garden clean-up has started or will start soon and this is a great time to add a layer of mulch to the garden!!

**What is mulch?** Mulches are materials applied as a dressing on top of the soil. If a material is dug into soil, it is a soil amendment.

### Why use mulch?

- helps retain soil moisture (water conservation)
- insulates plant roots from changes in temperature
- limits germination of weeds
- makes weeding easier (almost fun!)
- reduces soil compaction due to overhead sprinklers and rain, reducing need for cultivation
- helps control erosion
- limits crusting on the soil surface
- helps improve soil structure of our clay soils
- provides nutrients to plants
- makes gardens look tidy

### Types of mulch

Organic mulches eventually decompose and enrich the soil by providing nutrients and promoting growth of microorganisms that help to develop soil structure. When the microorganisms break down the organic materials into humus, the small clay particles of our soil are aggregated together into larger particles, so that drainage is improved and the soil is easier to dig. Some examples of organic mulches include: wood chips, leaves, grass clippings, straw, newspaper, cardboard, shredded cedar, redwood chips, purchased humus/compost, old carpet, composted garden waste, rice hulls and composted cleanings from horse stalls (manure and wood chips or hay). Materials that decompose readily will provide better drainage and nutrients more quickly. Crushed walnut hulls and some types of wood and

bark, such as cedar, fir and redwood, decompose very slowly! They are good mulches that will eventually provide the soil fortification of other organic mulches -- but you will have to wait many years for this benefit. These mulches are useful in paths because they are slow to decompose and don't have to be replaced as often.

Inorganic mulches include: rock, gravel, plastic and landscape fabrics. These materials are best used in permanent plantings for weed control. They **do not** improve soil structure that helps with better drainage. They **do not** add any nutrients to the soil.



A garden mulched with humus/compost from Smith Trucking (Patricia's favorite). This mulch will also help improve the soil structure when some is mixed with the soil during planting and weeding. Also notice the white painted trunks of the fruit trees.

### Applying mulches

When to apply: Late fall and winter, after fall clean up, is the easiest time to apply mulch because beds are accessible and there are less plants to worry about. Another good time is after the spring cleanup. Mulching, however, may be done at any time of the year!

How deep: 2 to 3 inches is needed for weed control and to conserve moisture. Some light and fluffy mulches settle after watering, so 4-6 inches may be necessary to apply.

How often to apply: It is necessary to regularly replace organic mulch as it disappears due to decomposition, erosion (wind and water), and mixing with the soil. Some mulches last for years and some for less than a year.

Adding mulch around existing plants: If the plant has a crown with basal leaves (meaning the new leaves grow from the base of the plant), you will kill it by covering the crown with mulch. As a general rule, pick up the branches/leaves of the plant, mulching up to the base of the plant without covering the stems, trunk or crown. **Keep mulch away from the base of woody plants such as trees and bushes.** Some plants, including many perennials and groundcovers, will root from the stem when covered with mulch. This can be an easy and successful way to propagate a plant, particularly in cool, wet weather.

Burning plants: Mulch piles often become hot as the organic matter decomposes. If hot materials are used in the garden they will burn the plants. Either open up the pile to slow the decomposition process, or better yet, wait until the mulch is well composted.

Watering mulch: Some mulch is very difficult to wet. Therefore, when overhead watering, it is important to make sure water wets all the mulch layer and gets through and into the soil below. Overhead watering helps settle light, fluffy mulch and helps keep it from blowing away or in a swimming pool/pond.

### Sources for organic mulches

Mulch products are sold by the cubic yard or cubic foot. One cubic yard is equal to 27 cubic feet. Buying in bulk is the cheapest but is not always feasible for many gardeners. It is always a good idea to take a look at the product before ordering a large quantity!

If you have access to a pickup truck, then the mulch will generally be loaded for you. Remember to bring something to cover your load for the drive home. If you need the mulch delivered, there is often a minimum amount of the bulk product necessary to purchase to waive the delivery fee. But for many gardeners, a large pile of mulch on the driveway doesn't work.

