

# The Digging Fork

A Davis Garden Newsletter

November-December 2010



*Euphorbia x martinii* and *Euphorbia characias*.

## Not-So-Friendly Plants

We mostly think of plants as being enjoyable and beneficial. They provide food, medicine, fiber for clothes, attract insects that keep the pests in check and are especially wonderful to cut into bouquets.

But there are many plants in our gardens, homes and parks that are irritating to the skin or mouth or are poisonous. Some plant parts are so very toxic that eating them can cause death.

Soon the poinsettias will be appearing in stores. These plants are generally considered to be very toxic but, in reality, are no more of a problem than most *Euphorbias*. They all have a sap that can irritate the skin and may cause temporary blindness if the sap gets in an eye. Eating the plant can cause vomiting and nausea but isn't fatal. Eating berries of mistletoe and holly can also make you very sick. Holly berries are harmless to birds but humans shouldn't eat them.

All plants contain toxins, even the vegetables we eat. However, we usually don't eat enough of the toxin to poison us. Some toxins in foods have been minimized with plant breeding or deactivated by cooking or processing before eating. Many toxins in plants are a survival strategy to avoid being completely eaten by animals and insects.

Sometimes only part of a plant causes problems. Here are a few more examples. For larkspur and

hellebore, the whole plant is toxic if eaten. For apples and caster beans, the seeds are most toxic. Daffodil bulbs and bearded iris rhizomes are also toxic. Rhubarb stems are fine to eat but the leaves are poisonous. Eat ripe tomatoes, but not the stems and leaves.

Sweet peas in the garden look a lot like eating peas. Although most shelling and snow peas have white flowers, some do have colorful



	November	December
<b>Planting</b>	<p>Perennials: CA natives and most everything except frost tender plants.</p> <p><u>Cool season perennials often treated as annuals:</u> stock, English daisies, pansies, Iceland poppies, snapdragons, primrose</p> <p><u>Cool season bulbs:</u> daffodils, Darwin hybrid tulips, Dutch iris, freesia, <i>Scilla</i>, <i>Leucojum</i>, cyclamen, grape hyacinth</p> <p><u>Cool season vegetables:</u> broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, cauliflower, artichokes, kale and collards, shallots, Swiss chard, bulbing onions, garlic, divide &amp; replant clumps of multiplying onions</p>	<p>Bare-root ornamentals: trees, roses, shrubs and vines</p> <p>Bare-root fruits-vegetables: artichokes, asparagus, bulbing onions, rhubarb, strawberries, berries, grapes, fruit trees</p> <p>(Some bare-root plants may not be available until January)</p>
<b>Seeding directly into the garden</b>	<p><u>Cool season annuals:</u> CA poppies, cornflowers, sweet peas, larkspur, etc.</p> <p><u>Cool season vegetables:</u> arugula, beets, grains, carrots, bok choy, green onions, cilantro, spinach, peas, radish, Swiss chard, turnips, fava, miner's lettuce</p>	<p><u>Cool season annuals</u> see November</p> <p><u>Cool season vegetables:</u> fava, spinach, Swiss chard, cilantro, green onions, bok choy, bulbing onions</p>
<b>Fertilize</b>		
<b>Pest &amp; Disease Control</b>	<p>Spray nectarines and peaches with fixed copper at Thanksgiving to control peach leaf curl.</p> <p>Control for snails, slugs, earwigs and cabbage worms as needed.</p> <p>Protect seedlings from birds.</p>	<p>Spray nectarines and peaches with fixed copper between Christmas and New Year's Day to control peach leaf curl.</p> <p>When pruning, look for borer damage and cut off infected limbs.</p> <p>Continue control of snails, slugs, birds, cabbage worms.</p>
<b>Tasks</b>	<p>Cut back herbaceous perennials (<i>don't cut back frost tender perennials until late spring</i>)</p> <p>Divide and replant herbaceous perennials.</p> <p>Garden clean-up continues. Compost leaves and plant debris.</p> <p>After first frost (or before), pull out summer annual flowers and vegetables.</p> <p>Remove unwanted seedlings or transplant.</p> <p>Cultivate with a digging fork and mulch.</p> <p>Weed control continues</p>	<p>Finish November tasks</p> <p>Start pruning deciduous trees</p> <p>Can start pruning roses toward the end of the month.</p> <p>Garden clean-up and weed control continues.</p>
<b>Water</b>	<p>We have had a good rain and the weather is cooler -- turn off automatic irrigation systems or set them to water very little. Water as needed to make sure <u>new plantings</u> have the water they need.</p>	<p>Water as needed (under large eaves, too)</p> <p><b>Well watered plants are less susceptible to frost damage!</b></p>

blossoms. But sweet pea plants and seeds are poisonous and shouldn't be eaten -- best to keep these out of the vegetable garden.



