



THE GARDENING SANTA CAN SKIP MY HOUSE THIS YEAR

Dottie Deems, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

When Santa asks me what garden tools I want for Christmas I'd have to tell him that I have everything I need. Santa's been very good to me in past years and I've taken good care of what I have been given.

If Santa and I started chatting over a cup of cocoa and cookies I'd have to tell him my favorites throughout the years have been the long handled shovel with the big teeth to break through our miserable clay soil in winter and in summer, my neat little hand trowel with a serrated edge that gets me through the smaller planting jobs in the clay soil, and my collapsible pruning saw, just another tool with serrated edges. Is there a theme here Santa?

Whether it is the summer sun that dries a rust on bare patches of my flower beds or the months of rain each winter and spring, my trusty carbide toothed shovel can break through the clay a lot easier than any other big tool. The handle is about 4 1/2' long and is fiberglass to keep the tool lightweight. The shovel end of the tool has teeth a little over an inch long and those teeth are sharp!

My hand trowel is actually seven tools combined into one. The chrome plated steel trowel has a transplanting blade, a serrated edge for cutting open bags of mulch or soil, a long sharp edge for cutting sod, a string or twine cutting notch, a weeder tip, a flat ended handle for tamping stakes into the ground, and the entire tool from end to end is a marked 11" guide for planting depth. How's that for handy! True to its name, it is a Planter's Pal.

The third nifty tool is my folding pruning saw. so sharp it makes mincemeat out of small to medium branches. Folded it's only about 12 1/2" long. The teeth are three sided for razor type cutting. The handle is ergonomic and comfortable. Best of all, the blade is replaceable which makes this a "forever" tool.

Every tool in my shed needs maintenance. Whether expensive or not, they perform their best when clean, free from rust, and oiled if necessary. There is no reason to put a tool away dirty or caked with clay. Hose off the dirt and debris. If necessary, put on your leather gloves and manually remove little bits of wood from the teeth of the saw. Dry the tools. Put the tools back in their holster, carrying case, or on the hanging device where they belong so you are not looking high and low for them next season. Thanks Santa for all those great gifts in years past. You can fly right over our house this year!



*Garden Santa figurine
(<http://www.christmas-treastusre.com>)*

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WINTER VEGETABLES FOR KIDS

Pearl Eddy, U.C. Master Gardener and U.C. Master Food Preserver, Solano County

Actually, the following recipes are not just for "kids," but for others who are really picky about eating some of the available winter vegetables. If you are interested in growing assorted winter vegetables, you need to realize that these are not started when the climate is cold, but in the late summer and early fall while the soil is still warm enough to sprout seeds or to encourage transplants to grow. Even if you do not grow these veggies yourself they are worth purchasing at grocery stores or farmers' markets because they contain so many healthful nutrients. Winter squashes, especially butternut squash, are my favorites. Besides being so flavorful, they contribute Vitamin C, potassium and other nutrients. One cup of baked winter squash cubes has less than 80 calories and is sodium-free. After acclimating family members to eat these sweetened recipes, the sweets can be cut back later.

Butternut Squash Casserole

Place a few Tbsp. of water in bottom of baking dish. Place halved squash in baking dish, cut side down and cover with plastic wrap. Cook in microwave about 10 min. or until tender. Cool a few minutes. Cut off rind. Cut squash into cubes about 1" square. Sprinkle with nutmeg and salt (optional). Top with 1/3 C. chopped walnuts and 1/3 C. dried, candied cranberries. Drizzle several Tbsp. margarine and maple syrup over top. Heat in microwave and serve. Leftovers can be re-heated later, or even eaten cold. Serves 10.