Many nurseries and garden centers sell products by the bag, which is more convenient to haul and store, but the cost is often considerably higher than bulk. For example, our Davis Ace Rock Yard currently sells humus/compost in bulk for \$25.99 a cubic yard. If you buy a cubic yard in bags it would cost \$40.23. If you only need one cubic yard and must pay the \$25 delivery fee, then the bags are cheaper. Some companies allow you to take 5 gallon buckets to pick up mulches but still get the bulk price. A 5 gallon bucket holds .78 (or about  $\frac{3}{4}$ ) of a cubic foot of **dry** material. Note that for liquids a 5 gallon bucket holds .67 (or about  $\frac{2}{3}$ ) of a cubic foot.



A garden mulched with humus/compost from Davis Ace. Some humus/compost products are very fine and powdery and it is very difficult to get them wet as the water seems just to run off.



Woodchips (from a tree pruning service) were used to mulch part of the area above to suppress weeds. The area in the lower right was not mulched and the weeds are really growing!!

**Below are some ideas of where to find mulches in our area:**

Make your own humus/compost

This is always a good idea! See **The Digging Fork** Sep-Oct 2009 and May-June 2007 for more articles on composting and composters.

Davis Ace Lumber – rock yard: 758-8000

Bulk items. Free delivery in **Davis** if you order at least 5 cubic yards. The delivery cost for 1-2 cubic yards is \$25 and for 3-4 cubic yards is \$15. Delivery outside Davis city limits is \$75.

Davis Ace Lumber –nursery area: 758-8000

Many products can be purchased in bags.

Horse barns:

Some local horse barns will be glad to have you come and pick up the discarded horse stall padding. Some will even load it into a pickup truck with their skip loader.

CL Smith Trucking: 662-2633 (not open weekends)

Woodland. Delivery is free for 6 cu. yards or more, otherwise \$35 delivery to Davis area.

Dumars Landscaping: 666-5045, ext. 18

Woodland \$25 delivery fee to Davis.

Tree pruning companies: You may purchase loads of chipped prunings from some tree service companies but some companies just give them away for free. If you can catch PG&E's Utility Tree Service, they may deliver them for free. In any case, you are likely to receive a mix of chip quality but it is always usable in the end.

Northern Recycling: 291-6267 Zamora

Sells compost. Call Sue Ellen for prices and directions.

Hastie's Capital Sand and Gravel: (916) 374-9935

West Sacramento. Free delivery to Davis for 6 cubic yards or more.

**Guidelines for determining quantities of mulch**

Measure or estimate the area to be covered and decide how deep a layer of mulch you want to apply. One cubic yard will cover 100 square feet (an area 10'x10') to a depth of 3 inches. A small pickup will hold 1 cubic yard; a large pickup will hold 2 cubic yards.

Area to cover	Depth of mulch application (cubic yard)		
	2 inches	3 inches	4 inches
100 sq. ft.	2/3	1	1 1/3
250 sq. ft.	1 2/3	2 1/2	3 1/3
500 sq. ft.	3 1/3	5	6 2/3
1000 sq. ft.	6 2/3	10	13 1/3

Adapted from Sunset Western Garden Book 2001



Leaves and sticks from the May pruning and thinning of the fruit trees are used to mulch the path in the vegetable garden. They will be brown in a few days. (photo on left) Grasses, sticks and leaves are used to mulch along a fence for weed control. (photo on right)

**There are no gardening mistakes, only experiments.**  
**- Janet Kilburn Phillips**



Nine cubic yards of humus/compost was added as a mulch to this garden (the area above and other areas) last fall. Wow! What a spring show.

**The Great Sunflower Project**

*Bees are responsible for every third bite of food.*

Have you planted your annual 'Lemon Queen' sunflowers yet??? The Great Sunflower Project is documenting bee pollination in the US. They could use your help. [www.GreatSunflower.org](http://www.GreatSunflower.org)

## Local sales, events & workshops

### **UCD Arboretum**

Sale on Saturday, 9am to 1 pm. Lots of help!

May 15 End of Season Clearance

Lots of great guided tours and workshops coming up!!

Call for a monthly reminder of events emailed to you

For information 752-4880

<http://www.arboretum.ucdavis.edu/calendar.aspx>

### **Garden Exploration Workshop – Patricia’s Garden**

Saturday, June 19 8:30 to 11:30 am

Instructors: Patricia Carpenter and Melissa Kelly

\$25 per person or \$40 for two people (gardening friends, spouses, family....) Includes handouts, bouquet & plants.

Guided tour of the early summer garden, planting warm season vegetables, collecting seed, planting bulbs in fall, tropical and low water plants, spring clean-up, irrigation, composting.... Lots of time for exploration and questions.

