



# Seeds For Thought

## BIRDS IN THE BACKYARD ALL WINTER LONG

*Christine Macgenn, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County*

It's December and finally raining in Northern California, giving us at least some relief from the drought. It actually feels like winter! I was sitting in my office this morning and looking out the window at my garden. My first thought was, "What a mess." After studying up on soil this summer, I decided not to clean up my garden until winter's end. I wanted everything in the garden to live out its life cycle and then return to the earth, and rebuild the soil structure naturally. An overgrown, weedy garden with only remnants of blooms, herbs gone to seed, and the odd pieces of fruit still hanging from the trees isn't a lovely sight, but I had made a commitment and I was sticking to it.



*Sparrow*

As I was mentally bemoaning my garden's fate, I noticed a lot of commotion out there. When I looked closely I could see there was a virtual metropolis of birds all foraging about. They were on the fence, under the bushes, up and down and all around each section of the garden and they were very, very busy. I didn't remember ever seeing so many birds in the garden in winter. I decided to do a little research on the subject. Almost immediately I found out that by letting our garden go wild, we were "birdscaping" (landscaping to attract birds) and naturally accommodating many of the needs of our winter birds. Our yard had become a fueling station for our winged friends! I never

really thought about how many challenges birds have to face during the winter — meager food supplies, fewer places to hide from predators, and no way to protect themselves from drastically changing temperatures. Here are some of the high points of what I learned about creating a safe and supportive habitat for our feathered friends during winter.



*Birds in Tree Canopy in Winter*

### ***Birdscaping***

If you'd like to see birds in your yard all year long, first look at your landscaping and consider diversifying. Not all birds seek food and refuge in the same way. Some prefer to find nourishment and refuge high in the canopy of tall trees, others in smaller trees, shrubs and even vines. The greater the variety of vegetation you have, the more birds will winter in your yard. The tiered effect of taller trees at the edges and smaller trees and shrubs in closer, with grasses and low flowers beneath them mimics Nature, a natural look that birds are attracted to. Evergreens, especially pines, junipers, firs, spruces and hemlocks are vital to a bird-friendly environment. These big trees and hearty shrubs do double duty for birds, providing shelter from the rain, wind and snow and they are a great source of food. The seeds from pinecones are good nourishment for birds during the chilling winter months — chickadees, pine

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## UNEXPECTED EDIBLES

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

Surprises are always a lot of fun, especially when you are wandering around in the woods. It's fun to look for wild berries, mushrooms and other special edibles. In the late summer you can look for the wild grapevines where clumps of muscadine grapes hang, ready to be made into grape jelly. Wild blackberries can be eaten "as is" or frozen or be made into jam or pies. Gooseberries can be made into pies. Elderberries make tasty jams, jellies and syrups.

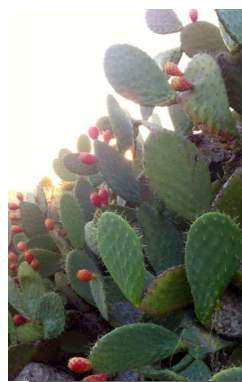
You do not have to leave home to find many unexpected edibles. In late winter and early spring look into your back yard or nearby vacant lots, and you may find miner's lettuce, purslane, mustard greens, dandelion, lamb's quarter, and many other greens which are tasty and edible, and which provide many important vitamins and minerals. Miner's lettuce is loaded with vitamin C and helped to prevent scurvy in the miners of the gold rush. Mustard greens are high in vitamins A, B, C and antioxidants. The newer, young leaves are best, but more mature leaves can be used although they are stronger in flavor. One way to overcome the strong flavor is to simmer the leaves in water a few minutes, pour off the water, and then finish simmering in fresh water. Season with salt, pepper and butter, or with bacon.

If you will be eating some of the greens raw (such as watercress), you can ensure that they are free from microscopic organisms by soaking them for 15 minutes in a solution of ½ tsp. Clorox in one gallon of water. Then place them in a clear water bath for 10 minutes, and then drain.

If you do not already recognize these and other edible wild plants, you should obtain a reliable book or look them up on the internet. Two helpful sites are [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/WEEDS](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/WEEDS), and [www.foragingpictures.com/plants](http://www.foragingpictures.com/plants). Two excellent, illustrated books are: Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants by Bradford Angier, and Edible and Useful Plants of California by Charlotte Clarke. This latter book gives detailed suggestions and recipes for using the plants. The first book can be ordered from Barnes & Noble, and the second book from [www.ucpress.edu](http://www.ucpress.edu). There are many copies of both available on line at assorted prices.

