



San Francisco
**Water
Power
Sewer**

Services of the San Francisco
Public Utilities Commission

GARDENING TIPS

JANUARY

GARDENING TASKS

- Order and plant bare-root fruit trees. Check the chilling requirements of the fruit trees and plant fruit tree varieties that don't require a cold winter for good fruit production. Begin winter pruning of established pome fruits (apples, pears, etc.).
- Prune perennial shrubs, deciduous trees and woody plants (except those which flower in spring).
- Begin less-toxic integrated pest management (IPM) early. If pests were a particularly bad problem last year, consider spraying with a dormant oil to suppress overwintering insects.
- Check for adequate drainage during winter storms to control rot. Make sure your sprinkler system is adjusted or shut down so there is no over-watering during the rainy season.
- Pull winter weeds as they emerge and before they can establish deep roots. Dig out bulb-forming weeds such as oxalis and nutsedge.
- Fertilize with organic materials, like compost and manure or plant cover crops like fava beans to add fertility and nutrients to fallow veggie beds. Avoid synthetic chemical fertilizers and pesticides. They can cause undesirable side effects, such as harming the local watershed.
- Learn how to care for trees by volunteering with Friends of the Urban Forest. Visit: www.fuf.net for more information.

FEBRUARY

GARDENING TASKS

- Continue planting bare-root roses and fruit trees.
- Plan your summer garden and shop for seeds and bulbs at local nurseries or mail order seed companies.
- To conserve water, install a drip irrigation system and group plants with similar water needs together.
- Finish pruning trees, vines, and shrubs.
- Begin less-toxic disease management. If a certain plant has repeatedly been susceptible to disease, consider crop rotating by choosing a different plant or crop in that area instead of spraying.
- Start vegetable seeds indoors in seed trays near a sunny window toward the end of the month. Use tray warmers to encourage sprouting. Choose varieties that will do well in a cool summer climate.
- Continue to pull winter weeds as they emerge. Apply a thick layer of mulch between plants to slow weed germination and growth between weeding. Also consider sheet mulching as an alternative to herbicides.
- Apply a top dressing of organic matter like steer manure or compost to lawns.

INTRODUCTION

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC)'s Water Pollution Prevention (P2) Program strives to educate San Francisco residents on how they can reduce their daily impact on our receiving waters, the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. One way SF residents can reduce their environmental impact is by reducing or eliminating their use of toxic chemicals or products in their yards. SFPUC is providing monthly gardening tips that will assist SF residents to garden in a "less-toxic way" and to reduce their environmental impact. For more information on the SFPUC P2 program, please visit: www.sfwater.org/CleanBay

MARCH

GARDENING TASKS

- Prepare beds for planting by amending with compost, manure, or organic amendments like bone, blood, and kelp meals.
- Check the pH of the soil with a testing kit or meter from your local garden center. A pH of 6.5–7.0 is ideal for most plants. Consult a nursery professional if your pH is too high or low for your plants.
- Start vegetable seeds indoors. Set larger seedlings outside toward the end of the month to harden off in preparation for transplanting.
- Prune early bloomers after they finish flowering.
- Check seedlings and trees for signs of damage and aphids. Visit: www.sfwater.org/CleanBay for the Pest Control Tips booklet.
- Fertilize plants and lawns with a slow-release organic fertilizer.

APRIL

GARDENING TASKS

- Prepare beds for planting if you have not done so already (see March tasks). Slightly dry soil is easier to work with.
- Plant vegetable starts, annuals, and perennials. To minimize transplant shock, leave store-bought plants in their containers for several days in a temperate location (don't forget to water them) before planting.
- Leafy green veggies like kale and lettuce that did well during the winter in sunny garden spots may bolt (begin flowering) as temperatures warm. Plant these crops in part-shade for summer leafy greens.
- Protect young plants from snail, slug and earwig damage with copper tape barriers and diatomaceous earth. Hunt these predators at night with a flashlight.
- Wash aphids from trees and shrubs using a strong water spray with a hose. For smaller vegetables and flowers, use a soap spray to control aphids. Keep an eye out for ants. Visit: www.sfwater.org/CleanBay for the Pest Control Tips booklet.
- Fertilize fruit trees with a slow-release organic fertilizer.
- Many weeds will begin flowering and setting seed as rains slow and temperatures climb. Be sure to remove weeds before they can release their seeds into your garden soil.
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Tip: If a certain tree was infested with aphids last year, wrap the tree trunk with a sticky barrier applied to a paper wrapping.

GARDENING TASKS

- Watch for aphid, whitefly, thrip, and scale infestations. Ant trails leading to and away from plants are a typical sign that an insect pest is feeding on plant juices. Visit: www.sfwater.org/CleanBay for the Pest Control Tips booklet.
- Watch for signs of pest or disease damage on fruit trees. Ensure young fruit trees are getting adequate water.
- Adjust sprinkler systems for warmer and drier weather. Avoid excess runoff onto paved surfaces.
- Mulch heavily to retain soil moisture.
- Time to deadhead! Remove spent flowers from flowering shrubs (especially rhododendrons), and annuals to encourage more flower production.
- If pests are a problem in your garden, consider planting plants which will attract beneficial insects. Visit: www.sfwater.org/CleanBay for the Pest Control Tips booklet.
- Fertilize perennial flowering shrubs like rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias when they finish blooming with a slow-release organic fertilizer.
- Fruit Tree Tip: For a harvest of larger apples, 'thin' developing apples to one apple per cluster.