Brussels Sprouts with Orange and Caraway

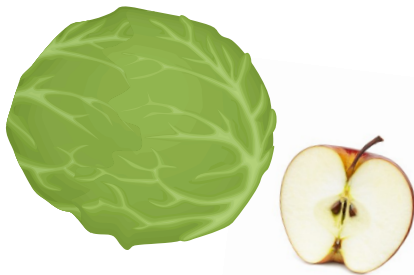
Slice thickly 1-1/2 lb. trimmed Brussels sprouts. In a bowl mix 2/3 C. orange juice, 2 Tbsp. lemon juice, 2 tsp. honey, and 1/4 tsp. ground hot pepper. In a pan brown 1 tsp. caraway seeds, remove from heat, and chop them. Thinly slice 4 scallions (green onions) into white parts and green parts. In a frying pan heat 2 Tbsp. oil, add grated zest from one orange, and the light part of the scallions. Add sprouts and toss over high heat until wilted (about 2 minutes). Add juice mixture and toss about 4 minutes to cook through. Add sprinkles of salt and pepper, green scallions, and caraway seeds and toss. Serve 6.

Cabbage and Apple Medley

Cut 1/2 green or red cabbage into bite-size pieces. Cut 4 or 5 apples (assorted colors) into bite-size pieces. Sauté cabbage and apples in oil in a large fry pan for a few minutes. Add sprinkle of salt and nutmeg and 1 Tbsp. (or more) of maple syrup. Stir and sauté a few minutes more and then let sit to steam a few more minutes. Serves 6.

Leland's Sweet Potato Soup

This is an adaptation of a soup that a friend serves every year for Thanksgiving. I think it is worth serving year round because it is so nutritious. Cook the following vegetables in 15 oz. canned broth until tender: 1 sliced carrot, 1 sweet potato, peeled and cubed, 1/3 C. chopped onion, and 1 chile serrano, chopped. Process cooked mixture in a blender until smooth. Add 1/4 tsp dried thyme (or more) and 3/4 C. cream. Warm soup and serve. For children you can omit the chopped chile and add 2 Tbsp. honey. Serves 6.



SALSIFY

Marian Chmielecki, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

Don't you just love this time of year? Gorgeous reds, yellows and ambers float down from the trees and decorate our gardens. Meanwhile, little shoots are poking their heads up out of the earth promising a glorious new year. Raking leaves today I noticed shoots of daffodils, freesias and day lilies already on the move. And what's that other one? Right there. Ah, yes. That's salsify (*Tragopogon porrifolius*), one of nature's surprises that has planted itself in my garden and returns dependably year after year. I had seen the name before, but didn't know the plant until a friend identified it for me. Salsify: make it rhyme with "olive tree."

Salsify is a biennial, meaning it establishes its leaves and roots the first year and then sends out its flower and seeds the second. According to the Sunset Garden Book the plant will grow up to 4 feet tall with a lavender purple flower shaped like a large dandelion, followed by white cottony seeds. I've seen that flower. I'm rather a random gardener (with a somewhat wild yard), whose philosophy is "If it dies, it didn't belong in my garden anyway. And if it is doing well, let's go with it!" So every once in a while I enjoy a salsify blossom among my ground cover. But salsify, also known as Oyster Plant, can be enjoyed in the kitchen as well.

With an edible root somewhat like a parsnip, but creamy white, salsify tastes a bit like an oyster. If you want to cultivate it you should give it rich, deep sandy soil. (In my yard, however, it pops up regularly under a *Quercus lobata* in un-amended Vacaville soil.) It can be boiled, mashed, mixed with eggs and sautéed as a patty or fixed in a variety of other ways.

"Bored with the same old winter vegetable day after day? Well, give salsify a go and you may never look back," says Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in the British newspaper, The Guardian. He goes on to give a variety of recipes including fritters, tempura and salsify gratin. (You can find all these recipes on the internet.) He includes two recipes that sound easy and tasty enough for a beginner to get the flavor. How about one of these?

Roasted Salsify: Peel the roots, put them whole in a roasting pan and drizzle with olive oil, a few cloves of

crushed garlic and a bay leaf; roast at 400 degrees for about 20 minutes or until softened. Serve sprinkled with salt or gremolata.

Boiled or Steamed Salsify: Boil or steam whole roots until just tender. Then chop them in a small dice and serve with a mustard and garlic vinaigrette.

I usually just attempt to dig out the salsify in my garden and toss it in the compost, but I may have to reconsider my weeding strategy this year. I just might bring some salsify in for dinner.

[Editor's Note: The U.C. Master Gardener Program does not endorse eating wild plants unless they have been positively identified by an expert.]