It is important to be able to identify plants which you intend to eat because some edible plants resemble

poisonous plants. For instance, the poisonous water hemlock has flowers that resemble the edible cow parsnip. Some plants have been introduced here in the past, such as oyster plant (salsify) with roots that taste like oysters, the cardoon with stalks that taste like artichokes, and chicory which has beautiful blue flowers in mid-summer. Chicory leaves can be used in salads, and the roots can be ground and used as a coffee substitute. Chicory was often included in the cans of coffee which I bought while living in the "deep south."



*Opuntia basilaris*  
Beavertail Cactus

Another useful plant is the beavertail cactus which is found not only in the deserts of the South, but also in local rural areas and back yards. The young flat green pads can be sliced and used as a cooked vegetable, such as the nopales used in Mexican recipes. The sharp spines of the pads, as well as spines of the fruits (prickly pears) can be removed by holding the items with tongs or a fork over flames from a gas burner, barbecue grill, or a twisted up newspaper which has been set afire. Prickly pears can be made into a butter: Peel and boil them until soft, strain out the seeds, add sugar if desired and cook until somewhat thickened.

Another unexpected edible, although it does not grow wild here, are the berries of the pyracantha bush which many of us grow in our yards. They make a nice jelly.

### Pyracantha Jelly

3 cups ripe, red berries  
6 cups water  
Juice of 1 lemon (approx. 3 Tbsp.)  
Juice of medium-sized grapefruit (approx. ½ cup)  
1 pkg. powdered pectin (1 ¾ ounces)  
4 ½ cups sugar

Wash and stem berries. In a pan bring berries and water to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 20 minutes. Stir in lemon and grapefruit juices. Strain (but do not squeeze) through a fine, clean cloth. You should have 4 ½ cups of

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# COLLECTING RAIN WATER

Tina Saravia, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County



Rain Collection Containers  
Photo by Tina Saravia

It's raining buckets, literally buckets of water. A lot of places are getting flooded. My own backyard is threatening to do the same. Our natural, modern day reaction is to get the water out of here and send it somewhere else - out of "site", out of mind. But let's take a moment to think

about what really happens when we send all that water away.

Rain comes down, travels over the roof of the house, and encounters dirt, dust, leaves, bird droppings and whatever else has settled there since the last downpour. The water then pours into the gutter, down the spout and across the driveway, picking up more dirt, debris, and engine oil, and then down the street it goes, taking dust, animal droppings, candy wrappers and other debris to the river, the bay, and finally into the ocean. The fish swim in it and drink it, then we eat the fish that had been consuming that filthy, toxic water. I could go on and on... but then I would start going off topic.

My point is, why are we sending that precious water away, when in a few months, when the rain stops, we're going to need that water in our own yard? This is California, and, drought or no drought, we do not get rain all year round. So why don't we collect that water for our future use and help ease the strain on those storm drains?

There are multiple ways of collecting rainwater. They can be as simple or as complicated as you want it to be. I like to start simple, get something going right away, and make it more efficient as time goes by. One of the simplest ways of collecting rain water is with rain barrels. One can get a ready-made rain barrel, hook it up to a downspout and you're set to collect rain water.

Personally, I like the DIH (Do-it-Herself) kind. I started by purchasing some inexpensive 55-gallon food-grade containers, drilled a hole for a faucet towards the bottom of the barrel and a

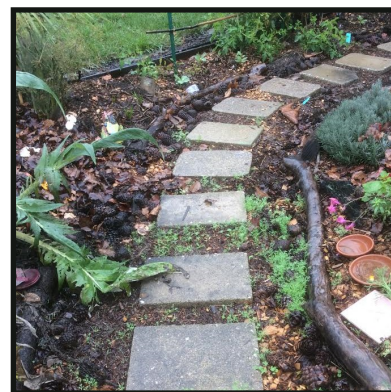
hole towards the top for overflow. I placed it next to the downspout and waited for the first rain. Not perfect, but I made it myself. And over the last 2 years, I've been perfecting them by connecting 3 of the barrels together, and installing better overflow hardware.

There are some basic requirements for a rain barrel. Your rain barrel should have a spigot/faucet so that you can access the water, an overflow pipe, a sealed and screened lid with an opening to attach your downspout, and screens on all vents. They should also have an overflow to a safe disposal location (storm water drain or rain garden).

Speaking of rain gardens, this is another way of collecting rainwater. A rain garden is basically a shallow depression in the garden filled with plants that survive both moist and dry conditions. The rain water travels through swales. Swales are shallow channels in the garden to direct the water towards the rain garden. Like the rain barrels, they can be as simple or complicated as you want them.