GARDENING TASKS

- Inspect woody perennials for signs of powdery mildew or other fungal diseases.
- Remove stray, crossing, diseased or damaged branches, pruning badly infected portions. Leaves that touch or branches that cross encourage fungal diseases and insect infestation. Prune plants open for good air circulation and clean up leaf litter around plants.
- Be sure to keep orchard floor clean. Pick up leaf litter and fallen fruit to avoid spread of disease.
- Water trees and lawns deeply, but less frequently to encourage deeper roots.
- Stake tomatoes and flowers before they fall over.
- Watch for aphids, earwigs, snails, slugs, and whiteflies. Inspect the underside of cole (cabbage family) crops, leafy vegetables, and older leaves on flowers for small, round, yellow caterpillar eggs.
- IPM Tip: If caterpillar damage is spotted, first handpick the caterpillars. If the damage is especially bad, consider spraying the organic pesticide bacilli's thuringiensis (Bt). Use with caution, however, as Bt will also kill the beneficial insects in your garden.
- Eliminate sources of standing water throughout the yard to reduce mosquito populations.

JULY

GARDENING TASKS

- Plant autumn-blooming versions of bulbs such as spider lily, colchicum, ivy-leaved cyclamen, and allium.
- Plant flowering vines such as clematis, bougainvillea, passion vine, and trumpet vine when temperatures are mild.
- Water potted plants, vegetables and lawns adequately and early in the day. Two lighter waterings in close succession are preferable to a single heavier watering. Water will penetrate deeper and reduce runoff.
- As cooler and foggier days arrive, try reducing irrigation frequencies on ornamentals until warm fall weather.
- Watch for pests and diseases. Prune dead parts of plants. Visit: www.sfwater.org/CleanBay for the Pest Control Tips booklet.
- Begin summer pruning for pome and stone fruits to encourage ripening and to promote strong branch growth next year.

AUGUST

GARDENING TASKS

- If you are in a foggy area of the City, you are most likely experiencing mold and fungus problems. Prune badly infected plant parts to increase air circulation.
- For powdery mildew, a common fungal disease, prune older, more diseased leaves and compost in a hot compost pile or place in green compost cart. If necessary, remove entire plant.
- Feed vegetables, flowers, and citrus plants with a slow-release organic fertilizer.
- Clean up dead and diseased leaves dropped from plants.

SEPTEMBER

GARDENING TASKS

- September can be one of San Francisco's hotter months, so make sure to check container plants frequently for proper soil moisture.
- Check irrigation. San Francisco gardens experience a second spring with warm fall weather and may need more water now than during foggy summer months.
- Reduce overall fertilizer applications. For flowering plants and roses, use a low-nitrogen slow-release fertilizer.
- Never apply fertilizers or pesticides (including less- or non-toxic chemicals) during the heat of the day.
- Fruits will begin to ripen rapidly, so harvest daily before pests have a chance to make a meal out of your crops.
- Sow seeds of winter flowers and plants or set out transplants later this month. These include pansies, primroses, iceland poppies, violets, and calendulas.
- Continue planting cool season crops and chrysanthemums.
- As an alternative to bulbs which must be replanted each year, try one of the many climate-appropriate choices available, such as spring star flowers or harlequin flowers.

OCTOBER

GARDENING TASKS

- Prune off the dead and diseased portions of summer vegetables and flowers. The warm conditions this month may bring more production from the remaining healthy portions of these plants.
- As summer vegetables and annuals die off toward the end of the month, consider sheet mulching to both build soil and keep weeds from sprouting in winter rains.
- Fall is a perfect time to review the plants which performed well in your garden. Take note and choose plants with similar light and water requirements for next year's plantings.
- Group plants with similar water needs together in the garden, organizing your garden by "hydrozones." Water newly divided or transplanted plants regularly until winter rains start.
- Plant spring bulbs, container shrubs, and trees when temperatures cool.
- Clean up leaf litter and dropped fruits to eliminate hiding places for pests and diseases.
- Evaluate the health of your plants and note any that suffered a severe disease. Rotate a different family of plants in that location next growing season.
- Plant California native plants and drought-tolerant plants in the fall, ahead of the winter rains.

NOVEMBER

GARDENING TASKS

- Ants may start showing up inside the house looking for dryer, warmer conditions. It often helps to keep two kinds of ant baits on hand for outbreaks. Visit: www.sfwater.org/CleanBay for the Pest Control Tips booklet.
- Plant cool-season crops and spring blooming flowers in areas with good drainage. Wait until soil cools before planting spring bulbs like tulips.
- Check drainage and watch for “ponding” around plants from winter rains. Modify the landscape or drainage as needed.
- Re-assess your gardens’ water needs and turn off or reduce irrigation systems and watering cycles as winter rains start.
- Discontinue fertilizer use, except a slow-release organic fertilizer on cool-season vegetables or lawns. Work fertilizer into the top layer of soil to reduce fertilizer run-off.
- Finish cleanup of dead plant material for disease control.
- Prepare areas where bare-root plants will be going in the coming months. Amend the soil before it gets too wet to work.

DECEMBER

GARDENING TASKS

- If insect damage was a problem this year, begin selecting plants which will attract beneficial insects to your garden. If insect damage was extensive, consider spraying an organic dormant oil spray to kill overwintering insects. Try to use sprays only to manage out-of-control pest problems, so as not to damage populations of beneficial insects.
- Prune trees and shrubs now, while they are at their most dormant stage.
- Plant violas, pansies, stocks, primroses, caledendulas, iceland poppies, and cyclamens for winter color.
- Pull weeds as they emerge. Apply a thick layer of mulch after weeding.
- Clear an area of weeds and set down some wildflower seeds.
- Continue planting California native plants.
- Consider a live Christmas tree that can be kept in a large container and reused for many years.

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