Salsify seed head. Photo by Jennifer Baumbach



Salsify root. Photo by Marian Chmielecki

ASK HOTTIE!

Lauren Peters, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

Dear Hottie,

I just moved to a home that has two cherry trees. I don't know anything about them. They have fruit on them now. But when can I pick the fruit? How do I tell it is ripe? Please help. Thanks!

Julie

Hi Julie,

Congratulations on your cherry trees.

Cherry trees come in two types: sweet for eating right away, and sour for canning or pies. Sweet cherries require a second tree to cross-pollinate. Sour cherries are self-pollinating so only one tree is required.

Cherries can be harvested when the fruit is sweet and soft. Almost all cherries are dark or bright red in color when ready to be picked. The exceptions are 'Rainier' which has a yellow-red blush and 'Royal Ann,' which is yellow with a red blush. The fruit will not ripen all at once, so harvesting can occur over a few weeks. I know my cherries are perfect when a flock of birds descends upon them to devour them!

Fruits will last longer if picked with the stem attached. Then they can be canned, or frozen or dried. But, of course, they are best eaten fresh off the tree. Cherries should be refrigerated quickly after picking or they will spoil.

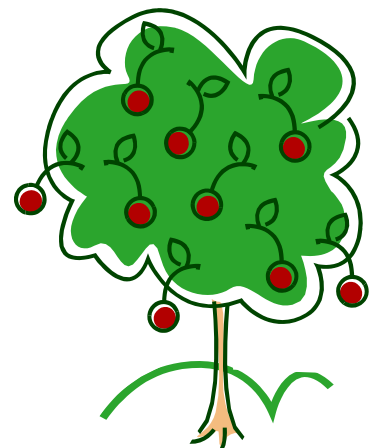
The following is a synopsis on how to care for your cherry trees throughout the year:

Winter: Spray with dormant oil to control San Jose scale. Prune 10% of growth on mature trees to let light in. Remove broken or diseased branches. Fixed copper spray can be used to protect against bacterial canker. Read all directions on containers before using.

Spring: Apply fungicide to control brown rot at popcorn (blossom buds show white) and full bloom stages. Fertilize mature trees just before or during rain with about 2 lb of urea or 50 lb. compost.

Summer: Control birds with bird netting. Drip irrigate daily. Sprinkler irrigate with 3-5 inches every 2-3 weeks, depending on heat. Harvest when fruit is soft and sweet. After harvest, fertilize mature trees with 2 lb. urea or 50 lb. compost and water in well.

Fall: Irrigate through summer heat and into fall until winter rains begin. Sprinkler irrigate until September 1 to prevent root rot.



More information can be found at www.homeorchard.ucdavis.edu. I have found the book, "The Home Orchard" anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu useful as well.

I hope this is helpful. Please write again with any more questions. "Hottie" (Lauren Peters, U.C. Master Gardener)