My own swale and rain garden originally came from a need to create a place to send the overflowing rainwater from a clogged-up downspout - something any first time homeowners can overlook when cleaning the gutters for the first time. Since then, I've planted in the rain garden a Maximillian sunflower (*Helianthus Maximiliano*), Rush (*Juncus effusus*) and California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*).

There are some basic requirements for rain gardens. Rain gardens should be located at least 10 feet from your house and at least 25-40 feet from a septic system or steep slope. They should also be designed to drain within 48-72 hours to reduce the risk of standing water and mosquito breeding.



Rain Garden  
Photo by Tina Saravia

One more way of collecting rain water and reducing run-off is by using pervious or permeable hardscape. There are many new types of pervious materials that allow runoff to pass through and SINK back into the soil. Some popular choices are paver

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# CHOOSING PLANTS WHEN REPLACING YOUR LAWN

Gene Ekenstam, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

Two previous articles in *Seeds for Thought* (Spring 2014 and Winter 2014) have reviewed the process for converting a lawn into a low-water-use landscape. As we worked through this process with replacing our lawn, I realized that in addition to the design and management of the hardscape, the choice of plant material deserves careful attention.

It's not as simple as walking into a nursery and asking to see drought-tolerant plants. Just which plants make the most sense? The most general answer might be "Mediterranean plants" the catch-all term for plants, world-wide that are adapted to periods of low rainfall.

Another, and naturally smaller, category would be "native plants." But...at a certain level, aren't those terms interchangeable? Why might the distinction between "Mediterranean" and "native" be significant? Well, for at least two reasons. Many regions of the world we term as Mediterranean (short, mild, rainy winters and long, warm, dry summers) have plants that flourish in gravelly or sandy soils, very unlike the heavy clay soils we find in much of Solano County. Further, an interesting consideration in the Mediterranean vs. native choice is that California wildlife has co-evolved with the native plants. So if the design of a garden is meant to encourage birds or butterflies and other pollinators, Mediterranean plants may be unfamiliar, or unattractive, or even harmful to them. For example, the berries of *Nandina domestica* "Heavenly Bamboo," originating in China and Japan, can be toxic to Cedar Waxwings and other birds. (Veterinary Medicine International, 2010, by Moges Woldemeskel and Eloise L. Styer)

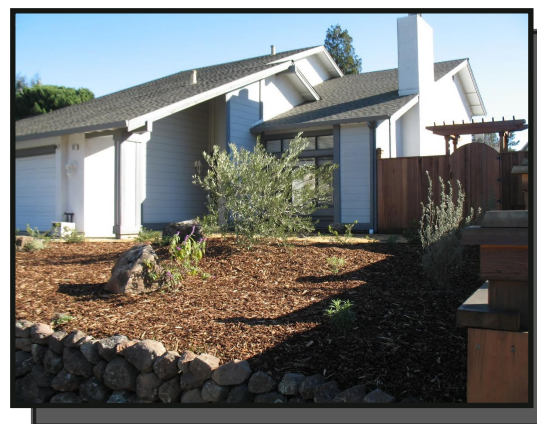
As it says in the 2004 edition of *Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates of the San Francisco Bay Region* published by the East Bay Municipal District (EBMUD): "...in selecting plants for the regionally appropriate garden, gardeners should compare the native habitats of the plants they want to grow with the soils and seasonal characteristics of their own microclimates. Just as

not all plants native to California are suited to all California microclimates, not all Mediterranean plants grow well or easily in all parts of the San Francisco Bay Region." (p.3)

With this in mind, how does one build a plant list for consideration? After all, you are trying to balance soil type, yard exposure to sun, complementary colors and heights within your design. Printed sources, such as the *Sunset Garden Book* or the EBMUD publication are good for starters. *Sunset* is important for its descriptions of the climates of Solano County (zones 9, 14, 15, and 17) and its section on "Plants for Dry Areas." The EBMUD book has the advantage that its Plant Catalog has a specific regional focus, but it also has beautiful full color shots of nearly all the plants represented, along with very full cultural notes. PG&E has a descriptive folder of "Small Trees of the Bay Area" which, though not exclusively water-thrifty, lists trees that will fit well in a small landscape area. Of course, there are numerous web sites, starting with the UC Davis Arboretum list of All Stars ([http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/arboretum\\_all\\_stars](http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/arboretum_all_stars)) I've also found the Las Pilitas and Native Sons (Mediterranean and native plant nurseries) web sites helpful in showing examples of the many varieties of a given plant family. Organizations outside California, such as the Missouri Botanic Garden, will list low-water use plants, but they may include some species that are not particularly suitable for the California climate. Such sites provide notes, photos, and growth description that helped us make a choice among the many varieties of *Arctostaphylos* Manzanita for example. Finally, of course a knowledgeable nursery staff member can be an invaluable guide to the options and will tailor their suggestions

to your specific locale, especially if you know what you are looking for.