Caster bean seeds are bright red.



Cactus spines are sharp.

Some plants just cause us to wish we hadn't touched them!! Sap from a fig tree and poison oak will cause a rash. Roses have prickles and some citrus have nasty thorns. Cactus spines seem impossible to get out of your skin and stinging nettles really hurt. It is a good idea to wear gloves when gardening.

Does this mean we shouldn't plant not-so-friendly plants in the garden? If you have small children or pets that tend to touch and eat garden and house plants, then yes. Mushrooms and berries are especially attractive to small children. Teach them to only eat plants approved by adults. And know the poisonous plants in your garden!

The common calla is extremely poisonous to humans as well as cats and dogs. Generally plants toxic to humans are not safe for pets either. However, there are some other plants not safe for horses, dogs, cats, rabbits and chickens to eat so it is best to check online or with the UC Davis Veterinary School to find out which plants to keep out of the home and garden and far away from cages and pet areas.

### **Lists of toxic plants:**

[http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/lawn\\_garden/poison/poison.html](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/lawn_garden/poison/poison.html)

<http://www.chelonia.org/articles/plantsthatpoison.htm>

### **Cornell University Department of Animal Science:**

<http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/index.html>

### **Dr. Sue's Poison Plant List:**

<http://www.dcn.davis.ca.us/vme/DrSue/poispnt.html>



California Master Gardener Handbook, chapter 21 written by Allison M. Beale is great! Publication 3382.

List of ornamental plants toxic to domestic animals and livestock. Publication 21564. University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Publications:

<http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/default.aspx> or 1-800-994-8849

**California Poison Control Center**  
<http://www.calpoison.org/about/home.html>  
**Poison Action Hotline 1-800-222-1222**

### **Plant notes!**

Here is more information about some plants mentioned in this newsletter.

#### **Some of the plants that are toxic or are irritants:**

**Apple** *Malus domestica* All contain cyanide but the seed has the highest concentration and shouldn't be eaten.

**Bearded iris** *Iris* spp. The leaves and underground parts are toxic on all types of iris.

**Calla** *Zantedeschia* spp. Entire plant is highly toxic if eaten.

**Caster bean** *Rhizinus communis* Seeds very poisonous if eaten.

**Daffodil** *Narcissus* spp. Underground bulb is poisonous.

**Euphorbia** spp. The milky white sap irritates the skin and if it gets in the eye may cause temporary blindness.

**Poinsettia** *Euphorbia pulcherrima* Mildly toxic if eaten.

**Euphorbia x martinii** Hybrid -- *E. amygdaloides* and *E. chacias*. Leaves turn a brilliant red during the cool weather.

**Euphorbia chacias** Self-sows and can be invasive.

**Fig** *Ficus carica* Avoid the sap. Ornamental *Ficus* are also toxic.

**Helleborus** spp. The whole plant is toxic for all hellebores.

**Christmas rose** *Heleborus niger*

**Lenten rose** *Heleborus orientalis*

**Larkspur** *Consolida ajacis* (syn. *Delphinium ambigua*) This is the annual most often planted in the garden. All *Delphiniums* plants are toxic and they cause problems when touched or eaten.

**Holly** *Ilex* spp. Berries are toxic.

**Mistletoe** *Phoradendron* spp. *Viscum album* Entire plant toxic.

**Poison oak** *Toxicodendron diversilobum* The whole plant is toxic.

**Stinging nettles** *Urtica dioica* Avoid touching this plant!

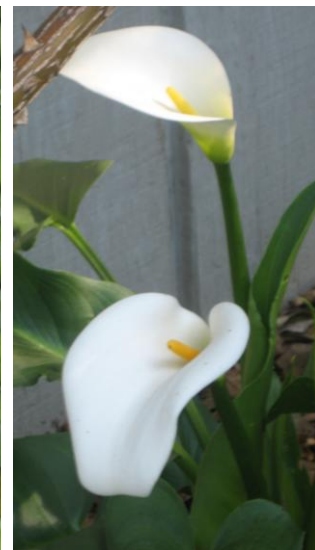
**Sweet pea** *Lathyrus odoratus* Whole plant is poisonous.

**Tomato** *Lycopersicon esculentum* Leaves and stems are poisonous. Ripe tomatoes fine to eat. Green tomatoes, although eaten by many, do contain some of the solanine toxin.

