



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

August garden opportunities

Cool, cloudy weather in August?

August is a transitional month in our climate. One of the Sacramento meteorologists coined the phrase “August cool-down” to refer to this common change in our weather pattern. The big high pressure domes that dominate over the southwest begin to break down, monsoon conditions set up over that region, and some of that moisture-laden air pushes up into the Central Valley. We even have periods of muggier weather, we see clouds, there are thunderstorms over in the mountains, and most notably the ocean breeze pushes in earlier and further into our region each afternoon.

We still have plenty of warmth ahead for our summer vegetables and flowers, but this cool spell of weather creates opportunities for cleaning up, providing deep waterings, and planning ahead for winter and spring.

What to do in the garden in August?

- Your trees and shrubs would appreciate some slow, thorough soakings now. Water deeply every couple of weeks.
- August is 'the month of weeds'--those little sprouts from May and June are either seeding or running amok now. So a good soaking and some hand pulling, digging, smothering, or mowing can make a big difference. Several inches of arborist wood chips will smother most weeds.
- Certain types of fruit trees are best pruned now. Cherries and apricots should only be pruned in late summer to avoid diseases that can affect those specific types through pruning wounds in the rainy season. Summer pruning of fruit trees is also done for other stone fruits such as peaches, nectarines, plums, and pluots.
- If you're growing cane berries (blackberries, boysenberries, etc.), this is a good time to remove the canes that have finished fruiting and tie up their replacements. Check for the shoots that run under the fence or into the shrubs. Your main management with berries is to keep them from becoming thickets.
- Monitor young citrus trees for rootstock! Suckers are common on citrus trees and can quickly overtake the tree, and their fruit is not edible. The most common rootstock has three-part (trifoliate) leaves and significant thorns. Remove them by cutting clean at the trunk, or you can just snap them off if they're still tender.

Start planting cool-season vegetables

This “August cool-down” is great for transplants. Some of the vegetables that we harvest in late winter need a long head start. Brussels sprouts go in best in July; we still have time in August. Large-headed cabbages, larger-head cauliflower varieties, and Romanesco do best when they have a long period of early growth.

Give them plenty of room! My biggest mistake with these broccoli relatives has been overcrowding. Minimum 18 inches apart for broccoli, cauliflower, and collards; two to three feet apart best for Napa cabbage and Romanesco (Romanesco broccoli is a unique cultivar of cauliflower with the inflorescence in a fractal pattern).



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Early planting can lead to an early pest

As I was moving drip line into the area where I'd be planting brassicas, I noticed some withered-looking wild radish plants. Wild radish, like mustard, is a non-native weed very common on farms and roadsides. It readily invades new areas, seeding in to open soil. But these plants looked unhappy, and on closer inspection I found them covered with harlequin bugs.

Harlequin bug is one of several summer stinkbugs we encounter locally. They have distinctive black and orange markings. A few won't do much damage, but a large congregation feeding on plants can stunt them badly. They have a strong preference for members of the mustard family, such as collards, broccoli, cabbage, and wild radish.

Remove them before you plant new brassicas, or they will move onto the new arrivals. The simplest method I've found is to just disperse them. Mowing this wild radish will likely take care of it, as they're vulnerable to predation by birds and other wildlife. But you can hand-pull and bag the plants they're crowded on.

Other pest problems?

So many questions about citrus leafminer!

This is a moth that lays her eggs into the tender new leaves of citrus trees. The larvae tunnel through the leaf, under the epidermis, making them impervious to sprays. Leaving a telltale track pattern on the leaf, they reach the leaf edge, which they curl around themselves to pupate. You may, if you wish, squish those.

The first samples usually show up in late July or early August, and we have a few generations before cold weather.

Since its arrival here a decade or so ago, natural predators have increased that give some level of control. Commercial growers who are concerned about young trees use pheromone traps to monitor, and then spray to try to control the adult moths. But the damage is largely cosmetic, doesn't affect the flowers or fruit, and doesn't appear to weaken the tree, so spraying isn't recommended for backyard trees.

Pruning off the affected portion isn't necessary and can stimulate new growth, which in turn attracts the moths to lay eggs again.

Bottom line: leave it alone.

Are the leafminers causing the curling of citrus leaves?

Partly.

It's very common on citrus trees to see leaves that are curled, cupped, or wrinkled. Citrus leaves expand by cell division in the meristem tissue at the leaf's edge. The young leaves lack the waxy cuticle that protects older leaves from injury. Most commonly the curling of citrus leaves results from environmental stress or insect injury during that tender expansion phase of growth.

Weather damage

If we suddenly get unusually hot or cold, or especially have dry wind, while that tender growth is pushing out, some of those cells on the leaf edges get injured and stop dividing. The ones next to them keep expanding, and the leaf bulges or wrinkles there. This is harmless and happens commonly with the first hot spell of the season, dry north wind in fall, or a sudden change into cold weather. The leaves are fine.