This isn't really a job to be turned over entirely to a contractor or a designer. It



After Lawn Replacement

needs the gardener's personal involvement and judgment as to the plants that will flourish best in the yard's microclimate, reduce water use, and be a source of personal joy and



Lawn Before Replacement

All Photos in this Article by Gene Ekenstam

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# Quarterly Pest Notes-HOME AND LANDSCAPE PEST INFORMATION

Contributed by Dave Harper, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

The University of California (UC) Statewide Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program provides practical information on pest management techniques and

identification for a broad range of California pests. Management suggestions apply to California, but they may be useful in other areas also.



## PEST MANAGEMENT

### QUICK TIPS

Quick Tips are very short-answer fact sheets aimed at consumers and nonprofessional audiences. Compiled by UC IPM staff, Quick Tips are drawn directly from the information contained in

the Pest Notes (see below) and reviewed by the original authors. Quick Tips are reviewed and revised when their corresponding Pest Notes are updated.

## PEST NOTES

Pest Notes are longer publications about specific pests or pest management practices, written for home gardeners, residents, UC Master Gardeners, landscape professionals, public agency professionals, and managers of wildlands and open spaces.

Authored by University of California scientists, each Pest Note is peer reviewed through the UC ANR process. As a series coordinated by a technical editor, they follow format and content guidelines established by the UC IPM Program and are edited, produced, and often illustrated by UC IPM staff. Once published, each document is reviewed periodically, typically about every 5 years, and updated as needed.

## OTHER CONTENT

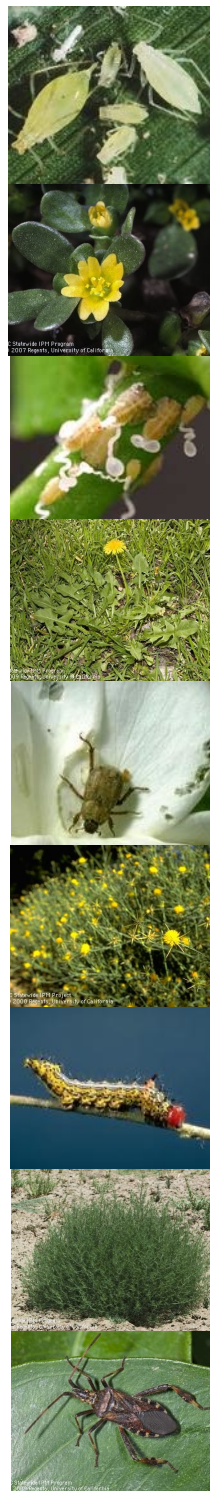
The home and garden section of the UC IPM site also

includes information from other UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) resources, primarily peer-reviewed UC IPM books and products, including Pests of Landscape Trees and Shrubs, Pests of the Garden and Small Farm, and Integrated Pest Management for Floriculture. The UC Guide to Healthy Lawns, Pesticides and Water Quality, and the Key to Identifying Common Household Ants are separately authored and reviewed resources.

## PESTICIDE INFORMATION

Please note that the pesticides suggested throughout the UC site conformed to the registered California pesticide labels at the time the publications were published or last reviewed. Pesticide registrations change frequently at both the state and federal levels, and UC IPM staff update the databases when notified. Ultimately, users are responsible for ensuring that their use conforms to current labels and local regulations.

The Web site <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/index.html> can help you learn about Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and how you can apply it to your pest problems. UC Cooperative Extension office in Solano County can also help—(707) 784-1322 [mgsolano@ucanr.edu](mailto:mgsolano@ucanr.edu)



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## HEAVENLY SCENT

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

Ask any gardener what their favorite plant is and I bet you will find they can't name just one. Count me in that group. I love plants. But there are a few stand-outs that are worth mentioning.

For me, what captures my interest is either the color or smell of a plant. I love bright colors. Mostly oranges and blues. But I think that fragrance is the top attribute I look for in plants to add to my yard.

When I was attending Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, I learned of this plant called *Psoralea pinnata* also known as the Scurfy Pea or the Kool-Aid® Bush. I had never encountered such a plant before. This was way back when I was just getting in to Horticulture, I was a late-bloomer with respect to learning or loving plants! What caught my attention is the smell of the flowers. They smelled like grape Kool-Aid®! Seriously! The plant is somewhat ugly and rangy, but the blue and white flowers made up for that.