Reservations required [TheDiggingFork@gmail.com](mailto:TheDiggingFork@gmail.com)

### **Native Plant Propagation Workshops**

Saturday, June 26 or Sunday June 27

8:30 - 11:30 am, includes tour of Patricia’s native garden

\$25 --helps support Kids in Native Gardens Program

Taught by Jennifer Hogan past president of the

California Native Plant Society –Sacramento Chapter

RSVP [jen.hogan@wavecable.com](mailto:jen.hogan@wavecable.com) or (530) 661-3410

### **Davis Central Park Gardens Workshops**

Lavender & Lavender Distillation Techniques

June 5 9:30 am

To Be Scheduled June 5 11:00 am

Workshops are free, <http://www.centralparkgardens.org>

### **Master Gardener Workshops -- Woodland**

Fruit Bush Culture and Summer Pruning May 15, 9 am

Lavender Distillation Techniques May 15, 10 am

Open Garden -- Woodland Community College

June 19 9 to 11 am

Visit the fruit tree, vineyard, vegetable and ornamental gardens and discuss your garden problems with Yolo County Master Gardeners

Workshops are free and held at Woodland Community College Horticultural Center. For more information 666-8143

### **Master Gardener Workshops – West Sacramento**

Sustainable Landscape May 22 9 – 11 am

Workshops are free and held at Bryte Park, corner of Todhunter and Carrie Streets. For more information 666-8143

### **UCD Project Compost Free Workshop**

Backyard Composting Saturday, May 22, 11am – 1 pm

For information contact **Project Compost** 754-8227

or <http://projectcompost.ucdavis.edu/>

### **Ceanothus California Field Botanists Association**

Learn to key plants. May 15 and June 19

UC Davis Center for Plant Diversity

Information [www.ceanothusfieldbotanist.blogspot.com](http://www.ceanothusfieldbotanist.blogspot.com)

### **Plant Sales at The Gifted Gardener**

June 5, 6, 19, and 20 10 am to 4 pm

18<sup>th</sup> and J Streets, Sacramento. Sales benefits local charities

Information [GardenNotes@sbcglobal.net](mailto:GardenNotes@sbcglobal.net) (916) 923-3745

### **Stebbins Cold Canyon Nature Outings**

[http://nrs.ucdavis.edu/Stebbins/Guides/guide\\_schedule.htm](http://nrs.ucdavis.edu/Stebbins/Guides/guide_schedule.htm)

### **Three Palms Nursery**

Summer Sale – 20% off June 26-27 9am to 5 pm

Information <http://www.3PalmsNursery.com> 756-8355

### **Davis Botanical Society**

Island oaks, forest fires, and really big tropical trees:

A tale of two islands. Dr. Kevin Rice

May 20 6:45 to 8 pm Veterans Memorial Center,

Club Room 203 E 14<sup>th</sup> St., Davis

Information <http://herbarium.ucdavis.edu/>

## More gardening tips!

### **Try growing some new annuals this summer!**



Snow-on-the-mountain (*Euphorbia marginata*) is easy to grow from seed and is a great cut flower if the cut is seared. It is native to the central part of the U.S. and was collected by Lewis and Clark. The leaf margins become whiter as the plant ages. The photo on the right was taken 45 days after the one on the left.



Roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) is grown as a warm season annual in Davis. The fleshy, red calyx at the base of the flower petals is used to make drinks, jams and syrups. The plant grows 3-6 ft. tall and is showy. Look for Botanical Interests™ seeds.

**Davis Life Magazine.** This online magazine has a gardening section called Digging Davis written by Leslie Kuss. <http://www.davislifemagazine.com/fun-stuff/outdoor-living/digging-davis/>

**Eggplants stressed?** If your eggplants don’t seem to be thriving it is probably because they got cold stressed. This tropical perennial doesn’t like cold temperatures and should be planted when the weather is stable and the soil is warm! On April 29th the temperatures dipped to about 39°F – this is not good. Once eggplant is cold stressed it doesn’t seem to recover.

#### **Newsletter created by:**

Patricia Carpenter -- Gardening Coach (Design and Education), with 35 years of Davis gardening experience

See <http://TheDiggingFork.wordpress.com/> for the current and archived issues. To be added to the subscription list or to unsubscribe, contact us at: [TheDiggingFork@gmail.com](mailto:TheDiggingFork@gmail.com)