



## Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

### Wet weather ahead?

#### **Strong El Niño**

Meteorologists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have officially declared that El Niño is here.

El Niño occurs when ocean water temperatures along the equator near South America becomes warmer than average. Trade winds blow east to west, and during El Niño those winds weaken. The movement of that warmer water affects rainfall patterns around the world. In the western United States, strong El Niño events generally correlate with higher rainfall, especially in Southern California and the American Southwest and usually in Northern California as well. Media coverage is now using the term "super El Niño" for this one. There is no official definition of a "super" El Niño, so I head over to the professionals to see what's really going on.

Daniel Swain, a UC Davis graduate in atmospheric science who writes the extraordinarily informative blog *Weather West*, is perhaps best known for coining the terms "weather whiplash" and "ridiculously resilient ridge" in describing some other climate phenomena. He is not given to over-statement, so this sentence is noteworthy in his June 11 update:

"Multi-model ensemble predictions have become even more aggressive and are now explicitly predicting an El Niño of very strong, and quite possibly record-breaking, magnitude by autumn or early winter. In fact, the just-released multi-model "super ensemble" predictions for June are nothing short of remarkable, with the median forecast from every single international model ensemble depicting at least a "strong" event, and the majority indicating a top-tier, very strong-to-historic event."

#### **Impacts on California?**

Ok, that sounds super. What are the impacts here in the west?

High temperatures and high humidity are likely in Southern California this summer.

Stronger monsoon season likely in the Southwest.

An "increased chance of anomalous convective activity (i.e., showers and thunderstorms) across California," which can lead to dry lightning events and wildfires. Higher likelihood of summer heat waves in the Pacific Northwest.

High winter rainfall is the most significant impact of a strong El Niño:

"Big El Niño events significantly increase the odds not only of wet winters in California and the Southwest, but also specifically of extreme precipitation events and most likely flood risk as well."

I can verify this last one. Winter of 1982-3, a very strong El Niño year, was our second full winter in business. Atmospheric river events, which are the main drivers of our annual rainfall totals, increase during strong El Niño events.

Rainfall began on October 12, 1982, with 5" of rain. That alone was a major storm. The next day, according to the CIMIS weather station on campus, it rained 12.56 inches, with an additional 3" the next day.



## Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

We got a year's worth of rainfall in three days. There was major flooding around the area. I-80 was closed, and water was lapping at the edge of the Yolo Causeway. January through March rainfall was well above average.

Gardeners had a great deal of difficulty getting pruning and dormant spraying done. Planting in the spring was challenging. Disease problems, especially on fruit trees, were severe. I had to quickly learn a lot about citrus brown rot, citrus blast, brown rot of stone fruits.

A real concern is the wind impact on large trees in saturated soils. Your shade trees should be inspected regularly by a certified arborist for branch structure and limb stability. If you've put that off for a while, this fall might be a good time for an evaluation. As for your fruit trees, it may be difficult to get proper pruning done mid-winter if the soils are slippery and muddy.

Good news is that you can do much of that pruning in late summer.

### Summer pruning

Summer pruning of fruit trees is an increasingly popular practice for backyard fruit growers. It's an easier time of year to do the work, and it isn't complicated. Deciduous fruit trees such as peaches, plums, apricots, and cherries put on a major flush of growth in spring as the fruit sets and develops, and then growth stops by midsummer as they enter a semi-dormancy (quiescence). If you prune a peach in May, it will sprout where you cut it. If you prune it in August, it won't.

Wait until after the main surge of growth in spring and early summer, finish harvesting the fruit, and then cut the trees back for size control and to correct structural issues. This is done in July or August. In effect, you are making your fruit trees into fruit bushes or hedges, making them easier to manage and harvest. Summer pruning also reduces the tree's water requirement.

The more of your pruning you get done in late summer, the less you'll need to do in winter. And it's important to note that apricots and cherries should only be pruned in late summer due to disease issues.

With a wet winter probable, I suggest you check your drain systems, evaluate your shade trees, and do some summer pruning of your fruit trees.

### June in your garden

Water use by plants is reaching our seasonal peak with long days and intermittent high temperatures.

A newly planted tree needs about 15 gallons of water each week, either all at once or split in two irrigation cycles.