Since then, I have found a prettier substitute for the Scurfy Pea. This plant is in one of my favorite genres, Salvia. The plant is *Salvia melissodora* known as the Grape-scented sage. It is a shrub that can get to 8 feet tall. It is native to the upper elevations of Mexico. The leaves also have an interesting smell, but not as good as the grapey fragrance of the violet/lavender flowers. To enjoy the smell, you have to avoid bruising the leaves, so don't touch, just sniff. But be careful, as the carpenter bees and other bees visit this plant frequently. You don't want a sting on your sniffer!

I have two of these salvias planted just outside my window. In the warm evenings of the summer, you can smell their delightful grape scent as it perfumes the neighborhood and of course, inside my home. They also bloom now and when the weather is warm enough, like our 60 degree winter days, the bees will be working the flowers.

Another favorite of mine is the Mock Orange (*Philadelphus 'Belle Etoile'*). This is a late spring-early summer bloomer. It has white-petaled flowers with a maroon center. The

shrub grows about 5 feet tall and 8 feet wide. Mine is not that wide, but its arching branches are long. At first, I didn't think this plant would do well in my garden, but about the third year, it took off. It puts off this lovely apricot scent and perfumes the yard when the winds blow to the North. I hope to put in another of these delightful shrubs for an even more intense treat for the nose.

I recommend you open up your senses and try picking out plants with interesting fragrances to add to your own yards. You'd be amazed at what's out there.



*Salvia melissodora* (above) and *Philadelphus 'Belle Etoile'* (below) (photos by Jennifer Baumbach)





## TRAVEL DOS AND DON'TS

Riva Flexer, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

It's happened to all of us...you're on vacation. Then you see it, and you have to have a piece. Just last week, it was...in Maui. My first thought was "how can I carry a piece back to my apartment?" The second? "Hands off, Riva!" I had this conversation with myself daily on that trip. The gingers, and all sorts of hibiscus, the enormous banks of bougainvillea, are everywhere, and in Mount Haleakala National Park, one sees plants found nowhere else on this planet.

But you can't take them home just like that. Why not??? My little plant won't cause any problems! Ah, but it can, all too easily. That small seed or cutting is host to microscopic organisms. Have you ever looked at seed packets for spices? Often they will specify that the contents have been sterilized. That is to ensure that should these seeds be planted unintentionally they contain no microscopic organisms that do not belong here, organisms found on the plant or in the soil where it originated.

Either the plant itself, or those microorganisms living on it or in the soil fragments in which it originated, can become an invasive pest. In its native environment, there are checks and balances in the ecosystem. Transfer that collection of life forms to a new environment, and poof! You have an exotic species and anything can happen.

Exotic species are organisms (plants, animals, and microorganisms) that are not native to a particular region. They have been introduced accidentally or intentionally. Their impact varies considerably depending on the species and the area being invaded. Some species have been imported to clear up an agricultural or animal problem. Others have simply piggybacked in, or may have been brought by homesick immigrants. For many of these organisms, California provides a wonderful place to live and prosper, with no natural predators. They then become invasive. Wild anise, star thistle and pampas grass, all of which thrive in Solano County are imports. Even a nursery plant, sold for home gardens, can inadvertently become a pest species because it reproduces vigorously and has no predators. Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and big-leaved Periwinkle (*Vinca major*) are used in landscaping, and both spread rapidly, choking out native plants, with no natural predators.

Exotic and pest insects and microorganisms are particularly dangerous here. California is home to a vibrant agricultural economic sector. We grow cherries, peaches, plums, dates and citrus, just to name a few major food crops. At least three of these are under threat from unintentionally imported species and organisms which have become serious agricultural pests.



*Hylocereus undata*  
Photo by Riva Flexer

The Spotted Wing Drosophila (*Drosophila suzukii*) is a relatively new import (first seen in 2008) that lays its eggs in ripening (not ripe) raspberries, cherries, blueberries, blackberries, plums, plumcots,

nectarines and figs. The Asian Citrus Psyllid is a carrier of Citrus greening disease, which has the capability to decimate our citrus industry. The light brown apple moth (found in Australia, NZ, New Caledonia, Hawaii, UK, and Ireland) has been found in Solano County, affecting grapes, citrus, pome fruits and stone fruits.

So, how does one avoid this problem in the first place?

### 1. Don't bring plants or soil home and be aware that you might be inadvertently carrying excess baggage.

If you are travelling to a contaminated area, ensure that you are not contaminating your home region when you return. Clean your footwear and don't spread species from that region to yours. It's just basic cleanliness.