WINTER GARDENING GUIDE

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Sow California poppy (<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>) seeds for spring color. ❑ Sow indoors cool-season edibles such as chard, kale, and lettuce. ❑ Plant winter blooming shrubs: purchase now while in bloom to see what you're getting. ❑ Harvest citrus as it ripens. Taste for flavor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Plant summer bulbs such as gladioli, cannas, ranunculus, anemone, dahlia, lily, tuberous begonia and delphinium. ❑ Plant leaf crops like lettuce, spinach, cilantro, beets, carrots, chard, lettuce, peas, and spinach directly in ground. ❑ Indoors, start seeds of eggplant, peppers, and tomatoes transplant outdoors in 6 to 8 weeks. ❑ Berries: raspberry, boysenberry and blackberry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Almost any plant (except tropicals) can be planted now. Start seeds of old-fashioned favorites such as apricot foxglove, bachelor's button, blue flax and Oriental poppies. Summer sizzlers like cosmos and zinnias also grow more vigorously from a seed start & catch up fast to nursery-started plants. ❑ Warm season annuals like ageratum, marigold, petunia and sunflower. ❑ Switch out cool-season vegetables for corn, beans, peppers and tomatoes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Prune deciduous plants while dormant to keep grapes, roses, fruit & shade trees shapely. ❑ Check mulch. Add more to paths and beds for weed suppression. ❑ Protect tender plants when cold nights are predicted. Water well—dry plants are more susceptible to frost damage. ❑ Fertilize azaleas after bloom, cymbidiums with 1/2 strength fertilizer every week or so. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Pinch fuchsias through March: for every stem you pinch, you'll get 2; for every 2, you'll get 4. ❑ Fertilize: citrus & fruit trees, cane berries, roses (only after you see new growth begin). ❑ Fertilize fall planted annuals & perennials & established trees & shrubs with an all purpose fertilizer. Wait on azaleas, camellias & rhododendrons until after bloom. ❑ Mulch exposed areas to prevent weed seeds from germinating. ❑ Repot cymbidiums if necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Fertilize almost everything: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Flowering and fruiting plants need phosphorus-rich fertilizer. ❑ Green leafy plants such as lawns and lettuce require nitrogen. ❑ Root plants such as potatoes, beets and bulbs appreciate a handful of potassium. Read the labels. ❑ Once soils have dried out, give your irrigation system a tune up. Then set to water deeply & infrequently to encourage deep root growth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Control snails & slugs by eliminating hiding places, or hand pick. ❑ Use a dormant spray to control overwintering insects on deciduous plants. Control peach leaf curl with lime sulfur or fixed copper. Follow directions for proper application. ❑ Spray roses with dormant oil to control overwintering insects such as aphids, mites & scale. Thoroughly coat trunk, branches & twigs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Snails and slugs are dormant two times a year, during the hottest part of summer and during the coldest weeks in winter. This is about the time they head out for feeding. Get out early & hand pick. ❑ Don't prune out any frost damaged growth for another month or so—the outer dead foliage may protect healthy growth beneath from further frost damage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Now is the time to get a jump on insect infestations: check for signs of aphids (distorted new growth & tiny, often green or black insects) & spittle bugs (under white foam on stems). Both can be effectively sprayed off with a garden hose. ❑ Handpick snails at night, or use bait, follow all directions.

MAKING WREATHS AT THE BUCK MANSION

Jennifer Baumbach, Program Coordinator, U.C. Master Gardeners, Solano County

The Master Gardeners (MGs) hold the Wreath Workshop event annually, and every year I am surprised by the creativity of the wreath makers. The participants all get the same materials to work with. They get the redwood base material, the same natural decorations, other foliage, bows and do-dads. Yet, each of them comes up with a fabulous, unique wreath. This year, we even had some grapevine brought in by my friend, Lindy. He helped many of the participants create the grapevine wreath, and then they worked on adding foliage and other decorations to those wreaths as well.

I should mention the refreshments we had on hand. The MGs donate food to the event, which they either make at home or buy. The hearty fare ranges from sweet stuff, like cookies and fudge-to savory—like the Spanish Tortilla. Mind you, the Master Gardeners partake heavily in the refreshments (because they are foodies too), but there is always food left over.

The following are pictures taken at this years Wreath Workshop by Sharon Leos, resident MG photographer. The pictures are of our preparation days and of the workshop itself.





Preparation days are held at the SRCD Conservation Education Center on Lewis Road in Vacaville. Left, you see MGs cutting up the green material in preparation of loading them into the boxes.

On this page, you see the wonderful and varied wreaths made by participants of this years wreath workshop.



BAREROOT TREES-GET 'EM NOW!

Sharon Rico, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

This is the time of year you can save some money by locating a bareroot tree, including fruit trees, that you have wanted to plant in your garden. Bareroot trees are plentiful in catalogs, online and at retail nurseries. Many deciduous plants are also available bareroot, including flowering shrubs, roses, cane fruits and even grapes. Although it is simple to place an order online or from a catalog, it is potluck what quality and size of tree you may receive. I prefer to examine the tree and root system before purchasing making sure the stem is strong and fresh looking and the roots are well formed and healthy.

Bareroot trees are so named as the plants are dug from the soil when they are dormant (without leaves), usually in the fall. The plant's roots are washed free of any soil, and then kept cool with the roots packed in moist material such as sawdust. Often at local nurseries, you will find the bareroot trees stacked together in a mound of sawdust or light weight soil medium or pre-packaged individually in sawdust. Bareroot roses are also packaged the same way.