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Insect injury

Western flower thrips are a common insect that lives in the fields around us. It is native but happily feeds on many of our garden plants and crops.

UCANR.edu has this succinct description: “Western flower thrips overwinter as adults in weeds, grasses, alfalfa, and other hosts, either in the orchard floor or nearby. In early spring, if overwintering sites are disturbed or dry up, thrips migrate to flowering trees and plants and deposit eggs in the tender portions of the host plant, e.g. shoots, buds, and flower parts. The peak infestation is usually reached in May or June.”

My experience is that thrips move into the garden when the weeds around the areas dry up, especially the grasses. Their feeding damage causes a silvery appearance on the leaf surface with dark fecal specks. On citrus leaves, they can damage the leaf edge and contribute to the buckling of new growth in early summer as the injured leaves expand.

Thrips are very difficult to control and can do a lot of damage to other crops. They can spread virus diseases to tomato plants, or cause scarring of nectarine fruit. But this damage to citrus leaves is seasonal and doesn't seem to harm the tree.

The importance of flowers.

The greater the diversity and abundance of flowers of all kinds in your garden in every season, the greater will be the diversity and abundance of wildlife visiting.

While that includes the glamorous things like hummingbirds and butterflies, it also includes natural predators of your garden pests: small birds, tiny wasps that attack aphids, dragonflies (voracious whitefly eaters!), predaceous mites, and even lizards and other animals that like to live where there is an abundance of foliage, flowers, and moisture. They will feed on your garden pests!

August can be a challenging month for seasonal blooms here due to heat and low soil moisture. Some flowers that thrive in late summer and into fall include amaranthus, blanket flower (*Gaillardia*), brown-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia*), celosia, marigolds (*Tagetes*, a late summer planting give great fall blooms here), petunias, phlox, sages (*Salvias*, especially herbaceous and Southwestern types), sunflowers (*Helianthus*) and Mexican sunflowers (*Tithonia*), and zinnias.

Comments and corrections.

An alert reader commented on the rainfall data I provided in my June column about the impending El Niño. In 1982-3 we had a very strong El Niño winter with some powerful atmospheric river storms causing significant regional flooding. But my note about heavy rainfall seems to have been based on flawed data.

I use the CIMIS weather stations to monitor rainfall, temperature, and evapotranspiration rates. The CIMIS station for Davis is on the UCD campus, near the experimental college gardens on the west side of campus, and it has data going back to the early 1980s. The report from October 1982 clearly shows 5” of rain, then 10”, and then two more inches in a 3-day period.

But as the reader noted, that would absolutely have been a record rainfall total for a single rainstorm in Davis! An event of that magnitude would certainly have had some contemporary news reporting, and I find none. Even a tropical storm a couple of weeks later that hit NorCal got media coverage. So I think,



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applying Occam's razor to this data, we can conclude that the weather station was wonky and that the very high-rainfall events I recalled four-plus decades later occurred later in that rainfall season. Our official rainfall total for 1982-3 was about 42 inches, which is more than double our average. Thanks for the note and the opportunity to set the record straight!



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harlequin bugs

One of several species of garden pests called stink bugs, harlequin bugs feed on many types of plants but are especially problematic on brassicas. Shown here in August crowded onto a dying radish plant, these will move quickly onto new brassica seedlings that you plant. Physically removing the harlequin bugs now can prevent future problems.



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harlequin bug damage on radish plant

A few harlequin bugs don't do much damage, but they tend to congregate in large numbers. Here is a radish plant that was severely infested, showing feeding damage and subsequent bacterial dieback on the foliage.



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citrus leafminer

Citrus leafminers burrow through the leaf, under the epidermis, leaving these telltale tracks. When they reach the edge of the leaf, they roll it in over themselves and pupate. Difficult to control and not very harmful to the plant, they don't affect the flowers or fruit. So we just tolerate them.



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dragonfly

Voracious whitefly eaters, dragonflies are entirely beneficial in the garden. They like flowers, water sources, and places to perch.



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longhorned bee on sunflower

Sunflowers and other daisies are great food sources for pollinators and other beneficial insects, and also attract hummingbirds. These longhorn bees like to settle in at sunset.



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Salvia guaranitica Black and Blue

Ornamental sages have showy flowers that strongly attract hummingbirds, butterflies, and the big shiny *Xylocopa* bees. There are *Salvia* species for blooms in every season. In late summer it's the herbaceous perennials with most abundant flowers, such as the *Salvia guaranitica* 'Black and Blue' variety shown here, along with the autumn sage group of Southwestern species and hybrids (*Salvia greggii* and *S. microphylla* hybrids and varieties). Our native sages bloom in late winter and spring.