When entering California from Nevada, you may recall agricultural check points on the highways at the point of entry. This is to keep unwanted pests out. A similar arrangement can be seen at airports. When one is returning to the United States, Customs and Excise officers will ask if you have visited a farm in the last two weeks, or if you are carrying seeds or plants or agricultural material. One year, it happened to me – I was returning from a holiday and had not emptied my pockets which still contained seeds I had automatically harvested. Upon being asked if I had any plant material on me, I had to say "yes", and subsequently spent too much time in a small room explaining why I had not emptied my pockets before entering sterile space.

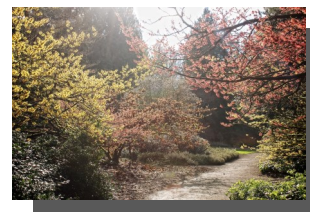
### 2. Research what you want to plant.

Native plants are best adapted to our Mediterranean environment, as are Mediterranean plants. Purchase from

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# WINTER GARDENING GUIDE

	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
P L A N T I N G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Sow California poppy (<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>) seeds for spring color</li> <li>◇ Sow indoors cool-season edibles such as chard, kale, and lettuce</li> <li>◇ Plant winter blooming shrubs: purchase now while in bloom to see what you are getting</li> <li>◇ Harvest citrus as it ripens—taste for flavor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Plant summer bulbs such as gladioli, cannas, ranunculus, anemone, dahlia, lily, tuberous begonia and delphinium</li> <li>◇ Plant leaf crops like lettuce, spinach, cilantro, beets, carrots, chard, lettuce, peas, and spinach directly in the ground</li> <li>◇ Indoors, start seeds of eggplant, peppers, and tomatoes. Transplant outdoors in 6 to 8 weeks</li> <li>◇ Plant berries, raspberry, boysenberry and blackberry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Almost any plant (except tropical) 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 and catch up fast to nursery-started plants.</li> <li>◇ Plant warm season annuals like ageratum, marigold, petunia and sunflower</li> <li>◇ Switch out cool-season vegetables for corn, beans, peppers and tomatoes</li> </ul>
M A I N T E N A N C E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Prune deciduous plants while dormant to keep grapes, roses, fruit and shade trees shapely</li> <li>◇ Check mulch. Add more to paths and beds for weed suppression</li> <li>◇ Protect tender plants when cold nights are predicted. Water well—dry plants are more susceptible to frost damage</li> <li>◇ Fertilize azaleas after bloom; cymbidiums with 1/2 strength fertilizer every week or so</li> <li>◇ Collect rain water to use on your garden</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Pinch fuchsias through March; for every stem you pinch, you'll get 2; for every 2, you'll get 4</li> <li>◇ Fertilize: citrus and fruit trees, cane berries, roses (only after you see new growth begin)</li> <li>◇ Fertilize fall planted annuals and perennials, and established trees and shrubs with an all-purpose fertilizer. Wait on azaleas, camellias and rhododendrons until after bloom</li> <li>◇ Mulch exposed areas to prevent weed seeds from germinating</li> <li>◇ Repot cymbidiums if necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Fertilize almost everything</li> <li>◇ Flowering and fruiting plants need phosphorus-rich fertilizer</li> <li>◇ Green leafy plants such as lawns and lettuce require nitrogen</li> <li>◇ Root plants such as potatoes, beets, and bulbs appreciate a handful of potassium. Read the labels</li> <li>◇ Once soils have dried out, give your irrigation system a tune up. Then set to water deeply and infrequently to encourage deep root growth</li> </ul>
P R E V E N T I O N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Control snails and slugs by eliminating hiding places, or hand pick</li> <li>◇ Use a dormant spray to control over wintering insects on deciduous plants. Control peach leaf curl with lime sulfur or fixed copper. Follow directions for proper application</li> <li>◇ Spray roses with dormant oil to control over wintering insects such as aphids, mites and scale. Thoroughly coat trunk, branches and twigs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ 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 and pick</li> <li>◇ 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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Now is the time to get a jump on insect infestations: check for signs of aphids (distorted new growth and tiny, often green or black insects) and spittle bugs (under white foam on stems). Both can be effectively sprayed off with a garden hose</li> <li>◇ Handpick snails at night, or use bait—follow all directions</li> </ul>





(Continued from page 1--Birds in the Backyard All Winter Long)

siskins, grosbeaks and woodpeckers love them. Deciduous trees may lose their leaves and not provide much shelter but they offer something else that is valuable. Nuts. Oaks (*Quercus*), walnuts (*Juglans regia*), hickories (*Carya*), and hazelnuts (*Corylus*), all produce rich fuel for birds.

### **Berry Delicious**

Fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, especially those that hang onto their fruit well into winter, are vital to a bird's diet. They provide a banquet of delicacies just when birds need them most.