The best time of year to plant bareroot is in the fall or early spring. The earlier you make a decision, the wider a selection you will have. Buying bareroot will save you money over buying the same plant planted in a container. We have bought countless numbers of bareroot trees over the years and they have all grown well. It's not only high quality plant stock that has been responsible for this great growth, but proper care upon arrival. It is best to plant bareroot trees as soon as possible. Roots need to be kept moist until planting, so it is a good idea to submerge the root ball into a bucket of water for 8 hours. If it will be awhile before you can plant, create a trench dug in a shady spot in your garden and cover the roots with moist soil, potting mix or even damp shredded newspaper. It's important that the roots do not dry out. Before planting, trim off any broken, twisted or damaged roots, being careful to not over-prune.



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Before putting your plant in the soil, have a measurement of the place in your garden where you plan on placing it. Take into consideration the size at maturity, not only in width, but height. All plants are "cute" when small, but it could be a problem if they are pushing over a fence or under the house overhang at maturity. When selecting your planting site, be aware of sewer lines and overhead wires.

Dig a planting hole with sides that taper outward into the soil. The hole should be twice as wide as the roots of the plant. If the sides of the hole are smooth, roughen them up with a shovel or spading fork. This procedure will help the roots penetrate the soil. The hole should be more shallow than the root ball, creating a plateau (or cone) of soil to support the plant at the proper depth. This will keep the plant from settling and ending up too deep. Make sure to position the graft away from the hottest sun of the day. Spread the roots over the plateau, positioning the plant at the same depth or slightly higher. Use your shovel handle to check the depth. Holding the plant upright, tamp the soil around its roots backfilling until several inches from the top of the hole. At this point, add water which will settle the soil and help eliminate air pockets. If the plant is below soil level, pump it up and down while the soil is being watered so you can raise it to an ideal height. Completely fill the hole with soil, then water, making sure not to

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8-Bareroot Trees-Get 'em Now!)

saturate the soil. Do not add fertilizer into the planting hole, as it could burn the roots. In the spring, create a water basin around the plant, then water when the top two inches of soil is dry. Many bareroot fruit and nut trees benefit from mound planting, which improves growth and reduces root and crown rots.

It helps to paint the tree trunk with white latex paint (50% paint, 50% water) from the bottom to about 2 feet to prevent sun scald. If you have rodents in the area, surround the bark with a cylinder of 1/4 inch mesh hardware cloth that is 18 to 24 inches high, pressing the bottom of the cloth a couple of inches into the soil. Mulching around your new plant will keep the roots cool and moist. Keep the mulch away from the trunk to prevent rotting. A tree more than 3 feet tall or planted in a windy site should be staked for the first year until the roots get established. Tie the trunk to one or two stakes set beside the tree, using padded wire. Allow for some movement of the trunk to toughen it more quickly. Water your new plant slowly once a week for the first year.

The most fragile part of a tree is the crown, the section at or just below the soil surface where the trunk joins the roots. When planting "high," the crown can be kept dry. If you are planting a fruit tree, you should cut back (head) the tree at 20 to 24 inches. This will keep the tree from getting too tall and it will be easier to pick fruit and prune the tree in the future. Doing this is difficult for most gardeners but is the only way to get low branch formation on the main trunk. The most vigorous growth happens nearest the heading cut. Heading too high means most of your fruit will be higher in the tree necessitating using a ladder at harvest and to prune.

Reasons for pruning are to train the tree for easy harvest, thinning and spraying, to influence the size of the fruit (larger fruit), control yearly bearing amounts, to allow light into the tree (for ripening) and to improve the health of the tree. If a tree is allowed to grow without pruning, it will have a dense canopy keeping the light from the interior of the tree. This will result in a poor bud formation and poor fruit set. Any interior fruit taste will be compromised.

A bareroot plant establishes more quickly and grows better than a containerized plant. It is also easier to handle planting a bareroot plant, versus removing a plant from a container, eliminating the chance of transplant shock. It is important to inspect plants from top to bottom before purchase to ensure they are healthy, vigorous and free from injury, disease and pests. This inspection is easier with a bareroot plant as the entire plant is available for viewing.