**An expert at anything was once a beginner. –Helen Hayes**



Lenten rose



Calla

## Local sales, events & workshops

### UCD Arboretum

Lots of great guided tours and workshops coming up!!  
Email below for a monthly reminder of events sent to you  
For information 752-4880 [www.arboretum.ucdavis.edu](http://www.arboretum.ucdavis.edu)

### Growing a Kitchen Garden – Davis Adult School

Tuesdays, January 18 to March 8, 2011 6:30 – 8:30 pm  
Plus two Garden Visits to reinforce classroom learning:  
Sunday, January 30, 12 - 3 pm and  
Sunday, February 13, 12-3 pm (rain date is Feb. 27)  
Taught by Patricia Carpenter and Lyn Taylor \$90  
Information [www.djUSD.k12.ca.us/AdultSchool](http://www.djUSD.k12.ca.us/AdultSchool) 757-5380

### City of Davis Worm and Garden Composting

After taking the Davis Compost Correspondence Class,  
Get a GeoBin™ Composter\_ for only \$10  
Information [www.davisrecycling.org](http://www.davisrecycling.org) (530) 757-5686  
[www.facebook.com/DavisRecycling.org](http://www.facebook.com/DavisRecycling.org)  
[www.twitter.com/DavisRecycling](http://www.twitter.com/DavisRecycling)

### Master Gardener Educational Workshops

#### Backyard and Worm Composting

Saturday, November 20, 9 am - 12 noon  
Rose Pruning Saturday January 15, 10 - 11 am  
Fruit Tree Pruning Saturday, January 15, 11 am-12 pm  
Held at Woodland Community College  
All workshops are free. For more information 666-8143 or  
[http://ceyolo.ucdavis.edu/Gardening\\_and\\_Master\\_Gardening/](http://ceyolo.ucdavis.edu/Gardening_and_Master_Gardening/)

### Davis Central Park Gardens Workshops

Dormant Pruning Saturday, January 8, 9:30-10:30 am  
Rose Pruning Saturday, January 8, 11 – 12 noon  
Garden Work Days This is a great way to learn more  
about plants and garden cleanup as you work  
alongside Master Gardeners and other garden experts.  
Free, more information <http://www.centralparkgardens.org>

### Ceanothus California Field Botanists Association

Next Davis meeting Saturday, November 20, (9:00am)  
Learn to key plants. Group meets about once  
a month at UC Davis Center for Plant Diversity  
Information [www.ceanothusfieldbotanist.blogspot.com](http://www.ceanothusfieldbotanist.blogspot.com)

### Cornflower Farms Nursery Days

November 13<sup>th</sup> 7:30 am to 2 pm  
9811 Sheldon Rd. Elk Grove  
Info (916) 689-1015 ext. 10 [www.cornflowerfarms.com](http://www.cornflowerfarms.com)

## **More gardening tips!!**

**Once the rains begin, it is time to turn off automatic sprinklers and drip systems.**

**Bare-root trees and plants** will become available starting in December and on into January. Do some research now so you will be prepared when it is time to purchase them. Quantities are often limited.

**Remove water basins** around newly planted trees and shrubs. With our clay soil, plants need good drainage during the winter rains!

**Planting generally slows some in December and January, our winter months.** It is still possible, however, to plant some cool season vegetables and flowers. Planting trees and shrubs is often difficult if the ground is too wet. Grab a handful of soil and squeeze into a ball. If it won't crumble, then the ground is too wet for digging!

### End of the season tomatoes



An assortment of tomatoes harvested early November.

Many of us are still enjoying a few tomatoes, but we also need some space in the garden for winter crops. The less productive tomato vines can be pulled out. But first, harvest all the tomatoes you can find because any that are turning whitish or have a blush of pink will ripen. Those that are green but have a gel inside around the seeds will also ripen. Although you can't cut it open to see the gel, the photo below shows how the inside is ripening even when the outside is green. Some people wrap blemish-free tomatoes individually in newspaper and store in a cool dry location. Check them often for ripening – or rotting as some will.

Green tomatoes can be fried, sautéed, made into salsa or added to soups. If there are too many red tomatoes to eat then try roasting them for use in pasta or drying them. When growing an

edible garden, the first task is learning to grow the plants successfully. Next is how to harvest and use all the produce.

Sometime in November a frost will kill tomato and pepper plants. Watch for low nighttime temperatures and harvest all your peppers, eggplant, basil and tomatoes *before the frost*.



#### Newsletter created by:

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