Shrubs with berries that persist in winter are winterberry holly, photinia, bayberry and viburnum. Others to consider are varieties of chokeberry bushes which generally tolerate no sun. Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), coffeeberry (*Rhamnus californica*), Oregon grape (*Berberis aquifolium*) and golden currants (*Ribes aureum*) will set a fine winter table for birds. Rosehips, those glorious, fleshy red and orange fruits that roses provide last well into the winter months as well. Dogwood offers many berry and flowering choices. Crabapples (*Malus spp*) are a bird favorite. Popular crabapples are the ones with the smallest fruits, such as Sargent or Sargent Tina, Snowdrift and Adirondack. When the fruit is small birds can grab and go, munching the whole fruit down with ease.



Winter Habitat for Birds

### **Garden Gone Wild (Going Wild)**

Another wonderful wintertime source of food for birds are native grasses that emerge later in the season. Instead of cutting them back in fall let them flower and go to seed. This gives coverage and food. I read once, "Nature isn't neat." I have to remember that when I look at my wintering garden. The birds showed me that a little messiness in the garden may be more ecologically sound than all my pristine little rows of perfection.

If you think a dead garden, with dried-up everything everywhere is useless, look more closely. You are sure to see chickadees scouring the branches, twigs and leaves for insect and spider eggs and cardinals and goldfinches perching on stems and eating seeds from the plants. Insects, insect eggs and larvae are a feast for wintering birds. Don't be in a hurry to rake your garden clean. The leaves can be used as a mulch layer and can host a plethora of insects and seeds. Leaf and stick piles will

attract sparrows and juncos, who'll work overtime on those piles doing bug cleanup. The more bugs you have, the more plentiful birds will be in your garden. Mother Nature designed it this way.

Let's not forget worms. For many birds, worms are their first food and a fantastic source of protein. Robins love them. Worms are so important to our circle of life: recycling our waste into rich, fertile soil and feeding our birds, who in turn help us manage garden insects.

### **Perennially Yours**

Perennial flowers also provide nutritious seeds for birds, if you let them. Keep your wildflowers going as long as you can into winter. Don't chop off their seed heads until spring! Plant big groupings of these flowers — the more seeds, the more birds. Some bird favorites are coneflowers (*Echinacea*), native perennial Sunflowers (*Helianthus*), Coreopsis, Black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia*) and Solomon's Seal (*PolYGONATUM*). California lilac (*Ceanothus spp.*), buckwheat (*Eriogonum spp.*), mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus betuloides*) and redbuds (*Cercis occidentalis*) are seed producers that birds will flock to as well. Planting a few winter blooming plants in your garden will add sparks of color to dreary winter days and provide seeds and nectar for birds. Consider currants (*Ribes malvaceum*, *Ribes viburnifolium*), manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos spp.*) and silk tassels (*Garrya elliptica*). I've noticed that Salvia is amazingly hearty and our precious little hummers love them. We haven't cut back the Milkweed either, which still has blossoms on it and the odd bunch of tasty aphids.

### **The All Important Watering Hole**

You would think winter would provide plenty of water for birds. Not during a drought and not when it is freezing outside. Winter is actually when birds need extra water support. Having access to a clean water source is paramount to a bird's survival. They need it for drinking and for bathing too. So don't put those bird baths away, just a make sure the water stays clean, shallow and doesn't freeze over. Changing it daily will make your backyard winter birds very happy.

### **If You Grow it They Will Come**

With just a few adjustments in our gardens we can easily create a habitat that supports birds year round. Evergreens, perennials, and fruit-bearing plants will have a very positive effect on the birds in your area. Birds are so delightful to watch, and there is nothing quite as sweet as waking up to the sound of birds chirping away. It might take a while for word to get out, but birds of a feather do flock together. They will find the safe haven you have created for them and you will be utterly enchanted when they do. ^

# GARDENING WITH A HEAVY HEART

Lowell Cooper, U.C. Master Gardener, Solano County

The weather is not inviting: short days, chilly to outright cold, maybe even rain (we should be so lucky). Makes the most sense to stay inside and catch up on old puzzles and t.v.? But the call of the garden is so compelling, especially when I look at my roses and realize they want their bed made so they can go to sleep.

At the same time, I am filled up with the imminent death of one old friend in the terminal phase of an aggressive cancer and another pal who recently discovered he had prostate cancer. It is difficult to garden with a clear mind. The best I can say to myself is that there is some comfort in caring for the flora in need and it also serves as a distraction. Psychologists suggest that engrossing distractions can be very useful activities when stressed; as a (retired) psychologist I offered this advice more than once over the years. And invariably individuals who had a knack for stress-relieving activities, had an easier time getting through a hard time.