Be diligent the first year in caring for your bareroot plant. You may want to keep it permanently mulched to keep lawn movers or weed whackers away. With proper planting and care, buds will soon push out new stems, the future limbs of your plant.

Local Nurseries that may carry bareroot trees:

Lemuria, 7820 Serpa Lane, Dixon, CA 707-678-4481

Mid City Nursery, 3635 Broadway Street, American Canyon, CA 707-642-4167

Sweet Pea Nursery, 891 Alamo Drive, Vacaville, CA 707-448-1000

El Rancho Nursery, 5098 Ellsworth Road, Vacaville, CA 707-447-3388

Van Windens Garden Center, 1805 Pueblo Avenue, Napa, CA 707-255-8400

Four Winds Growers, 3373 Sackett Lane, Winters, CA 530-795-4670

Master Gardeners in Your Community

Rose Pruning Presentation

February 16

7:00 p.m.

Vacaville Public Library

1020 Ulatis Drive

FREE presentation

Come and learn how to care for and prune your roses. Master Gardener and rosarian Jerry Crumrine.

This presentation is part of an on-going series the Master Gardeners do monthly at this location.

Plant Propagation Workshop

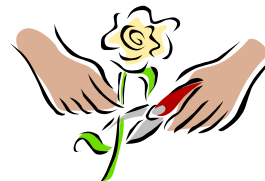
March 10

10:00 a.m. until noon

Solano Community College

Horticulture Building, 1000

FREE presentation



This is a hands-on workshop to show participants how to propagate plants. Each participant will take home 2-3 plants they propagate at the workshop. The Master Gardeners will cover: seed, division, air-layering, and cuttings (stem and leaf).

RSVP is required, as space is limited. Contact Jennifer Baumbach to RSVP or if you have more questions, 707-784-1321 or jmbaumbach@ucdavis.edu

Vegetable Gardening Seminar

March 24

10:00 a.m.

Benicia Community Garden

1400 East 2nd Street

(garden is located behind the church-there is parking in the front)

Come join the Master Gardeners as they talk you through how to set up a successful vegetable garden. Learn about seeds, how to transplant, irrigation, double-digging, tool maintenance, and composting.

RSVPs are required. This is a FREE seminar.

Master Gardeners at Fairfield OSH

Information Table 10am until 2pm

Talks 11am until 12 pm only on days noted

March

- 3rd-information table (IT)
- 17th- IT and Spring Vegetable & Flower Gardens talk

April

- 14th-IT
- 28th-IT and Soils, Amendments & Fertilizer talk

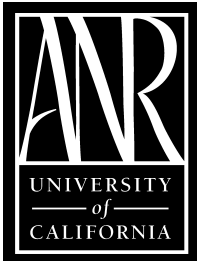
May

- 12th-IT
- 26th-IT and Lawn Planting, Care & Irrigation talk

June

- 9th-IT
- 23rd-IT and Landscape Planning, Shrubs & Trees

In the spring, we will also be at the local Farmers Markets! Look for us!



University of California Cooperative Extension

Seeds For Thought

A fresh gardening publication produced by the University of California Master Gardeners in Solano County.

Dear Friend of the Master Gardener Program:

We are pleased to provide you with a copy of our newest publication, *Seeds For Thought*, published jointly by the Master Gardeners of Solano County. We are volunteers whose purpose is to provide valuable and timely information to you, the gardening public. We also aspire to expand your horticultural knowledge and inspire your gardening creativity.

Seeds For Thought is published quarterly, with an issue for each gardening season. Printed copies are available at the local University of California Cooperative Extension Office, at selected local Master Gardener appearances, and by postal subscription. Electronic copies of *Seeds For Thought*, including our previous publications, are available for viewing and free download through our web site. You may sign up to be notified by e-mail when a new issue of *Seeds For Thought* is available for download.

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JENNIFER BAUMBACH, AND SHARON RICO**



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It is available through the internet for free download:

<http://cesolano.ucdavis.edu/newsletterfiles/newsletter130.htm>

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Baumbach".

Jennifer M. Baumbach

Master Gardener Program Coordinator



U.C. Cooperative Extension
Solano County Master Gardeners

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Late