More established trees should have deep soakings every two to three weeks, sufficient water to penetrate to 18 inches soil depth. That may take several hours with a drip irrigation system, or a couple of hours with a conventional sprinkler (watch to avoid runoff).



## Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

Vegetable gardens recommendation will depend on your soil. Raised planters are generally filled with very fast-draining soil and need frequent irrigation. Low-output drip systems for raised beds need to run for 30 to 45 minutes at a time minimum, and often need to run daily. Vegetables grown in a regular garden bed can be watered less often, but longer. Running your drip line for two to three hours about twice a week will likely suffice.

### **Pest problems?**

One of the simplest practices you can adopt right now to minimize damage from aphids, thrips, whiteflies, and mites, is to wash your plants off vigorously every few days. You will kill adult stages of those pests, dislodge eggs and some of the nymphs, and reduce the dust that encourages spider mite populations. Providing the extra moisture encourages resident populations of beneficial insects such as leatherwing beetles, lacewings, and hoverflies.

If whiteflies start to increase, rinse the infested plants vigorously once or twice a day for three or four days in a row. I mean, vigorously rinse them. Use a nozzle that creates a strong stream of water and focus on the undersides of the leaves. You won't hurt the plants.

"But don't they just crawl back up?"

No. If their proboscis was in the plant, it tears off. Adults drown. Nymphs are blown into oblivion. Eggs detach and desiccate. Beneficial insects are big enough to withstand your firehose. You can significantly reduce the overall population of pests by this simple method of mechanical control.

The good news is that beneficial insects are always increasing in the presence of these soft-bodied pests. The rinsing is just a way of resetting the population of the pests while you wait for the beneficials to breed enough to catch up.

### **We get questions.**

"What's that blue flower I keep seeing growing along the roadsides? It's really pretty! Is it a wildflower? Can I grow it?"

It's certainly easy to grow! Alas, chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) is not native, but it is, indeed, really pretty.

This blue daisy was brought to North America by early colonists and has reseeded across the whole country. It's especially fond of disturbed sites, commonly growing on the edges of farms and rural roads. The roots are roasted and eaten or used as a coffee substitute or additive. Pollinators like the flowers.

I was happy to learn from one of my professors that a weed is just "a plant that is out of place." So, if chicory comes up where I don't mind it, then by definition it is no longer a weed! However, chicory reseeds quite freely, so be forewarned.

### **Plant now.**

We can continue planting:

tomatoes, tomatillos, peppers, and eggplants;

cucumbers, summer squash, winter squash, and pumpkins;



## **Redwood Barn Nursery**

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

corn, okra, lima beans, and sweet basil.

Flowers to plant include celosia, marigolds, zinnias, verbena, pinks, petunias, and much more.

Plant in the cool of the evening or morning, water as soon as you plant them, and check the new seedlings daily for a few days. They will root and grow quickly in warm soil.

Mulching conserves water, builds soil, and reduces weeds. Deep watering makes for healthy shrubs and trees. Washing the garden reduces pests, and flowers attract pollinators and beneficial wildlife. Enjoy the summer and plan now for winter rains!



## Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



A pluot that has been summer pruned. Strong upright suckers have been removed, remaining new summer growth has been cut back by about 1/3. The result is a "fruit bush" with easier management, reduced water use, and easier harvest. Photo courtesy of the late Chuck Ingels, Sacramento farm adviser.



## Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



Beautiful chicory flowers. Not native, but widely naturalized, chicory is used for the root (roasted and added to coffee). It does draw bees and butterflies, but also reseeds very freely.



## Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



Okra may not be to your liking for its flavor and texture, but it is a beautiful member of the hibiscus family. Okra plants love warm soil and full sun and can be planted through June.



## Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



Sweet basil is the most popular summer herb. It loves full sun and is very easy to grow. Genovese basil, shown here, is the preferred type for Italian cooking. Plant every few weeks through August to keep a steady supply, as the plants flower quickly and the flavor is more acrid when they're blooming. Or plant new varieties such as Emerald Towers that don't initiate flowering until much later in the summer.



## Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



Plant now for fall harvest! Pumpkins are planted in late June for the Hallowe'en market. The vines run vigorously and need plenty of water. This variety is Fairytale, a multi-purpose pumpkin used for decorations, pies, and roasting.



# Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

06/20/2026