The holidays themselves can be wonderful and also times of great stress. Those of use who have gardens that call for caring, winterizing, are lucky because there is always someplace to go and something to do. Walking the dogs, going to the gym, and lining up get-togethers with friends also work and more is probably better when it comes to stress managers. The thing I particularly like about gardening is that it is very close at hand and I can do as much or as little as I need to by myself.

Holidays are a particularly valuable personal teaching/ learning experiences. I have the feeling that the repetition gives a steadiness to my life – especially when there are dreadful conditions surrounding me. The challenge is how to enjoy the predictable while attending to the terrible – sad, angry, distraught and really helpless events life sometimes deals up. -



Photo by Melinda Nestlerode

## Rattus rattus

Diana Flores, UC Master Gardener, Solano County

*Rattus rattus all brown and furry  
Sitting atop the tall Canary pine tree  
Sitting there waiting so patiently  
Not one not two but three times you see  
As a thief in the night so menacingly  
You scampered and stole my winter veggie  
An herbivore so shockingly  
If I had known I would have planted differently  
Since you aren't a slug as I thought you to be  
I am now the proud owner of a little kitty*

*The moral of this tale for you and for me is to always always know your enemy*



*(Continued from page 2-Unexpected Edibles)*

juice. Return juice to pan and stir in pectin. Stir until mixture comes to a full rolling boil. Add sugar, and bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Continue to boil 2 minutes. Remove from heat and skim off foam. If desired, add a few drops of red food coloring. Pour into hot, sterilized jars and seal at once. For best storage, process jars for 10 minutes in a hot-water bath. Makes 4 half-pint jars.

There are dozens of useful and nutritious plants just waiting to be discovered and enjoyed. I hope you have as much fun as I do, "grazing" through our surrounding natural areas. -

(Continued from page 3-Collecting Rain Water)

stones, turf block and permeable asphalts and pavements. One perfect example would be, instead of having a solid concrete driveway where water flows down to the street, to use a pervious material to allow some of the water to sink down before reaching the street.

This is more than a DIH'er can do. This will be a future project to be hired out. But I can still make my garden paths with permeable materials like stepping stones, gravel or bark. Meanwhile, the rain barrels are full and the rain garden is waiting for more rain. ~

(Continued from page 4-Choosing Plants To Replace Your Lawn)

satisfaction. And, all that starts with an appropriate plant list. When we began to plan our yard, we were not interested in either artificial turf or the gravel-and-juniper look. The plan for our 1,000 square foot south-west facing front yard considered mature size, color, pollinator-attraction, aroma, diversity, and attractiveness. Not all of the plants are native. This is our plant list:

- *Olea europaea* 'Wilsonii' (Fruitless Olive)
- *Acer palmatum* 'Crimson Queen' (Japanese Maple)
- *Baccharus pilularis* (Dwarf Coyote Brush)
- *Zauschneria latifolia* 'johnstonii' (California Fuchsia)
- *Diplacus aurantiacus* (Sticky Monkey Flower)
- *Asclepias syriaca* (Milkweed)
- *Leucophyllum frutescens* 'Green Cloud' (Texas Ranger)
- *Salvia leucantha* (Mexican Sage)
- *Arctostaphylos densiflora* 'Howard McMinn' (Manzanita)
- *Thymus citriodorus* cv. 'Lemon Frost' (Lemon Thyme)
- *Dymondia margaretae* 'Silver Carpet'



Other gardeners would make other choices, but using the resources I have mentioned (plus the input of our landscape contractor), we narrowed the choices down to this manageable group. ~

(Continued from page 7--Travel Dos and Don'ts)

reputable nurseries, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Talk to your local Native Plant society chapter. Look at the Sunset Garden Book!

### 3. Don't release unwanted plant material into the environment.

That fragment of aquatic plant, or the bacteria in your aquarium water could easily become an invasive species.

### 4. Don't transport firewood.

Buy it where you burn it. Unwanted organisms may be hitching a ride from one county to another. It looks like willpower, coupled with some knowledge and common sense can keep our state safe from exotic pests and insects! ~

#### FURTHER INFORMATION:

Importing Plants to the USA:

[https://help.cbp.gov/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/600/~importing-plants-and-plant-products](https://help.cbp.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/600/~importing-plants-and-plant-products)

Exotic and Invasive species:

<http://ipm.ucdavis.edu/EXOTIC/exoticabout.html>

<http://ipm.ucdavis.edu/EXOTIC/index.html>

Selecting plants for your garden:

The Sunset Western Garden Book

Native Plant Society <http://www.cnps.org/cnps/grownative/>



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